

# DePaul University

*Department of Religious Studies*

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## Syllabus

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**Dr. Naomi Steinberg**

**Autumn 1998**

**REL270-83-101 WOMEN IN THE BIBLE T/TH 10:10-11:40 LPC**

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**Office: SAC 454**

**Office Hours: T and TH, by appointment**

**Phone: (773) 325-1288 e-mail: [nsteinbe@wppost.depaul.edu](mailto:nsteinbe@wppost.depaul.edu)**

**FAX: 773/325-7304**

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### **General Purpose of the Course:**

The purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to major theoretical perspectives and significant recent interdisciplinary research as these relate to the topic of gender roles in the Bible. Analysis of selected biblical texts will depend upon considerable attention to historical and cross-cultural materials. Each class meeting will provide the student with the opportunity to examine the assigned biblical texts from three perspectives: secondary literature relating the text to its ancient socio-historical context; contemporary feminist literature; the values of the student in light of the first two perspectives.

### **Course Objectives:**

1. To give the student a basic literacy in biblical texts relevant to the study of gender.
2. To examine major critical issues in the interpretation of that literature.
3. To equip the student with the methodological expertise with which to deal with these issues.
4. To explore how biblical texts about women and gender have been appropriated in the history of Western society.
5. To explore new questions and challenges posed by feminist scholarship in the areas of biblical studies and gender roles.

6. To become aware of the power and the danger of biblical stories due to their polyvalence of meaning.

7. To help students to clarify their own values.

### **Required Texts:**

The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible with Apocrypha

Alice O. Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible

Renita Weems, Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible

Packet of additional readings listed in syllabus

### **Course Requirements:**

Careful, critical, and active reading of assignments. Active participation in class discussions and presentations. One page statement of understanding of texts for each class. Take-home midterm examination. Final formal paper based on individual research.

### **Grading Policy:**

The instructor will evaluate your work in all aspects of the course requirements. The following numerical sequence will provide the instructor with a method of adjudication:

- Classroom attendance and participation 25%
- Mid-Term exam 25%
- Final exam 25%
- Journal 25%

All assignments must be completed to receive a passing grade for the course. Letter grades have the following meaning:

A=creative contribution beyond what was given in class, presuming that the contribution is accurate and intelligent; B=accurate and complete grasp of the material covered (i.e., complete on matters of central importance not exhaustive in detail) but without creative contribution; C=adequate, correct but not complete; D=close, but not correct or adequate; F=not even close.

In order to receive a passing grade if you are taking the course pass/fail, all four written assignments must be completed on time, you must receive a passing grade on all of them, and you must meet the course requirements for participation and attendance. Regardless of whether you are taking the course for a grade or pass/fail, late assignments will not be accepted unless cleared with me in advance. These assignments must be done in the manner specified. To be more specific:

1. **Reading:** You are expected to have read the assigned material for each class meeting before coming to class that day. Careful, critical, and active reading will prepare you to engage in productive class discussions.

2. **Participation:** The course is set up as a forum for discussion and interaction among us. It assumes a collaborative, participatory model of learning, whereby we all contribute to each other's understanding of the material under consideration. Participation will constitute 25% of the course grade.

Evaluation of your participation will be based on the following criteria: a. Frequency and clarity of your oral contributions (i.e., are you making an effort to contribute to class discussions? Is it evident that you have prepared for class?). b. Knowledge of the reading material and your ability to grasp its central themes (i.e., how carefully and critically did you read?). c. Your ability to take an independent and reflective stance toward the ideas under discussion (i.e., are you willing to think creatively?). d. The overall development of your power of oral expression during the course of the quarter (i.e., do you demonstrate increased willingness and ability to contribute to class discussion through the course?).

3. **Attendance:** Attendance is essential and will be monitored. Three unexcused absences will lower your final grade by one letter, while five unexcused absences will be considered excessive and will draw the grade of FX. Otherwise, there will be no grade for attendance as such, but frequent absences will mean fewer opportunities for you to participate in discussions, and therefore, a lower grade. If you are late arriving for class this will be counted as an unexcused absence; three tardy arrivals will equal one unexcused absence.

4. **Written assignments:** You will be asked to keep an intellectual journal as a response to the issues raised in the textbook. I will collect these entries unannounced at least twice in the quarter. If you are absent on the day they are collected, you will be expected to turn in the entire journal--instead of the specific day's entry--the following class meeting. Failure to turn the material in by the following class will result in zero credit. I will collect the entire journal at the last class meeting. Your responses to the questions should be between one and two sides of a sheet of notebook paper. You should make your journal entry before coming to class because they will be discussed in class and if you are unprepared for this you will receive zero credit for participation that day. The main concern in the journal should be with getting your ideas down on paper. I am not looking at either spelling or grammar as long as I can read and understand what you are trying to say. But, you must take a critical perspective on your ideas and question your values in these journal entries, i.e., you must discuss what is at stake for you in holding a particular perspective. Therefore, each journal entry should conclude with a discussion of the values expressed for that particular day. Your final journal entry will be an evaluation of the changes in your perspectives on gender as a result of our ten week study. In addition to the journal, there will be a take-home midterm examination and a final paper that will be due in my hands on the day that the final exam is officially scheduled.

**5. Plagiarism:** Plagiarism, like other forms of academic dishonesty, is always a serious matter. This course adheres to the University's policies on plagiarism as stated in the current Bulletin/Student Handbook. Consult the manual, "Writing in Liberal Studies," for instruction on proper citation or acknowledgement of the work of others in class assignments.

## **CLASS SCHEDULE**

### **READINGS ARE TO BE DONE BEFORE COMING TO CLASS**

#### **Week 1** The Contemporary Study of Gender: Method and Theory

Sept 10 Introduction to the Course (and how to read a citation)

Topic for discussion: Do gender roles constitute a social problem in contemporary American society? Social problems are defined as conditions involving a gap between actuality and the values held by a significant portion of the population, conditions, moreover, that are felt to be potentially susceptible to social control. Paraphrasing sociologist Robert Merton, a social problem can be said to exist if neither the individual objectives of members of a society nor their collective purposes are as fully realized as they might be, not in some utopia, but in a conceivable alternative social system.

A preliminary affirmative answer: gender roles do constitute a significant social problem in contemporary society.

Question: How does our late twentieth century Western perspective on gender roles condition our responses to an ancient document from a pre-industrial non-Western society? How does the fact that this text is authoritative religion literature complicate our ability to understand ancient Israel and earliest Christianity on their own terms?

#### **Week 2**

Sept 15 Further Discussion of the Study of Gender in the Bible Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes, pp. 3-29. Meyers, "Everyday Life: Women in the Period of the Hebrew Bible."  
Wordelman, "Everyday Life: Women in the Period of the New Testament."

Sept 17 The Politics of Social Location-Ancient and Modern Issues Matthew 15:21-28  
Wainwright, "A Voice from the Margin: Reading Matthew 15:21-28 in an Australian Feminist Key."

#### **Week 3**

Sept 22 Genesis 24; 26:34-28:9; 29-31; 34 Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes. pp. 80-90.  
Lamphere, "Strategies, Cooperation, and Conflict Among Women in Domestic Groups."

Sept 24 Honor, Shame, Virginity Genesis 19; 38 Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes, pp. 79-80; 91- 92. Weems, Just a Sister Away, pp. 129-40.

#### **Week 4**

Sept 29 1 Timothy; Titus; The Acts of Paul and Thecla (in packet)

Oct 1 Judges 19-21; Judith Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes, pp. 131-35; 219-23.

#### **Week 5**

Oct 6 Motherhood and Fatherhood Genesis 12:10-13:1; 16; 20-21; 26:1-16 Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes, pp. 67-79. Steinberg, Kinship and Marriage in Genesis, pp. 5-30; 50-86. Weems, Just a Sister Away, pp. 1-21.

Oct 8 Matthew 1-2; Luke 1-2 Weems, Just a Sister Away, pp. 113-26.

#### **Week 6**

Oct 13 The Interaction of Sex, Class, and Ethnicity Esther Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes, pp. 211-17. Weems, Just a Sister Away, pp. 99-110. White, " Esther: A Feminine Model for Jewish Diaspora."

Oct 15 2 Samuel 13-14; 1 Kings 21 Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes, pp. 151-53; 164-67. Exum, Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)Versions of Biblical Narratives, pp. 170-201.

### **MIDTERM EXAM DUE IN CLASS**

#### **Week 7**

Oct 20 The Price of Sex Susanna (in packet) Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes, pp. 217-19.

Oct 22 Mark 6:14-29 Anderson, "Feminist Criticism: The Dancing Daughter."

#### **Week 8**

Oct 27 Women Together Ruth; Exodus 2:1-10 Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes, pp. 206-211. Tribble, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, pp. 166-99. Weems, Just a Sister Away, pp. 23-36.

Oct 29 Luke 10:38-42 Reid, "Pitting Martha against Mary." Schussler Fiorenza, But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation, pp. 51-76. Weems, Just a Sister Away, pp. 39-50.

#### **Week 9** The Case of Love and Sexuality

Nov 3 Genesis 2-3 Tribble, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, pp. 72-143.

Nov 5 Song of Solomon/Song of Songs Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes, pp. 199-203.  
Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality, pp. 144-65

### **Week 10** In Memory of Her

Nov 10 1 Samuel 18-19; 25:44; 2 Samuel 3;6 Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes, pp. 145-47. Exum, Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives, pp. 42-60.

Nov 12 Judges 11 Bellis, Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes, pp. 127-31. Weems, Just a Sister Away, pp. 53-69; 85-97.

### **Week 11**

Nov 17 In Memory of Her Continued **Journals Due**

### ***Dates To Remember***

**Mid-term Examination Thursday, October 15 (due in class)**

**Journals Due Tuesday, November 17 (last class)**

**Final Exam Monday, November 23 (due by noon)**