

## **ST 130: Feminism and Theology**

**Easter 2017**

**Dr. Alina N. Feld**

### **Course Description**

Feminist theology, and feminism generally, has as its central concern “women’s full flourishing.” The aim of this course is to ask, and attempt to answer, the following questions: Is Christianity conducive to the full flourishing of women? Have its traditional interpretation and practice been attuned to women’s ontology and distinctive sensibilities? What have been the role and significance of women’s mystical experience within theology as well as philosophy and personal understanding? What are the marks of contemporary feminist theological thinking? To address these questions we will read excerpts from medieval Christian women mystics as well as from contemporary feminist thinkers.

**Learning Goals and Objectives** established in accord with the Global Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD):

Goal 1. Ability to think critically and creatively.

- a. Clearly and accurately summarize and evaluate the facts, presumptions, viewpoints, values, and arguments presented in a text or creative work.
- b. Gather and assess relevant information, and apply appropriate cognitive methods in solving problems or answering questions raised in a text or creative work.
- c. Construct well-reasoned solutions or conclusions; test and defend conclusions against relevant criteria and standards.
- d. Critically analyze one’s own thinking by identifying one’s presuppositions, values, and viewpoints as well as problems.
- e. Conceive and defend alternative hypotheses and viewpoints; offer and explain reasons for provisionally rejecting or accepting them.

Goal 2. Ability to apply analytical reasoning across academic disciplines.

- a. Read with comprehension, and critically interpret written work in discipline-specific contexts.
- b. Describe, comprehend, and analyze the role of philosophical ideas, historical movements, or ethical debates in the development of civilizations.

Goal 3. Proficiency in written communication.

- a. Write an effective argumentative essay.

Goal 4 Cultural and Religious Difference Awareness

- a. Articulate and analyze own core beliefs and the cultural, religious, and/or historical origins of these core beliefs
- b. Recognize ethical issues when presented in complex contexts and recognize interrelationships of issues
- c. Independently apply different cultural and theological perspectives to a question and consider full implications of that application

d. Demonstrate ability to state a theological position and state objections, assumptions, and implications, and to defend own positions

### **Required Reading (excerpts)**

Medieval Women Mystics

Elizabeth Zum Brunn, *Women Medieval Mystics*

Andrea Janelle Dickens, *The Female Mystic: Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages* (Tauris et co., 2009)

Hadewijch, *The Complete Works* (Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press, 1980)

Hildegard, *Scivias* (CWS, Paulist Press, 1990)

Julian of Norwich, *Showings* (CWS, Paulist Press, 1978)

Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls* (CWS, Paulist Press, 1993)

Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* (CWS, Paulist Press, 1998)

Laura Swan, *The Wisdom of the Beguines* (Bluebridge, 2014)

Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* (CWS, Paulist Press, 1979)

Contemporary Feminist Theology

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2006)

Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*

Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (Crossroads, 1994)

Susan Frank Parsons, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, (2002)

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Beacon Press, 1983;1993)

Dorothy Soelle, *Suffering* (1984)

Simone Weil, *Simone Weil Reader* (2007)

Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God Talk* (1993)

### **Course Requirements:**

Attendance and Participation 5%

Weekly Responses/Reading Journal (300 words)—10 entries (20 %)

Student Presentation (10%)

Mid-term Reflection Paper, 2000-2500 words (30%) Due 3/23

Final Reflection-Research Paper, 3000-3500 words (35%) Due 5/11

**Participation:** Your participation to discussion is welcome and encouraged at all times.

**Weekly Reflections (Reading Journal), 10 entries, 300 words each:** The weekly reflections are responses to the topics under consideration whether inspired by primary or secondary sources as well as class discussion. They provide an opportunity to formulate questions and develop your own ideas that would relate the new material to your particular theological concerns, on-going projects, and contemporary cultural issues. You are encouraged to share your responses during our class meeting. The entries will not be graded individually, there will only be a completion grade. Weekly submission is recommended.

**Student Presentation:** The presentation is intended as a more elaborate reflection on

the topic of the day. Any media may be used.

**Midterm Paper:** This will involve a reflection-essay addressing a topic related to the material covered during the first part of the semester, i.e., medieval women mysticism. Date: 3/23.

**Final Paper:** The Semester Project is a research-reflection paper focused a topic developed during the second part of the semester or one bridging the medieval and contemporary feminist theologies. You may thus refer to a specific feminist approach to systematic theology, concentrate on one medieval or contemporary feminist thinker, or establish a parallel between the two areas. It is advisable to begin reflecting on it and discussing it with me and your colleagues as soon as possible. Final due date: 5/11.

### **Incompletes**

Arrangements for an incomplete must be made with Registrar and me before the deadline for the final paper.

### **Writing Guidelines-Sources and Style**

Texts must be typed double-spaced, font size 12, and pages numbered. It is recommended that you select and use consistently a standard form/publishing style (MLA, APA, Chicago Manual of Style).

### **Special Needs**

Students with documented disabilities or special needs who require accommodations for this course must notify me as soon as possible so that we make arrangements to provide them with adequate support.

### **Academic Dishonesty**

Plagiarism is the use of an author's text or thoughts or an internet entry without proper acknowledgment. Remember to always indicate the source of quoted or paraphrased materials used in your reflections and arguments.

## **Course Outline**

The following outline may be subject to modifications according to students' requests and academic priorities.

2/2 Introduction, Overview. Women's Experience and Theological Reflection.

Reading:

Ruether, "The Emergence of Christian Feminist theology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (3-18)

Serene Jones, "Mapping Feminist Theory and Theology" in *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology* (1-22)

2/9 Women Mystics in Medieval Theology. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

## Readings:

Hildegard of Bingen, Scivias (bks 1, 2, 3) in *Scivias*

Newman, "Introduction," in *Scivias*

Dickens, "Sybil of the Rhine: Hildegard of Bingen" in *The Female Mystic* (25-38)

Film: Margarethe von Trotta, *Vision* (2009)

2/16 The Beguines: Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207-1282/94);

## Readings:

Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* (31-336)

Tobin, "Introduction" in *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* (1-24)

Swan, "Who were the Beguines?" in *The Wisdom of the Beguines* (1-71)

Dickens, "Divine Lover: Mechtild of Magdeburg" in *The Female Mystic* (71-85)

2/23 The Beguines: Hadewijch of Antwerp (d. 1248)

## Readings:

Swan, "Who were the beguines?" in *The Wisdom of the Beguines*

Hadewijch, "Visions" in Hadewijch, *The Complete Works* (261-305)

Hart, "Introduction" in Hadewijch, *The Complete Works* (1-41)

Dickens, "Jouster for Love: Hadewijch of Brabant" in *The Female Mystic* (55-70)

3/2 The Beguines: Marguerite Porete (1248-1310); Joan of Arc (1412-1431)

## Readings:

Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls* (65-222)

Babinsky, "Introduction" in Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls* (5-48)

Dickens, "Annihilated Soul: Marguerite Porete" in *The Female Mystic* (119-131)

Swan, "Were Beguines Heretics?" In *The Wisdom of the Beguines* (159-179)

Film screening: Carl Theodor Dreyer, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928)

3/9 Julian of Norwich (1342-1416); Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

## Readings:

Julian of Norwich, "Showings" in Julian of Norwich, *Showings* (125-170)

Leclercq, "Preface" in Julian of Norwich, *Showings* (1-16)

Teresa of Avila, "The Interior Castle" in Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* (33-196)

Kavanaugh, "Introduction" in Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* (1-29)

Dickens, "Bodily Mystic: Julian of Norwich" in *The Female Mystic* (133-147)

Dickens, "Carmelite Reformer: Teresa of Avila" in *The Female Mystic* (179-191)

3/16 No Classes-Spring Break

3/23 Simone Weil

Readings:

Weil, "Spiritual Autobiography;" "Sketch of Contemporary Social Life;" "Criteria of Wisdom;" "Paths of Meditation," in *The Simone Weil Reader*

McCullough, "Introduction" (1-12); "The Paradox of Desire" (51-84); "God and the World" (85-122); "Grace and Decreation" (171-212); "Conclusion" (213-239) in *The Religious Philosophy of Simone Weil*

#### The Themes of Feminist Theology

3/30 God

Gebara, "God for Women" in *Out of the Depths* (145-175)

McFague, "God as Mother" in *Weaving the Visions* (139-149)

Johnson, "Introduction" (3-16); "Feminist Theology and Critical Discourses about God" (17-41); "Basic Linguistic Options" (42-60), in *She Who Is*

Williams, "Womanist God Talk and Black Liberation Theology" (127-157); "Womanist-Feminist Dialogue" (158-180) in *Sisters in Wilderness*

Trinity, Christology, Pneumatology

Johnson, "Triune God: Mystery of Relation" (191-223); "One Living God: She Who Is" (224-245); "Suffering God: Compassion Poured Out" (246-272) in *She Who Is*

Soskice, "Trinity and Feminism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (135-151)

Oduyoye, "Jesus Christ" in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (151-170)

Slee, "The Holy Spirit and Spirituality" in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (171-189)

4/6 Creation and Anthropology

Ruether, "Women, Body and Nature: Sexism and the Theology of Creation" in *Sexism and God-Talk* (72-93); "Anthropology: Humanity as Male and Female" (93-116) in *Sexism and God-Talk*

Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire" in *Gender Trouble* (1-47)

Deane-Drummond, "Creation" in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (190-205)

Parsons, "Redeeming Ethics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (206-223)

4/13 Maundy Thursday-No Classes

4/20 Evil and Suffering

Ruether, "The Consciousness of Evil: The Journeys of Conversion" in *Sexism and God Talk* (159-183)

Gebara, "Introduction;" "Women's experience of evil;" "What Evil Women Do" in *Out of the Depths* (1-61; 95-108)

Soelle, "Introduction: The Two Questions" (1-8); "A Critique of Christian Masochism" (9-32); "The Truth in Acceptance" (87-129); "The Religion of Slaves" (151-178) in *Suffering*

4/27 Church and Sacraments

Ross, "Church and Sacrament" in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (224-242)

Ruether, "Mariology as Symbolic Ecclesiology: Repression of Liberation?" (152-165); "Ministry and Community for a People liberated from Sexism (193-214)" in *Sexism and God Talk*

5/4 Redemption and Eschatology

Karras, "Eschatology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (243-260)

Ruether, "Can a Male Savior Save Women? Liberating Christology from Patriarchy" (81-94); "Suffering and Redemption: The Cross and Atonement in Feminist Theology" (95-107); "Future Hope and Eschatology in Feminist Theology" (108-120) in *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism*

Gebara, "Women's Experience of Salvation," in *Out of the Depths*

5/11 Final Exam

**Recommended Readings:**

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller, eds., *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline*

Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (1982)

Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney, eds., *Horizons in Feminist Theology* (Fortress Press, 1997)

Anne M. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (2002)

Sarah Coakley, "Feminist Theology" in James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought* (Fortress Press, 2006)

Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Beacon Press, 1993)

Ivone Gebara, *Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor* (2004)

-----, *Out of the Depth: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation* (2002)

Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985)

-----, *Ethics and Difference*

Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Fortress Press, 2000)

Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, *First Dream, Response Letter to Sor Filotea de la Cruz*

Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World*

Julia Kristeva, *Teresa, My Love: An Imagined Life of the Saint* (2014)

-----, *This Incredible Need to Believe*

Sallie McFague, *Models of God* (1988)

Anna Mercedes, *Power for: Feminism and Christ's Self-Giving* (2011)

Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (1998)

Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, eds., *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* (1989)

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Visionary Women: Three Medieval Mystics*

-----, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Fortress Press, 2012)

-----, *Redemption in Christian Feminism* (Pilgrim Press, 1998)

Margaret Schaus, ed., *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (Routledge, 2006)

Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (1983; 1994)

Alice Walker, *In Search of our Mother's Gardens*

Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1983)