


RELN 328: WOMEN AND THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

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Links:	Selected handouts:
Merriam Webster Online Dictionary	A Gnostic Glossary
Online Bible	Valentinian's Cosmic Scheme
The Bible Unbound	Important Ideas and Timeline for Christianity
LBIS Consort: Course Reserves and E-RES	Ten Commandments for Essay Writing
Resources: Marriage, Sex, and Catholicism	Twenty Rules Not to Follow
Resources: Marriage, Sex and Conservative Protestantism	Film Viewing Guidelines
	The Academic Study of Religion
	Fact-Finding Assignments
	Guidelines for Research Papers

Course Description: This course explores the significance of Christianity for women in that tradition. Why wasn't Mary Magdalene considered one of the disciples? How did a system of church government evolve that excluded women? How have women responded to that system? We will examine founders of church-reform movements such as Clare of Assisi, as well as founders of new Christian churches (Ellen White, the founder of Seventh-Day Adventism, and Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, for examples). The course will also explore contemporary Christian issues involving women, such as ordination, abortion, and marriage and divorce laws. One of the goals of the course is to explore the importance and consequence of gender in the Christian experience. Is Christianity different for men and women? A respect for the variety within both the Christian tradition and the choices made by different women within it, are also important parts of this course. These are some of the central themes that we will be examining:

Women as Leaders in Christian Movements

Women as Participants in Christian Movements

Views About Women in Christian Religious Governing Systems

Views About Women in the Central Myths of Christianity

Views By Women About Christianity

Woven through all these themes will be constant attention to context and complexity. In every case we discuss, we need to be asking "Whose Christianity is this?" "When?" and "Why?"

Class format: This class is organized as a seminar, not as lecture/discussion. There will be occasional presentations by the teacher. Classes will focus on serious discussion of the readings. You should come to class each day prepared to discuss the reading for that day. You should also bring the relevant reading materials.

Because I will not be presenting formal lectures, you will be divided into [small groups](#) of 2 or 3 that will have the responsibility for leading the Friday discussion and providing in advance written analysis, questions, and comments for the class to consider. Each group will have responsibility for four topics over the course of the semester. See [Group List](#).

I will also assign short response essays or [fact-finding assignments](#) to provide context and commentary for the topics covered. For these assignments you will turn in either one-two page typed response essay or a short one-page summary of your findings and the source that you used. You will be expected to report on your findings to the rest of the class. Groups in charge of the discussion and critiques for that week will be exempt from these assignments.

There will be no midterm or final exam in this class.

Because of this format, your attendance is mandatory. If, for any reason, you miss more than two classes, your grade will be lowered by a full grade point.

Grading:

- Seminar participation: 20%
- Response essays, critiques, and fact-finding assignments: 20%
- Small groups papers and leading class discussion: 60%

You will receive periodic assessments on your class participation, fact-finding assignments, and written work after each group discussion.

Required Reading:

Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (UC Press: 1989)

Elizabeth Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (Oxford: 1986)

Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Readings in Her Story* (Fortress Press:)

Cheryl Sanders, ed., *Living the Intersection: Womanism and Afrocentrism in Theology* (Fortress Press: 1995)

Course reserves and E-res documents:

Rosemary Ruether, *Religion and Sexism*.

Rosemary Ruether, *WomanGuides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology* (Beacon: 1985)

Maryanne Stevens, ed., *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol: Essays in Feminist Christology* (Paulist Press: 1993)

Schedule of Topics and Assignments:

Week 1: Women and the Foundations of Christianity

Friday, August 26 : Intro to the course: A survey about Christian origins and timeline

Reading assignment for next Monday:

***Womanguides*, Chap. 9: Foremothers of Womanchurch, 175-193 (Course Reserve)**

In the New Testament: Mark 16:1-8; Matt 28:1-10; Luke 1-2; Luke 8:1-4; John 11:1-20; John 19:25-27; 20:1-20; Acts 1:12-14; 16:11-16; 18:1-5; 18-26;

***Readings in Her Story*, 11-35**

***Gospel of Truth* (E-Res)**

***Gospel of Mary* (E-Res)**

Link: [Forum Romanum](#)



August 29, 31 and Sept. 2:

Aug. 29: Women in the gospels: Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha, and Paul's missionaries: Priscilla, Lydia, Phoebe; Alternative Christianities

**Aug. 31 and Sept. 2: Early Christian Women
*Reading Assignments for Wednesday and Friday: E-res: "Muffled Voices", 14-22***

Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church (E-Res)

***Readings in Her Story*, 34-49**

Fact-finding assignment Friday: find a Christian symbol which is feminine

Create groups and lay out assignments starting Week 3 (Sept. 12, 14, 16)



Week 2: Sept. 5, 7, 9: Gender and the Early Church

Reading Assignment for Wednesday and Friday:

E-Res: "Augustine: In defence of mediocrity"

Medieval Women's Visionary Literature, 83-114

Womanguides, chap. 2 (Course Reserves)

Fact-Finding Assignment for Friday: Find out something about a male saint from the period of 400 - 1000



Week 3: Sept. 12, 14, 16: The Church as Family: What Kind of Family?

Reading Assignment for Monday:

Womanguides, chapter 8 (Course Reserve)

Sister of Wisdom, 1-89

Reading Assignment for Wednesday and Friday:

Medieval Women's Visionary Literature, 231-275

For Friday, Sept. 16:

Group 1: Discussion: Discussion: Ecclesia; Women's visions; Redemptive Community

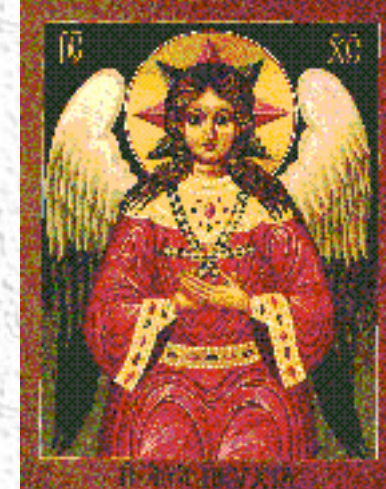
Group 2: Reasoned critique and discussion

Group 3: Fact-finding Assignment: Find out something about one of these venerated male saint from the same time period, 1000 - 1300: Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Francis of Assisi, or this man who was excommunicated as a heretic: Peter Waldo (or Valdez).



Week 4: Sept. 19, 21, 23: Prelude to the Reformation: New Ways of Structuring the Religious Family

Reading Assignment for Monday and Wednesday and Friday: Medieval Women's Visionary Literature, 171-195



Group 2: Discussion: Women's roles in the prelude to the Reformation;

Group 3: Reasoned critique and discussion

Group 1: *Fact-Finding Assignment:* Find out something about heresy and gender

Week 5: Sept 26, 28, 30: The Protestant Reformation and Women

*Reading Assignment for Wednesday: "Women and the Continental Reformation" in Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism* (Course reserve)*

Readings in Her Story, 68-84

Reading Assignment for Friday: E-res, "Saints and Sisters"

Group 3: Early Protestantism and Women

Group 1: Reasoned critique and discussion

Group 2: *Fact-finding assignment:* Find out the origins of one of these early Protestant reform movements that would become important in colonial America: Lutherans, Quakers, Puritans, Congregationalists, Baptists



Week 6: Oct. 3, 5: Women in Colonial America; women preachers

*Reading assignment for Wednesday: *Readings in Her Story*, 92-115; 139-163*

Reading assignment for Friday:

[Electronic Version](#) through page 23 (right hand column)

[About Jarena Lee](#)

[Larger version of photo](#)

Link: [Rebecca Cox Jackson](#)

[The Black Church](#)



[Gifts of Power: Rebecca Cox Jackson](#)

Group 1: Discussion: The Protestant Reformation in America; Early African-American women and Christianity

Group 2: Reasoned critique

Group 3: Find out something about the foundations of 19th century African-American churches

OCTOBER BREAK: OCTOBER 6-7

Week 7: Oct. 10, 12, 14: Womanism and Feminism; Afrocentrism; African-American churches and women

Reading assignment for Wednesday: Living the Intersection, 21-56

Reconstructing the Christ Symbol, Chap. 3 (Course Reserve)

Reading Assignment for Friday: Living the Intersection, 121-175

Group 2: Discussion: Womanism and Christianity

Group 3: Reasoned critique

Group 1: Fact-finding assignment: Find out about one of these women: Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, Amanda Berry Smith



Week 8: Oct. 17, 19, 21: Creation and the problem of evil: New Christian models of the world

Reading Assignment for Wednesday:

Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, "Mystification Through Myth" (E-Res)

Sally McFague, "God and the World" (E-Res)

Reading assignment for Friday:

[Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*](#)

Sister of Wisdom, 121-15



Group 3: Discussion: Hildegard's theology of the feminine; Cady Stanton's revised Bible

Group 1: Reasoned critique

Group 2: *Fact-finding assignment*: Find out something about gender and Christian symbols of evil and repentance

Week 9: Oct. 24, 26, 28: Christian sex; Marriage, Divorce, Abortion: Catholicism and mainline Protestantism

Reading Assignment for Wednesday:

Ruether, *Religion and Sexism*, "Canon Law and the Battle of the Sexes", 267-291 (Course reserve)

Readings in Her Story, 163-166

Reading Assignment for Friday:

E-res, "Fundamentalist Theology and Gender Roles"

E-Res: "Mormon Marriages in an American Context"

[Lutheran Church](#)

[Marriage and the Family in The Church of the Nazarene](#)

[The Methodist Church: Statement about Marriage and family](#)

[Marriage, Divorce, Abortion: The Presbyterian Church](#)

Group 1: Discussion: Christian approaches to marriage, divorce, and abortion

Group 2: Reasoned critique

Group 3: *Fact-Finding Assignment*: Find out about attitudes towards sex, abortion, marriage, and divorce in one of the mainline Protestant denominations: Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran

Week 10: Oct. 31, Nov. 2, 4: Christianity in the Gay and Lesbian Communities

Reading Assignment for Monday:

"The Debate over Homosexuality" (Handout)

E. Ann Matter, "My Sister, My Spouse: Woman-Identified Women in Medieval Christianity (E-Res)

Reading Assignment for Wednesday: Bernard Schlager, "Boswell and Gay-Affirming Movements in Christianity (E-Res)

"The Rev. Irene Monroe" (E-Res)

Reading Assignment for Friday: *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol*, chapter 6 (Course reserve)

[LDS: Teachings About the Family](#)

[Official LDS Website About Beliefs](#)

LDS: [Teachings About God](#)

Group 2: Discussion:

Group 3: Reasoned critique

Group 1: *Fact-finding assignment*: Find out about Christian denomination that includes gays and lesbians

Week 11: Nov. 7, 9, 11: Christianity and Hispanic Feminism

Reading Assignment for Monday: *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol*, Chapter 4 (Course reserve)

E-Res: "Guadalupe, the Sex Goddess"

Reading Assignment for Wednesday: Reading: "Women and the Theology of Liberation" -- Julia (E-Res)

***This Bridge Called My Back* (E-Res)**

Group 3: Discussion

Group 1: Reasoned Critique

Group 2: *Fact-Finding Assignment*: Find out something about a Latina woman or issue pertaining to Christianity

[Liberation Theology](#), from the Encyclopedia Britannica

[Liberation Theology](#)



National Museum of Women in the Arts

Week 12: Nov. 14, 16, 18: Looking at the Da Vinci Code

Reading for Wednesday and Friday:

Selections from *The Da Vinci Code* -- E-Res

Reading: "One of the Marys: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Michelangelo's Florentine Pieta" -- E-Res

[A Hostile Review](#)

[An Introduction to Grail History](#)

[Rebutting the Da Vinci Code](#) from the New York Times

Group 1: Discussion

Group 2: Reasoned Critique

Group 3: *Fact-Finding Assignment*: Find out something about the way Mary Magdalene has been portrayed throughout history: in art, in film, as a prostitute, leper, sinner, prophet, disciple

[Mary the Sinner](#), from Catholic Saints Online

[Mary Magdalene](#), from The Encyclopedia Britannica

[Mary Magdalene](#), from Catholic Encyclopedia Online

[Gospel of Mary](#) excerpts from PBS Frontline series, *From Jesus to Christ*

[A Gallery of Images](#) of Mary Magdalene, from Haverford College

THANKSGIVING BREAK STARTS NOVEMBER 19

Week 13: Nov. 28, 30, Dec. 2 : Women as Reformers and Leaders in New Christian movements

Reading assignment for Monday:

E-res, "Entering the Sanctuary" --The Roman Catholic Story And The Episcopalian Story"

Readings in Her Story, 191-22

Reading assignment for Wednesday and Friday:



The Ordination of Women: Pro and Con, chapters 1 and 2 (Course Reserve)

Readings in Her Story, 177-190

Group 2: Discussion

Group 3: Reasoned critique

Group 1: *Fact-finding assignment*: Find out about a woman founder of a Protestant church (Examples: Aimee Semple McPherson, Ellen White, Mary Baker Eddy)

[Definition of Prophetic Religion](#)

Week 14: Dec. 5, 7, 9: Women in Christian Movements Today: Symbolic and Real

Reading assignment for Monday: Sister of Wisdom, 196-271

Reading assignment for Wednesday and Friday:

[Introducing Theology](#), pp. 1-51

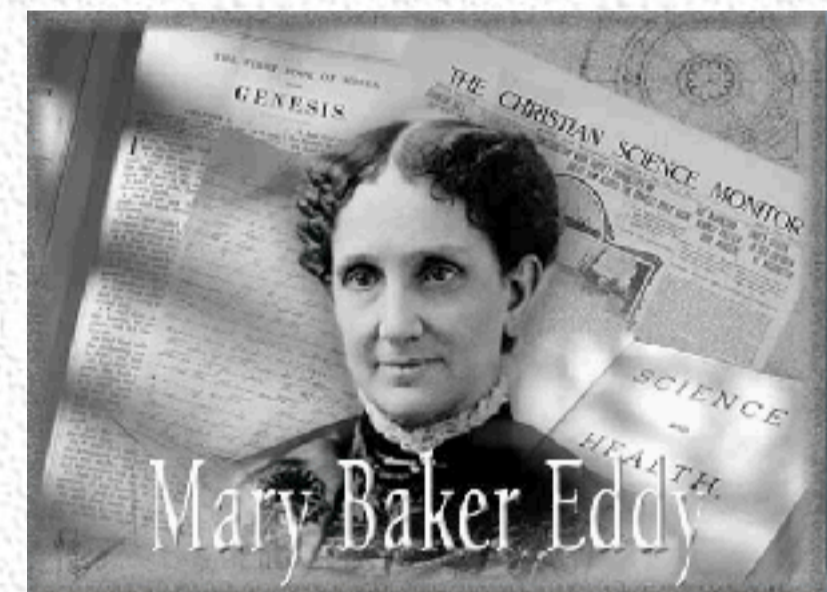
Reading for Thursday: "Ethics and Justice in Goddess Religion" Handout

Rediscovering the Christ Symbol, chapter 5

Group 3: Discussion

Group 1: Reasoned Critique

Group 2: *Fact-Finding Assignment*: Find out something about current Women's spiritual groups



*Women
in
God's Spirit*

