

REL 331
Christian Faith and Feminist Critique
Instructor: David McKenzie
Fall 2009

Class information:

Location - SCI 102
Time - 12:30 - 1:45 TT

Office information:

Location - EVA 126
Hours - 2:00 - 3:30 TT
9:00 – 11:00 TT
1:30 - 2:00 MWF
3:00 - 3:30 MWF
Phone - 290-2693
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Texts:

Daphne Hampson, *After Christianity*, second edition (SCM, 2003).
Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God* (Continuum, 2007).
Ross Kramer and Mary Rose D'Angelo, *Women and Christian Origins* (Oxford, 1999)
Barbara MacHaffie, *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition*, second edition (Augsburg, 2006).

Course Description: This course explores feminist concerns regarding the Christian faith. It focuses primarily on the work of feminists writing within the Christian tradition and deals with the topics of the language of scripture and liturgy, biblical models of the family, the role of women in leadership positions in various denominations, and the theological issues related to "God the Father" and "Jesus the Son."

Purpose for the Course: The course provides a context in which students can examine the options available in respect to the clash between contemporary feminist thought and the historic Christian faith. There are basically three options. First, the historic faith can be affirmed and feminist commitments can be denied as inconsistent with Christian theology. Second, feminist commitments can be affirmed and the Christian faith denied as inconsistent with the moral equality demanded within feminism. And third, both the historic Christian faith and the commitments of contemporary feminism can be affirmed with the relevant qualifications on each side necessary for a correlation. All of these options will be respected, though the course will give more attention to the third.

Student Learning Outcomes: Students will be acquainted with the roles of women in the Bible, the life of the early church, in Christian history, and the modern church. In addition, they will become conversant with the egalitarian ethical commitments of contemporary feminism as they relate to religious belief and spirituality, and will be immersed in the horizontal clash of contemporary feminism and the traditional Christian faith, with a focus on Christian feminism as a blending of horizons. Through written assignments, and class discussions and debate, they will develop the ability to give historical accounts of the experiences studied, to state and analyze

prominent alternative positions held on the relation between feminism and Christian theology, and to articulate their own positions on the issues encountered.

Assessment Measures: Achievement of these goals will be measured by writing assignments which require students to exhibit their understanding of the historical experiences reviewed and issues discussed, and to defend their own views. In addition, achievement will be measured by satisfactory performance on test questions concerned with particular historical developments and the principals involved.

Methods of Instruction: Classes will normally begin with a brief lecture to provide background for discussion of the issue for the day. Discussions are sometimes open, allowing any student who wishes to comment on the issue. More often, they are directed by the instructor, using the strategies of Socratic questioning. Discussions normally begin with a focus on the nature of the issue at hand, then move to focus on the various arguments that might be advanced to support positions on the issue. The dialogue will sometimes be intense, but will **always** be oriented to the issue and arguments, not to the persons stating them. In addition to our typical reading/discussion class sessions, we will also have presentations by guest lecturers whose areas of expertise bear on our interests. Beyond the class sessions themselves, there will be many cultural events on campus relevant to our work. Attendance is not required at any events outside the regularly scheduled class period, but bonus credit will be given for attendance of and reporting on selected events.

Attendance Policy: Students are allowed two unexcused class absences. Absences beyond two must be excused. Typical excused absences include school-sponsored trips and family or personal illness. Excessive unexcused absences will be relevant in cases of borderline semester grades.

Academic Integrity: In no case will academic dishonesty be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, fabrication, multiple submissions, and aiding and abetting. Plagiarism is the type of academic dishonesty most relevant to REL 331. It involves submitting material that in part or whole is not the student's own work without properly attributing the source(s) of its content.

Requirements and Basis for Grading:

1. Participation is crucial to the seminar setting, and is expected in this course. Participation will be the basis for 10% of the grade.
2. Quizzes on the reading assignments will be administered periodically. The quizzes will be short essay in nature, and the quiz average will constitute the basis for 10% of the grade.
2. Two position papers are required. The papers should be four to six pages in length, double-spaced, and in appropriate style. They should be submitted on the dates indicated in the schedule of assignments and may pertain to any topic addressed in the relevant section of the course. Each

position paper will constitute the basis for 15% of the student's grade.

3. A term paper is required. The paper should be eight to twelve pages in length, double-spaced, and written accord with the specifications of the MLA Stylesheet or a comparable manual of style. It should be submitted on the date indicated in the schedule of assignments and may pertain to any topic addressed in the course. The paper should be amply documented and should reflect the rigorous scholarship of feminist writers in religion. The term paper will constitute the basis for 30% of the student's grade.

4. A comprehensive final exam will be administered on the date indicated in the schedule of assignments. The final will be essay in nature, and students will be given options as to which questions to answer. A study sheet for the final will be provided during the last week of classes. The final exam will constitute the basis for 20% of the student's grade.

Grading scale:	93-100 = A
	90-92 = A-
	87-89 = B+
	83-86 = B
	80-82 = B-
	77-79 = C+
	73-76 = C
	70-72 = C-
	67-69 = D+
	63-66 = D
	60-62 = D-
	Below 60 = F

Accommodations: Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodation in this course are encouraged to contact the Academic Support Center in Krannert Room 326 (ext. 4080) as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

Schedule of Assignments:

Tuesday, August 25 - Introduction to the class and initial discussion. No assignment.

Section One: Women and Christian Origins

Thursday, August 27 - Discussion of the lives of women in the ancient Mediterranean region. Read Kraemer, chs. 1 and 4.

Tuesday, September 1 - Discussion of the roles of Jewish women in the first century CE.
Read Kraemer, chs. 2-3.

Thursday, September 3 - Overview of various biblical portraits and the roles of women
in the early Christian churches. Read MacHaffie, ch. 1.

Tuesday, September 8 - Discussion of the canonical gospel presentations of women, with
a focus on Mary Magdalene. Read Kraemer, chs. 5 and 8.

Thursday, September 10 - Discussion of women in the Pauline tradition. Read Kraemer,
chs. 9 and 11.

Tuesday, September 15 - Discussion of gender and authority in Gnostic scriptures and in
the first centuries of Christian history. Read Kraemer, chs. 12-13.

Section Two: Women in Christian History

Thursday, September 17 - Discussion of prominent models of women in the Medieval
and Reformation periods. Read MacHaffie, chs. 2-3.

Tuesday, September 22 - Discussion of women as pioneers, spiritualists, and social
reformers in the Colonial and Revolutionary periods. Read MacHaffie,
chs. 4-5.

Thursday, September 24 - Discussion of women as social reformers, teachers, preachers,
and missionaries in nineteenth-century America. Read MacHaffie, chs. 6-7.

Tuesday, September 29 - Discussion of women in theology and leadership positions in
churches in the twentieth century and the contemporary setting. Read MacHaffie,
chs. 8-9.

Thursday, October 1 - Review of the first two sections and discussion of the first paper.

Tuesday, October 6 - **First paper due.** Discussion of theological methods.

Section Three: Christian Feminist Theology

Thursday, October 8 - Discussion of divine revelation and mystery.
Read Johnson, chs. 1-2.

Tuesday, October 13 - **Fall break.**

Thursday, October 15 - Discussion of the God of compassion and liberation.
Read Johnson, chs. 3-4.

Tuesday, October 20 - Feminist models in biblical and classical theology.
Read Johnson, chs. 5-6.

Thursday, October 22 - Ethnic and interfaith issues from a Christian feminist perspective. Read Johnson, chs. 7-8.

Tuesday, October 27 - Discussion of a Christian feminist reinterpretation of the Trinity.
Read Johnson, chs. 9-10.

Thursday, October 29 - Review of the third section and discussion of the second paper.

Tuesday, November 3 - **Second paper due.** Discussion of theological options.

Section Four: The Post-Christian Feminist Position

Thursday, November 5 - Discussion of Christian particularity.
Read Hampson, intro. and ch. 1.

Tuesday, November 10 - Discussion of liberal and radical approaches within Christianity.
Read Hampson, ch. 2.

Thursday, November 12 - Discussion of Christian idolatry.
Read Hampson, ch. 4.

Tuesday, November 17 - Discussion of Post-Christian theism and spirituality.
Read Hampson, ch. 6.

Section Five: Review and Student Presentations

Thursday, November 19 - Student presentations of term paper rough draft.

Tuesday, November 24 - Student presentations of term paper rough draft.

Thursday, November 26 - **Thanksgiving Break**

Tuesday, December 1 - Student presentations of term paper rough draft.

Thursday, December 3 - **Term paper due.** Review and preparation for the final.

Final exam - Wednesday, Dec. 9, 10:30 a.m.

Tuesday, December 4 - **Term paper due.**

Thursday, December 6 - Class evaluation and preparation for the final.

Final exam - Wednesday, December 12, 10:30