

A Syllabus for the Course

WOMEN AND THE BIBLE

DVOT607

Beeson Divinity School
Birmingham. AL 35243

Allen P. Ross

Fall Semester, 2004

3 Semester Hours

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00--2:20 p.m.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

A through-the-Bible detailed study of God's design for women in creation, in the culture, and in Christianity, and how that plan worked out in the development of the faith. In other words, the course seeks to discover how much women have contributed to the development of God's program through the ages, and therefore how much they can do today.

The course is not merely a study of the question of ordination based on the few New Testament passages that are often used in the debates. This course will include that issue near the end, but it is a much broader study than that. We will gradually work through the Bible to gain the whole picture, and then, and only then, be ready to understand the apostolic principles.

The substance of the course will be biblical exposition and the discussion of the interpretations; the goal of the exposition and discussions will be the synthesis of the biblical material; and the relevance of the synthesis will be the spiritual development of the household of faith, both women and men.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- A. The primary objective of this course is to begin to develop a complete and accurate understanding of the biblical texts that concern women and their contribution to the program of God. To accomplish this we shall
1. study all the significant passages from Genesis to Revelation that deal with this subject,
 2. survey the relevant literature of the ancient Near east to discover background or parallel customs that inform the biblical text,
 3. become familiar with the various interpretations and applications that have been made from key passages, and
 4. develop biblical principles that will serve as guidelines for women and men to follow in Christian life and ministry.
- B. A secondary objective, and an important one, is to gain a better understanding of the way modern theology interprets the biblical text. To do this we shall
1. read and discuss selected writings from modern feminist interpretation to see what is being said and to evaluate it critically but fairly, and
 2. read and discuss selected writings from traditional interpretation on the subject to see what is being said and to evaluate it critically but fairly.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Reading

1. **Scripture Reading (15%).** Each student will be expected to read the passages of Scripture that pertain to the subject matter scheduled for each class period.

- 2. Collateral Reading (25%).** Each student will be required to read assigned reading selections and write a one page (only) critical evaluation of the reading. The length of each reading assignment averages out to be about 35 pages.

There are eleven reading assignments scheduled, and students must do ten of them to satisfy this requirement. The list of the readings for these reports is found at the end of this syllabus. The student may read these, or opt for other readings from the class bibliography or individual research. If other selections are read, they must average about the same length, and they must be reported when the reports are due. At the end of the course the student should have read about 350 pages of collateral reading.

On each of the reading reports each student must also state whether or not she or he is current with the reading of the Scripture passages.

- 3. Biography (20%).** Each student will be required to write and present a short biographical sketch of a woman in the Bible. These biographies will be based on the facts of the text properly interpreted, but will also draw upon historical and cultural considerations, and require imagination and creation to present them in an interesting and significant way. The biography will count 20% of the total grade.

On the second class day of the course each student will sign up for the biography assignment. Since only one person can present on a particular woman, each student should have several choices in mind in case some are already taken. These biographies will be due when they are scheduled during the course, and the biographer will have 15 minutes to present the story to the class. The presenter may assume that the audience is familiar with the biblical text from the reading, and so need not restate the simple facts in the Bible, but spend the time digging deeper into the text, developing implications and allusions, and filling out the background from the culture.

- 4. Project (40%).** Each student will prepare a semester project. This project can be a formal research paper on a passage or a critical issue,

but it would be more effective if it was put into a form that could be used in ministry, such as a chart of the passages and principles covered in the semester, or a series of lesson plans for teaching in the Church, or a discipleship guide for women and ministry in the Church, or a dramatic script of some person or period for a performance, or . . . well, it can be almost anything that takes the substance of this subject and develops something very useful for the Church.

The **topic** for the project must be **approved** by the teacher; and the topic should be settled by the **tenth class meeting**. The date the projects will be due will be determined at the time of approval; if possible, they may be worked into the class discussion where they are most appropriate. Otherwise, they will come at the end of the semester, the final meeting of the class, the exam period, December 9.

COURSE SCHEDULE

1. Thurs, Sept 2 Introduction to the Course. A Survey of the Role of Women in Church History, and of the Responses to it.
****N.B.** The notes for each class period will be posted on my web site,
www.christianleadershipcenter.org.

WOMAN AND THE NATURE OF GOD

2. Tues, Sept 7 The Uniqueness of God in Contrast to the Polytheism of the Ancient World.
3. Thurs, Sept 9 *Anthropomorphisms*, Metaphors and Feminine Imagery for God in the Bible. **Reading Report #1 is due.**

WOMAN: IN THE BEGINNING

4. Tues, Sept 14 The Image of God: Male and Female
 Read Genesis 1:1--2:3; Psalm 8.

5. Thurs, Sept 16 The Corresponding Help and One Flesh
Read Genesis 2:4-25. **Reading Report #2 is due.**
6. Tues, Sept 21 Temptation and Sin; Judgment and Grace
Read Genesis 3:1-24.

WOMEN IN ANTIQUITY

7. Thurs, Sept 23 The Witness from Archaeology
Read Gen 4:19-26; 6:1-4; 12:10-20; 16:1-16; 18:1-15;
19:30-38; 21:1-21. **Reading Report # 3 is due.**
Biography 1: **Hagar**
8. Tues, Sept 28 The Witness from the Bible: Genesis and Exodus
Read Gen 25:19-28; 27:5-17; 29:15--30:24; Exod 1:8--2:10.
Biography 2: **Rebekah**

WOMEN AND THE LAW OF MOSES

9. Thurs, Sept 30 The Laws of Marriage and Divorce
Read Gen 24:50-67; Deut 22:13--30; 24:1-5; Lev 22:16-17;
21:7; Mal 2:10-16; Psalm 45; and Rev 19:6-9.
Reading Report #4 is due.
Biography 3: **Zipporah**
- Tues, Oct 5 Lectures: No Class
10. Thurs, Oct 7 The Rites and the Rights for Women
Read Gen 34:1-31; 38:1-30; Exod 21:7-11; Num 27:1-11;
and Lev 18:1-30.
Biography 4: **Tamar**

WOMEN AND RELIGIOUS SERVICE

11. Tues, Oct 12 Participation in Sanctuary Services: Sacrifices, Vows, Prayers, Commemorations and Other Rituals.
Read Exod 15:20, 22; 1 Sam 1:1--2:11; 2 Sam 11:1-5.
Reading Report #5 is due.
Biography 5: **Hannah**
12. Thurs, Oct 14 Prominent Participation in Religious Activities: Theophanies, Prophecies, Temple Service and Music.
Read Judg. 13:2-25; Psalm 68; the superscription of Psalm 46; and 2 Kings 22:14-20.
Biography 6: **Miriam**
- Tues, Oct 19 Conference: No Class

WOMEN IN THE TIME OF THE SETTLEMENT

13. Thurs, Oct 21 Conquest and War: Rahab, Deborah, Jephthah's Daughter, the Samson Saga, and the Levite's Concubine.
Read Josh 2:1-21; Matt 1:5, 6; Judg 4 and 5 and 16.
Reading Report #6 is due.
Biography 7: **Deborah**
14. Tues, Oct 26 Times of Peace: The Story of Ruth (with Lot's Daughters in Genesis 19 and Judah's Tamar in Genesis 38).
Read the Book of Ruth and Deut 25:5-10.
Biography 8: **Naomi**

WOMEN IN THE ISRAELITE STATE

15. Thurs, Oct 28 David's Court: Michal, Abigail, and Bathsheba; and Solomon's Court: Many Wives and the Queen of Sheba.
Read 1 Sam. 25:14-44; 2 Sam. 3:1-5; 11:1--12:25; 13:1-21; and 1 Kings 11:1-8. **Reading Report #7 is due.**

Biography 9: **Bathsheba**

16. Tues, Nov 2 Proud Wickedness: Jezebel, Maacah, Athaliah; and Humble Virtue: The Woman of Zarepath, the Great Woman of Shunem, the Maid of Naaman, and Jehosheba. Read 1 Kings 16:29--18:40; 2 Kings 4:1--5:19; 11:1-16.
Biography 10: **Jezebel**
17. Thurs, Nov 4 Women in Prophetic Literature: the *Almah*, Gomer, Ezekiel's Wife, Huldah, Belshazzer's Mother, Noadia, and Queen Esther. Read Isaiah 7; Hosea 1-3; Esther 2, 4 and 5.
Reading Report #8 is due.
Biography 11: **Gomer**
18. Tues, Nov 9 Women in Poetry: Personification in Proverbs: Madam Wisdom and Dame Folly; and the Song of Songs. Read Gen 39:1-23; Prov chapter 5; 6:20-35; chapter 7; and 31:10-31; and Song of Solomon 1.
Biography 12: The **Shunamite** of the Song of Solomon

WOMEN IN THE BEGINNING OF CHRISTIANITY

19. Thurs, Nov 11 Prominent Women in the Gospels: Mary, Elisabeth, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary and Martha. Read Matt.1:18-25; Luke 1:26-56; Matt. 12:46-50; Luke 10:38-42; and John 11:17-44. **Reading Report #9 is due.**
Biography 13: **Magdalene**
20. Tues, Nov 16 Women in the Ministry of Jesus: Anna, the Woman with the Issue, Jairus' Daughter, the Widow and her Mites, the Sinful Woman, the Woman Taken in Adultery. Read Luke 2:36-38; Luke 8:40-56; Luke 21:1-4; and John 8:1-11.
Biography 14: The **Woman with the Issue.**
21. Thurs, Nov 18 Foreign Women in the Gospels and Other Teachings: the

Samaritan Woman, the Syro-Phoenician Woman, Salome, a Mother's Request, Marriage in Heaven, and the Virgins. Read John 4; Matt 15:21-28; and Matt 14:1-12; 20:20-28; 22:23-33; and 25:1-13. **Reading Report #10 is due.**
Biography 15: The **Syro-Phoenician** Woman

22. Tues, Nov 30 Women in the Early Church: the Daughters of Philip, Sapphira, Rhoda, Lydia, Dorcas, and Priscilla. Read Acts 5:1-11; 9:32-43; 16:11-15; 18:18-28; and 1 Cor 16:19-20.
Biography 16: **Dorcas**

WOMEN AND APOSTOLIC TEACHING

23. Thurs, Dec 2 Apostolic Affirmations of Women and the Cultural Settings. Read Rom. 16:1-16; 1 Cor. 12; Gal. 3:26-29; Phil. 4:2, 3; Col 4:15; and 2 John.
Reading Report #11 is due.
Biography 17: **Priscilla**

24. Tues, Dec 7 Apostolic Rulings Concerning Women and Men in the Christian Home, the Culture, and the Early Church. Read Gal 4:4; Eph 4:15--5:33; 1 Cor 11:2-16, 14:26-39; 1 Tim 2:8-15; 5:1-16; and 1 Pet 3:1-7.
Biographies 18 and 19: **Eve** and **Mary** (the BVM)

- Thurs, Dec 9 Present Service and Future Victory in Revelation
Class meets during scheduled exam period, from 10:30-12:30 a.m.). At this time final reading reports will be taken, and some semester projects will be presented. Read Zech. 5:5-11; Rev. 12:1-6 and Rev. 17:1-18.
Biographies 20 and 21: **Symbolism of Women.**

READING ASSIGNMENTS

Reading Report #1, September 9
(31 pages)

Achtemeier, Elizabeth, "Female Language for God: Should the Church Adopt It?" *Transformation*, pp. 24-30. Read the article and the response to it.

Besancon Spencer, Aida. "God as Female." In *The Goddess Revival*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995. Pp. 19-37.

Frey, Rebecca, "Why Women Want the Goddess: Experiential and Confessional Reflections." *Reformation* 10 (1991):19-26.

Reading Report #2, September 16
(48 pages)

Stott, John. *Volume II: Involvement: Social and Sexual Relationships in the Modern World*. A Crucial Questions Book. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1985. Chapter 5: "Women, Men, and God," pp. 127-156.

Davidson, Richard M. "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2." *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26 (1988): 5-24.

Reading Report #3, September 23
(32 pages)

Kass, Leon R. "A Woman for All Seasons." *Commentary* (1991):30-35.

Trible, Phyllis. "Hagar, The Desolation of Rejection." In *Texts of Terror*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984. Pp. 9-35.

Reading Report #4, September 30
(33 pages)

Baker, James R. "David's Household" and "Miscellaneous Cases." In *Women's Rights in Old Testament Times*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992. Pp. 125-135 and 171-179.

Cohen, Shaye J. D. "Solomon and the Daughter of Pharaoh: Intermarriage,

Conversion, and the Impurity of Women.” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 16-17 (1984, 85):23-37.

Reading Report #5, October 12
(37 pages)

Peritz, Ismar J. “Woman in the Ancient Hebrew Cult.” *JBL* 17 (1898):111-148.

Reading Report #6, October 21
(51 pages)

Bronner, Leila Leah. “The Regime of Modesty: Ruth and the Rabbinic Construction of the Feminine Ideal.” In *From Eve to Esther, Rabbinical Reconstructions of Biblical Women*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994. Pp. 61-86.

Trible, Phyllis. “An Unnamed Woman: The Extravagance of Violence.” In *Texts of Terror, Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984. Pp. 65-91.

Reading Report #7, October 28
(28 pages)

Trible, Phyllis. “Journey of a Metaphor.” In *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978. Pp. 31-59.

Reading Report #8, November 4
(29 pages)

Leith, Mary Joan Winn, “Verse and Reverse: The Transformation of the Woman, Israel, in Hosea 1-3.” In *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*. Edited by Peggy L. Day. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989. Pp. 95-108.

Ackerman, Susan. “‘And the Women Knead Dough’: The Worship of the Queen of

Heaven in Sixth Century Judah.” In *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*. Edited by Peggy L. Day. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989. Pp. 109-124.

Reading Report #9, November 11
(40 pages)

Pomeroy, Sarah B. “The Roman Matron of the Late Republic and Early Empire.” In *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves, Women in Classical Antiquity*. New York: Schocken Books, 1975. Pp. 149-189.

Reading Report #10, November 18
(30 pages)

“Excerpts from ‘Re-Imagining,’ The Women’s Ecumenical Conference. Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 4-7, 1993, and review articles.
Edwards, Ruth B. “What Is the Theology of Women’s Ministry?” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 (1987): 421-436.

Reading Report #11, December 2
(34 pages)

Whitacre, Rodney A. “The Coherence of Scripture Regarding Men and Women in Ministry,” pp. 1-16.
Robinson, Donald, “Scripture, Apostolic Tradition, and the Ordination of Women,” *The Evangelical Catholic* 13 (1990):1, 3.
Tomlinson, Wallace K. “Authority, Sexuality, and the Order of the Church,” *The Evangelical Catholic* 7 (1984):1, 2.
Williamson, Cecil. “Should Women Teach?” *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 5 (1982):7-21.

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- Baker, James R. *Women's Rights in Old Testament Times*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992.
- Bellis, Alice Ogden. *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes. Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible*. Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox, 1994.
- Besancon Spencer, Aida. *Beyond the Curse. Women Called to Ministry*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985. 3rd Printing, 1997.
- Besancon, Aida, et al. *The Goddess Revival*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995.
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- Clark, Stephen B. *Man and Woman in Christ*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1980.
- Cohen, Shaye J. D. "Solomon and the Daughter of Pharaoh: Intermarriage, Conversion, and the Impurity of Women." *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 16-17 (1984, 85):23-37.
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- Davidson, Richard M. "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1-2." *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26 (1988):5-24.
- Day, Janith Norfleete. *The Woman at the Well: Interpretation of John 4:1-42 in Retrospect and Prospect. Interpretation Series 61*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002.
- Day, Peggy L., editor. *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis:

Fortress Press, 1989.

DeBerg, Betty. *Ungodly Women. Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Edwards, Ruth B. "What is the Theology of Women's Ministry?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40 (1987):421-436.

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Frey, Rebecca. "Why Women Want the Goddess: Experiential and Confessional Reflections." *Reformation* 10 (1991):19-26.

Heine, Susanne. *Matriarchs, Goddesses and Images of God. A Critique of Feminist Theology.* Translated by John Bowden, 1988. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988.

Hurley, James B. *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981.

Jeansonne, Sharon Pace. *The Women of Genesis. From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Kass, Leon R. "A Woman for All Seasons." *Commentary* (1991):30-35.

Howe, Margaret, "The Positive Case for the Ordination of Women." In *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology.* Edited by Kenneth Kantzer and S. Gundry. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979.

Keener, Craig S. *Paul, Women and Wives. Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul.* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992.

Knight, George W. *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women.* Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978.

Kraemer, Ross Shepard, and D'Angelo, Mary Rose, editors. *Women and Christian*

- Origins*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- LaCocque, Andre. *The Feminine Unconventional. Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.
- Mabery-Foster, Lucy. *Women and the Church, Reaching, Teaching, and Developing Women for Christ*. Nashville: Word, 1999.
- McFague, Sally. *Models of God, Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.
- Nunnally, J. Ellen. *Fore-Mothers. Women of the Bible*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.
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- Robinson, Donald. "Scripture, Apostolic Tradition, and the Ordination of Women." *The Evangelical Catholic* 13 (1990):1, 3.
- Saucy, Robert L. "The Negative Case Against the Ordination of Woman." In *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology*. Edited by Kenneth Kantzer and S. Gundry. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979.
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- Thurston, Bonnie Bowman. *The Widows. A Women's Ministry in the Early Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989.
- Yohn, Rick. *Discover Your Spiritual Gift and Use It*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1974.
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“Women and the Bible”

The Lay Academy
Beeson Divinity School
Allen P. Ross

Thursday Evenings, 7:00-9:00,
September 16--October 28

- 1. Sept 16: The Creator and the Creation**
- 2. Sept 23: The Temptation and the Fall**
- 3. Sept 30: Woman in Antiquity**
- 4. Oct. 7: Woman under the Law**
- 5. Oct. 14: Woman in the Israelite State**

6. **Oct. 21: Woman in the Gospels**
7. **Oct. 28: Woman in the Church**