

RELS 285 Religion and Feminism
Fall 2013

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Office Hours: MWF 9:00-9:45 and M 11:00-1:00 and by appointment

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Course Description: The feminist critique of history and culture has influenced virtually every aspect of academia. In this course we will examine feminist theory and its relationship to the study of religion. Areas of examination will include feminist critical theory and the analysis of patriarchal religion, feminist theology, feminist hermeneutical models for reading religious writings and sacred texts, and theories of feminist religious ethics. The latter will incorporate analyses of socially constructed gender roles and constructions of 'spiritual achievement,' that have been promulgated within Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions.

Required Texts:

Women's Studies in Religion: A Multicultural Reader, Bagley and McIntosh, eds., 2006. (WSR)

Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation, Schussler-Fiorenza, 2001. (WW)

Woman at Point Zero, Nawal el Saadawi

Selected readings on OAKS

Course Requirements:

Two in-class exams (2 X 100 points)

One take-home essay exam (100 points)

One 5 page feminist exegesis (50 pts) accompanied by class presentation (50 pts)

Four 2 page critical response papers (4 X 25 points)

Course Objectives:

Students in the course will: 1) know the basic arguments of feminist theory as it is applied to cultural gender constructions 2) understand how feminist theory is applied to a critique of patriarchal religion, 3) learn and apply strategies of feminist Biblical interpretation, 4) understand how feminist theory is applied to traditional ideas of religious ethics.

General Education Student Learning Outcomes

General Education requirements for a course in the Humanities address these two additional Student Learning Outcomes: 1) Students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture; 2) Students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the material in writing assignments.

Successful mastery of the General Education Student Learning Outcomes will be demonstrated by crafting a coherent and organized exegetical paper.

Grading:

Each set of 100 points will be worth 20% of the final grade.

Numerical and letter grades will be based upon the following scale:

	A	100-92	A-	91-89	
B+	88-86	B	85-82	B-	81-79
C+	78-76	C	75-72	C-	71-69
D+	68-66	D	65-62	D-	61-59
F	-58				

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments:

Part I: The Feminist Critique of Culture and Religion

I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat.

~Rebecca West

What are patriarchal values? Simply, the assumption that the fact of biological sex differences implies a God-given or at least a "natural" separation of human activities by sex, and the further assumption that this leads to a "natural" dominance of male over female. ~ Gerda Lerner

08/21 Introduction and Syllabus

08/23 Introduction and Methodology

Introduction pp. 1-13 in *Women's Studies in Religion (WSR)*

08/26 Methodology continued

Chapter IV, *Wisdom Power*, 102-122 in *Wisdom Ways (WW)*

08/28 Methodology and *For Strong Women*

Poem, *For Strong Women*, from Marge Piercy's *The Moon is Always Female* (OAKS)

08/30 *The Church and the Second Sex*, Mary Daly 105-113 in WSR

Take My Yoke Upon You, Frances E. Wood, 128-136 WSR

****09/02 Critical Response Paper #1--** Write your paper on either piece by Mary Daly, above or below (you must *read* both of them)

Chapter 1 from Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (OAKS)

Part II: Feminist Theology

The belief that established science and scholarship--which have so relentlessly excluded women from their making--are "objective" and "value-free" and that feminist studies are "unscholarly," "biased," and "ideological" dies hard. Yet the fact is that all science, and all scholarship, and all art are ideological; there is no neutrality in culture! ~ Adrienne Rich

Where it is a duty to worship the sun, it is pretty sure to be a crime to examine the laws of heat.
~ John Morley

09/04 *God*, Francis Fiorenza and Gordon Kaufman, 136-157, from *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*

09/06 *The Incomprehensibility of God and the Image of God Male and Female*, Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J. (OAKS)
God as Mother, Sallie McFague (OAKS)

Part III: Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics

Women's degradation is in man's idea of his sexual rights. Our religion, laws, customs, are all founded on the belief that woman was made for man. ~ Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Truth is constructed. ~ Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza

09/09 Introduction 1-18 WW

09/11 Chapter I, *Mapping Wisdom's Terrain* WW

09/13 Poem, *Applesauce for Eve*, Marge Piercy, from *Mars and Her Children*, 1992 (OAKS)
Video: *Poet Marge Piercy* with Bill Moyers

09/16 Chapter III *Wo/men's Movements-Wisdom Struggles* in WW

09/18 *Feminist Theology: Methodology, Sources and Forms*, Rosemary Radford-Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (OAKS)
Poem, *Dismantling the Castle*, Linda McCarriston, from *Eva-Mary*, 1991 (OAKS)

09/20 Chapter V *Wisdom Steps* in WW

09/23 Video: The Burke Lecture by Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza

09/25 Chapter VI *Wisdom's Dance* in WW

09/27 First Exam

Part IV: Feminism and Islam

For example, one young woman, an African-American, told me that she wore hijab as a way of calling for gender justice. "When people stare at me on the T (Boston subway), I find myself thinking that if there's just one woman out there who begins to wonder when she looks at me why she dresses the way she does and begins to notice the sexism of our society-if I've raised just one person's consciousness, that's good enough for me." ~ Leila Ahmed

09/30 *Backlash: The Veil, the Burka and the Clamor of War*, Chapter 9 from *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America*, Leila Ahmed (OAKS)

****10/02 Critical response paper #2--** *Woman at Point Zero*, Nawal el Saadawi

10/4 *American Muslim Women's Activism in the Twenty-First Century*, Chapter 11 from *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America*, Leila Ahmed (OAKS)

10/07-09 Film: Tahani Rachad's *Four Women of Egypt*

10/11-14 NO CLASS MEETINGS

10/16 *Islam, Women and Equality: Reading the Qur'an for Liberation* by Asma Barlas (OAKS)
Readings from the Qur'an (OAKS)

10/18 Exegetical papers due

10/18- 10/30 Class presentations of exegetical papers

Part V: Religion and Feminist Ethics

When human beings are regarded as moral beings, sex, instead of being enthroned upon the summit, administering upon rights and responsibilities, sinks into insignificance and nothingness. My doctrine then is, that whatever it is morally right for man to do, it is morally right for woman to do. ~ Angelina Grimke

The word "sin" is derived from the Indo-European root, "es-," meaning "to be." When I discovered this etymology, I intuitively understood that for a [person] trapped in patriarchy, which is the religion of the entire planet, "to be" in the fullest sense is to "sin." ~ Mary Daly

11/01

Stages of Moral Development, Lawrence Kohlberg (OAKS)

Moral Orientation and Moral Development, Carol Gilligan in *Women and Moral Theory* (OAKS)

11/04 Take Home Exam Due

11/04 *Feminism and the Ethic of Inseparability* by Catherine Keller, (OAKS)
Caring, Nel Noddings (OAKS)

11/06 *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*, Jacquelyn Grant, 48-55 in WSR

11/08 No Class Meeting

11/11 *Sacred Space and Profane Bodies* ~~ Louise Doire, presented at the 2013 National Women's Studies Association Conference, November 9, 2013.

****11/13 Critical response paper #3 --***The Cultural Production of Evil*, Emilie M. Townes, Harvard Divinity Bulletin, (OAKS)

11/15 *Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theology*, bell hooks, from *Still Brave: The Evolution of Black Women's Studies* (OAKS)

**** 11/18 Critical response Paper #4--** *Violence against Women in the Historical Christian West: The Visual and Textual Evidence*, Margaret Miles 113-126 WSR

11/120 *Injustice in Families, Assault and Domination*, Sara Ruddick, (OAKS)
Toward a New Theology of Sexuality, Judith Plaskow 211-219 in WSR

11/22 *Christian Forgiveness: The Villain in the Virtue* ~Louise Doire

11/25 Catch Up Day

11/27-29 No Class Meeting/ Thanksgiving Break

12/02 **Last Day of Class**

Third Exam: Friday, December 6 @ 8:00AM

Additional Course Notes

Attendance Policy: Class attendance and participation in group discussions are mandatory. FIVE absences will be allowed. SIX or more absences may result in a lower final grade but MAY be excused with proper medical documentation. Ten absences will result in your being dropped from the class, which will earn you an F for the course. Please note that a memo from CofC Health Services does NOT *automatically* qualify as an 'excused absence.' Final determination of an excused absence always lies with the Instructor.

SNAP: If you have a disability that qualifies you for academic accommodation, please present a letter from the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. For more information regarding accommodation and the SNAP program, see: <http://www.cofc.edu/~cds/index.htm>.

Honor Code: The Code of Honor found in the Student Handbook will be strictly enforced. Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated and WILL be reported to the Honor Board. According to the Student Handbook plagiarism *includes but is not limited to:*

- * The verbatim repetition, without acknowledgement, of the writings of another author. All significant phrases, clauses, or passages, taken directly from source material must be enclosed in quotation marks and acknowledged either in the text itself or in footnotes/endnotes.
- * Borrowing without acknowledging the source.
- * Paraphrasing the thoughts of another writer without acknowledgement.
- * Allowing any other person or organization to prepare work which one then submits as his/her own.

Classroom Code of Conduct

—Selections taken from the Student Handbook, published by the President's Advisory Committee in cooperation with the Office of the President.

Your professor expects that you as a student:

1. Will be attentive and courteous during class.
2. Will complete the assigned work according to the course schedule.
3. Do not cut classes, come in late, or leave early. If you ever are late for class, enter in complete silence and do not walk between the class and the professor. Never leave during class unless you absolutely must. Leaving for a short break and then returning is not acceptable. The professor is not a TV set, but is a person addressing the class, and it is rude to leave when someone is addressing you.
- 4. Turn off cell phones, pagers, and all other electronic devices.**
5. Visible and noisy signs of restlessness are rude as well as disruptive to others. If you cannot sit still or stay awake, you should not be taking a college class. Do not begin packing your book bag or otherwise indicate that you think it is time for class to come to an end; wait for the professor to dismiss class. If the class period has ended but the professor has not finished and you cannot stay any longer, leave in complete silence.
6. Come to class prepared to work. Your professor expects you to prepare for class by completing reading and homework assignments. If you are unprepared for class, this may prevent you from participating in a class activity. Do not present your lack of preparation as a problem for the professor to solve or excuse.