

# RELIGIOUS STUDIES 479-01

## *Contemporary Issues for Women and Religion*

Fall 1998; 2pm-3:15 TR, University of Calgary

(12 weeks; 12 students; 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students)

**Instructor: Kathleen O'Grady**

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"Examination of the religious views and evaluations of traditional religious structures by contemporary women writers such as E. Schüssler-Fiorenza, S. McFague, A. Klein, R. Gross, J. Plaskow, F. Mernissi, and D. Williams." Issues concerning several major religious traditions will be examined in this course, including Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism.

### **Textbooks:**

- 1) *Religion and Gender*. Ursula King, ed. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995.
- 2) *An Anthology of Sacred Texts by and About Women*. Serinity Young, ed. NY: Crossroad, 1993.
- 3) Assorted handouts.

### **Requirements:**

Weekly informal response to *Sacred Texts* readings (short booklet entries): **20%**

Seminar (on material from Section 1 or 2) **20%**

Essay (elaboration of seminar) **35%**

Final Exam **25%**

1. **Reading Responses** – 20% of final mark. This is an opportunity for you to react and reflect informally to the assigned readings from the *Sacred Texts* anthology. There is no specific requirement for the structure of these reflections; they may be academic comments, anecdotes, poems, aphoristic reflections, etc. or all of the above, whatever form you choose. This is a "working notebook" of ideas for you to draw on when you construct your seminar and essay. There is no assigned word count. These may be handwritten or typewritten, so long as they are legible.

2. **Seminar** -- 20% of final mark. Each person in the class will be asked to give a short seminar on a topic of

her or his choice from Sections I and II as outlined in the Class Schedule. Each person is responsible for preparing a presentation that lasts approximately 15 minutes in length (20 minutes maximum).

The material presented must be a careful and thoughtful account of the research conducted on the selected topic. This may include an in-depth discussion of a single book (per person, in the case of group seminars), or a small sampling from a variety of sources. The bulk of the seminar will be an interpretation of this research, but a good seminar will also raise important questions that the material does not answer and indicate possible directions for further research. Creative presentations (dramatic interpretations, for example) are encouraged, so long as the academic material is presented in a clear way to the class.

### 3. **Research Paper** -- 35% of final mark.

This assignment is to be based on one of the topics mentioned in Section I , II or III of the course schedule (or a topic of your own choosing within the course perimeters *in consultation with the instructor*). You are permitted and encouraged to write on the same topic as your seminar provided the essay *builds and reflects upon* the material already presented in the seminar.

A research paper is a focused analysis of material obtained from any of a number of different sources (course books, other academic books and monographs, the Internet, magazines, newspapers, personal interviews). The paper must not merely summarize the position maintained by another, but present your own argument, opinions and reflections. Your argument must be amply supported by the data reviewed. This paper should be carefully structured and presented. The paper must include a title page, endnotes or footnotes and a bibliography. The paper should be approximately 8-10 pages in length. Late papers will be penalized.

Please note: Plagiarism is easy to spot, and harshly penalized by the University. Don't be afraid to trust your own words and opinions.

### 4. **Final Exam** -- 25% of final mark, date and place to be announced.

The final exam is a formal test of what you have learned during the class lectures, seminars, guest lectures, films and assigned readings. The questions on the exam will be taken from discussions generated during class. I will indicate the types of questions that may be asked on the final exam during the last class. Textbooks and notebooks will not be allowed in the exam room.

**Final Note:** The assignments (1 through 3) are structured in such a way that you may conduct in-depth research on a small selection of topics (or even a single topic) and continue to build on your knowledge and reflections with each exercise.

## GENERAL COURSE OUTLINE

**Introduction:** Feminist theory at work in religious studies. General overview.

**Class 1: Feminist Theory and Religious Studies**

Introductions, outline, assignments

Lecture: General development

Handout: Postscript by Janet Martin Soskice from *Bodies, Lives, Voices: Gender in Theology* (K. O'Grady et al. eds), pp. 266-267.

## **Class 2: Feminist Theory and Religious Studies**

Lecture: Theoretical problems: Textual Studies

*Readings:* 1) Ursula King, "Introduction", *R+G*;

Optional: 2) June O'Connor, "The Epistemological Significance of Feminist Research in Religion", *R+G*

## **Class 3: Feminist Theory and Religious Studies**

Lecture: Different Strategies: Ritual Studies and Ethnography

*Readings:* 1) Handout: Delores S. Williams, "Womanist Theology" from *Weaving the Vision*;

Kwok Pui-lan, "Mothers and Daughters, Writers and Fighters" from *Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens*, pp. 21-34

Optional: 2) Rosalind Shaw, "Feminist Anthropology and the Gendering of Religious Studies", *R+G*

## **Class 4: Feminist Theory and Religious Studies**

Lecture: Moving Forward: Womanist Criticism

*Readings:* 1) Ursula King, "A Question of Identity", *R+G*;

Handout: Alice Walker, "God is Inside You and Inside Everyone Else" (*In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*); and "Womanist" (pp. xi-xii);

Audre Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly" and "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" from *Sister Outsider*.

Optional: 2) Kim Knott, "Women Researching, Women Researched", *R+G*

**Film: Sisters in the Struggle, 50min.**

## **Section 1. Women's Bodies**

### **Class 5: Eve: Judaism, Christianity, Islam**

Lecture: Lilith and Eve

*Readings:* 1) Handout: Judith Plaskow, "The Coming of Lilith" 2) Sacred: pp. 2-7 [Genesis; Lilith]; pp. 30-31 [Zohar]; p. 46 [Tertullian]; pp. 67-69 [Aquinas]; pp. 85-86 [Luther]; pp. 98-100 [Quran]

### **Class 6: Menstruation, Menopause and Childbirth**

Lecture: Menstruation "taboos" across cultures; [Kristeva's theory of abjection and menstruation]

*Readings: Sacred*: [Pliny], p. 171; [Aristotle] pp. 157-159; [Leviticus 15] p. 18; [Black Elk], pp. 229-231.

Handouts: "The Curse" by Mary Alice Ward, from *Sweet Secrets: Stories of Menstruation* (K. O'Grady and P. Wansbrough, eds); and "Menstruation" by K. O'Grady from *Encyclopedia of Women and World Religions*; Gloria Steinem's "If Men Could Menstruate".

### **Class 7: Sexuality and Reproductive Rights: contraception, abortion, fertility**

Lecture: Women and Sexuality in Christianity

*Readings: Sacred*, pp. 15-17 [Hebrew Bible]; pp. 44-46 [New Testament]; pp. 79-81 [Malleus Maleficarum]; pp. 81-83 [Joan of Arc]; pp. 83-85 [Luther]; pp. 86-88 [Calvin].

### **Class 8: Female "Circumcision" / "Genital Mutilation"**

Lecture

*Readings: Sacred*, pp. 244-246 [Dogon]; Handout: pp. 94-98; pp. 366-367 and pp. 178-79 of *Warrior Marks*; "Circumcision of Girls" by Nawal El Sadaawi in *Hidden Face of Eve*.

### **Class 9: Female "Circumcision" / Genital Mutilation**

**Film: *Warrior Marks*, 1 hour**

Discussion

### **Class 10: Hijab**

Lecture

*Readings: Handouts: Fatima Mernissi, "Preface to the English Edition", The Veil and the Male Elite; and 2) Suha Sabbaghx, "The Debate on Arab Women"*

### **Class 11: Hijab**

Lecture

*Readings: Handout: Fatima Mernissi, "Muslim Women and Fundamentalism"; Sacred*, pp. 101-102 [Quran];

## **Section 2. Re-reading Sacred Texts**

### **Class 12 Inclusive God-Talk and Feminine Representations of God/s, Judaism and Christianity**

Lecture: Yahweh, The Goddess in the Hebrew Bible, Asherah and Shekinah

*Readings: Handouts: Sallie McFague, "God as Mother"; Rita M. Gross, "Female God Language in a Jewish Context"; Sacred*: pp. 18-20 [Wisdom]; pp. 53-55 [Wisdom]

Read: "The Thunder, Perfect Mind" in class: <http://www.uky.edu/ArtsSciences/Classics/thunder.html>

### **Class 13: Feminine Representations of God/s, Catholicism**

Lecture: The Blessed Virgin Mary as Goddess

*Readings:* Morny Joy, "God and Gender", *R+G*; Sacred, pp. 61-64 [Mary]

### **Class 14: Feminine Representation of God/s, Buddhism and Shinto**

Lecture: Kuan Yin and Amaterasu

*Readings:* Marilyn F. Nefsky, "Liberator or Pacifier: Religion and Women in Japan", *R+G*; Sacred, pp. 221-223; pp. 321-323; pp. 309-310

### **Class 15: Feminine Representations of God/s, Hinduism**

Lecture: Devi and her many forms

*Readings:* Sacred, pp. 298-303 [Durga, Kali, Parvati, Laksmi]

### **Class 16: Men's Religious Organizations: The Promise Keepers**

Lecture

**Film: *NOW on the Promise Keepers*, 10 minutes**

Discussion

*Handout:* Seven Promises of the Promise Keepers;

### **Class 17: Men's Religious Organizations: The Million Man March**

Lecture

Discussion

*Readings:* Handout: Pledge of Million Man March

Handout: "What does it take to be a man?", Op-Editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* (K. O'Grady), August 21, 1998 (available online).

### **Class 18: Ordination and Women Religious Leaders**

Lecture: Women's ordination in the Catholic and Anglican Traditions

*Readings:* Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Women in the Early Christian Movement".

Sacred, pp. xxvi-xxvii [Women Religiosi]; p. 21 [Philo]; pp. 43-44 [The Early Church, NT]; pp. 55-57 [Gospel of Mary]; pp. 60-61 [Ordination of a Deaconess]; pp. 75-76 [Catherine of Siena]; p. 88 [Calvin]; pp. 403-408 [Alternative Religious Movements]

Optional: Kari Elisabeth Borrensen, "Women's Studies of the Christian Tradition", *R+G*; Sacred, pp. 25-26

[Beruriah]; p. 90 [Teresa of Avila]; pp. 76-78 [Christine de Pizan];

### **Class 19: Ordination and Women Religious Leaders**

Lecture: Women Religious Leaders and Thinkers

*Readings:* Sacred, pp. 232-233 [Comanche]; pp. 242-243 [Amazon]; pp. 248-250 [!Kung]; pp. 254-255 [Australia]; pp. 434-435 [Voodoo]

Optional: Sacred, pp. 387-390 [Sun Pu-erh] ]

## **Section 3. New women's religions**

### **Class 20: Spiritual Goddess Movements**

Lecture: Reformation and transformation from within or abandonment of traditional religions?: Wiccan and neo-pagan movements

*Readings:* Naomi Goldenberg, "The Return of the Goddess", *R+G*; Donate Pahnke, "Religion and Magic in the Modern Cults of the Great Goddess", *R+G*; Sacred: "Neopaganism", pp. 429-432.

## **Conclusion: "Changing the Subject": Revisioning the Study of Religion**

### **Class 21: Final Wrap Up**

*Readings:* Rosalind I. J. Hackett, "Women and New Religious Movements in Africa", *R+G*; Felicity Edwards, "Spirituality, Consciousness and Gender Identification", *R+G*

### **Exam questions outlined**

**Film: Ecofeminism Now!** (35 min.)

\*\*\*(3-4 Classes remaining: Overlap time for classes listed above)