

DR. RENITA J. WEEMS, Ph.D.
Academic Bio (2023)

Author, Scholar, Clergy, & Public Intellectual

In addition to being a former professor at Vanderbilt Divinity School (1987-2004), Dr. Renita Weems has taught at Spelman College, Howard University Divinity School and Memphis Theological Seminary. She grew up in Atlanta, Ga where she attended Atlanta public schools.

Dr. Renita Weems earned a Ph.D. degree at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1989 making her the first African-American woman to earn a doctorate in Old Testament Studies. Her dissertation was a trailblazing effort. Writing in an era when women doctoral students hesitated to take on “women’s issue” topics, and when most male faculty still felt uncertain, if not uncomfortable, advising such topics, Dr. Weems chose to study marriage imagery in the Hebrew prophets. Her work offered careful, challenging, and often painful insights into use of this metaphor; moving beyond traditional scholarship, which had all too easily looked only at the “love” side of the marriage metaphor. Weems was among the first to point to the violence associated with this biblical imagery, violence acceptable within the prophets’ cultural assumptions about marriage and all too often considered acceptable even in twentieth-century America. Dr. Weems’ 1995 volume *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* brought this important work to a wide audience, with powerful hermeneutical reflection on implications for contemporary understandings of God and of marriage. *Just A Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women’s Relationships in the Bible*, published in 1989 along with a host of other articles and books highlighting the questions and experiences that black women bring when reading the Bible has sealed her legacy as a trailblazer in the field of womanist biblical scholarship. Her seminal essay “Reading Her Way: African American Women and the Bible” appeared in the landmark book *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation (1991)*. Her commentary on the book of “Song of Songs” in the New Interpreter’s Bible (1997) remains an important resource for understanding biblical notions of love, sex and human sexuality.

Finally, Dr. Renita J. Weems is a biblical scholar, a minister, and an author whose scholarly insights into modern faith, biblical texts, and the role of spirituality in everyday lives has made her a highly sought-after writer and speaker for more than four decades. She has numerous books, commentaries and articles on the Bible and prophetic religion to her credit. She has written multiple articles and essays for academics, preachers and lay audiences on topics of faith, prophetic religion, Christian ethics, biblical notions of justice, women’s spirituality, and the Bible and human sexuality. She is the first black woman to deliver the Yale University Lyman Beecher Lecture (2008). Dr. Weems is featured in “*Black Stars: African American Religious Leaders*” (2008), a collection of biographies of some of the most important Black Religious Leaders over the last 200 hundred years, including such impressive figures as Adam Clayton Powell, Elijah Muhammad, Sojourner Truth, Howard Thurman, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. Renita J. Weems lives in Nashville with her family.