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Tribble: A feminist outlook Liberating the Scriptures

By Dan Coran
Of the Emerald

Feminism is one of those topics that may draw differences of opinion even before much is said. Yet, according to Phyllis Tribble, an internationally-recognized authority on the role of women in the Bible, feminism is an issue which challenges contemporary society in critical and far-reaching ways.

Tribble, a professor of sacred literature at New York's Union Theological Seminary, believes that ancient Israel's male-dominated, patriarchal society distorted and muted the true role of women in biblical literature. This paternalistic attitude has not only affected modern biblical interpretation, according to Tribble, but has also affected other areas of modern culture.

Tribble spoke on feminism and biblical faith Tuesday and Wednesday at the University, through the Department of Religious Studies' annual Distinguished Lecturer's Program.

"The patriarchal attitude is one of domination and subordination," Tribble says. "In our society, this manifests itself in such areas as racism, exploitation of the earth and the macho mentality of military development. Feminism is a radical critique of this attitude."

According to Tribble, there have been several approaches to feminist interpretation of biblical literature. One points out instances in the Scriptures where the inferiority, subordination and exploitation of women are evident. Tribble says this portrayal of women reflects, to a certain degree, the culture of ancient Israel.

"From birth to death, Hebrew women belonged to men," Tribble says. "Girls stayed close to their mothers until their fathers released them for marriage. Men expected to marry virgins, and a woman who was not a virgin at the time of marriage violated the honor and power of her father and husband. Such a person was put to death by stoning."

According to Tribble, another avenue of feminist interpretations of the Bible re-interprets various biblical episodes from the viewpoint of the woman involved. One example is Tribble's in-

terpretation of the creation of man and woman in the second chapter of Genesis.

"Adam's identity as a male did not exist before the creation of Eve," Tribble says. "Human sexual identity came into being simultaneously. Eve was not created second to primal man, nor as his helper, his servant or his subordinate. Man does not control her, but moves toward her to regain unity and wholeness."

Re-interpreting biblical Scripture from a feminist viewpoint is an effort to point out meanings already existing in the text, Tribble says.

"The Bible is a rich, complex and diverse book making interaction between writer and interpreter inevitable," she says. "Like any true work of literature, its meaning is often not fixed. New occasions teach new duties, and we are compelled to look for meanings which save, liberate and free."

"This doesn't mean, however, that one can make the Bible say anything one wants," Tribble cautions. "A good analogy is a score of music. Though no two conductors produce the same music from one score, the notes written down remain fixed and unchanged."

Tribble has published a number of articles on women and the Bible including "Women in the Old Testament" and "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation." She is also author of the books "God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality" and "Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives."

She would like to see her work as part of a larger feminist effort within the church to create a new cultural perspective.

"The work I'm doing hopefully brings people enlightenment and joy, and for now that's enough. On another scale, though, it's an effort to help the church and society truly repent for the sin of patriarchy — the sin of exploitation and subordination. It's a vision for a balanced understanding of humanity, both male and female."

High-tech writer to speak

Lenny Siegel, director of the Pacific Studies Center in Mountain View, Calif., will speak on the environmental costs and effects of high-tech industry

tonight at 7:30 in Room 150 Geology. The lecture is sponsored by the EMU Cultural Forum.

Tomorrow, Siegel will speak

on the dangers of computerization at 3:30 p.m. in EMU Century Room A, in a lecture sponsored by the University Arms Control Forum. Both lectures are free.

Called "the resident gadfly of the Silicon Valley" by The New York Times, Siegel is an authority on the social, economic, environmental and military implications of high technology.

Siegel's articles have appeared in a number of newspapers and national magazines. He is the editor of two periodicals: Pacific Research and Global Electronics Information Newsletter. As director of the Pacific Studies Center, Siegel has prepared reports for Congress on the background of California's Silicon Valley and has testified before Congress on several issues.

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