

Jewish and Christian Feminism
Spring, 2007
REL 240/WS 240
Tues/Thurs. 12:50-2:00 pm; Comenius 201
Instructor: Dr. Kelly Denton-Borhaug
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Office Hours: T/TR, 11 – 12:30 PM; you may also make an appointment with me or stop by and see if I am available

Course Description: What do feminism and religious traditions have to say to one another? A huge body of literature has burst onto the religious scene in the last thirty or more years as more and more women on the U.S. scene and around the world are exploring this question. Over the course of this semester students will be exposed to writers whose shared struggles with feminism and the religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity have deeply touched the lives of countless religious women (and also men). We will compare and contrast Jewish and Christian women writers on themes such as the understanding of God, sacred texts, *halakhah*, understanding of community, sexuality, and ritual. In addition to assigned books, a few additional articles are assigned; these may be found on reserve in the library (or may be passed out in class). *As well as learning about the intersection of feminism and the traditions of Judaism and Christianity, this class in particular honors the opportunity to direct the questions of feminism and religions to our own lives.* Additionally, we will learn from women in our larger community with respect to the fundamental questions of feminism and religion.

Course Objectives

- 1) Students will be encouraged to sink into the huge questions raised by the encounter of feminism and Christianity and/or Judaism; in the process their understandings of religion(s) and feminist theory and values will be challenged and widened;
- 2) Student appreciation and awareness of diversity will be enhanced through our study in two ways: first, the diverse perspectives and social locations of writers we study will demonstrate wide variety of experience, areas of concern and ways of valuing; and second, our comparison and contrast of Jewish and Christian experience will likewise present an opportunity for study in religious diversity;
- 3) Critical thinking and writing skills will be enhanced and challenged in this course, through in depth reading and class discussion of readings in an area most of them never ill have been exposed to before; and through finding a research topic, augmenting research skills, and exploring their topic to completion in a paper and oral presentation;
- 4) Listening and collaborative skills will be developed through working in pairs to interview a woman in our own community with respect to her religious/feminist perspectives and history;
- 5) Students will gain a deeper awareness of the significance of their own social location and of their own questions with respect to feminism and religions through

encouragement to closely attend to and learn from their own experience in juxtaposition with the thinkers we study.

Required Readings (to be purchased in the bookstore)

Feminism and Theology, Eds. Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton

On Women and Judaism, Blu Greenberg

Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism, Ed. Danya Ruttenberg

The Papal "No": A Comprehensive Guide to the Vatican's Rejection of Women's Ordination, Deborah Halter

Additional assigned readings on reserve in the library or passed out as handouts.

Required Extra-class Experiences: Inform your athletic coach and/or employers/professors in order to be present for these events. Do This Early!

- Meeting on campus with Dr. Stacey Zaremba's WS class, members of "In a Different Voice: The Moravian Women Student Alliance," and other women students (an intentional parallel activity will be planned for the men in our class), Feb. 1, Thursday. This is a mandatory event that will take place during class time.
- Student pairs will develop and present the religious/spiritual/feminist oral history of a woman, either Christian or Jewish. This may well involve you interviewing a woman off campus. Each student pair will be required in advance to compete and fill out appropriate IRB forms for this study involving "human subjects." Check out the HSIRB link on the intranet website.
- Feb. 17/18: Vagina Monologues
- March 19: Jane Curry and "Nice Girls Don't Sweat" Prosser, 7:30 pm
- March, date TBA, evening event: "The Yellow Dress" performed on Moravian campus

Important Note: Students are required to attend ONE of the above three events (either Feb. 17/19, Mar. 19 or "Yellow Dress" events – if you wish to attend more, you may!)

- April 25, Wed., 7:00 pm, location TBA: "The reality of sexual violence against women on college campuses and recommendations for institutional response" Dr. Susan Stocker, feminist philosopher and ethicist, the Netherlands. This is a mandatory extra-class event.

Course requirements

Careful advance reading, attendance and participation in class and at extra-class events. A seminar course such as this requires the careful preparation and the active participation of every student. Read every assigned text carefully well in advance of class. Don't use a highlighter to mark your text, but with pen or pencil write your reactions and questions

in the margins and note the development of the author's argument. Underline what you think are the key points, ideas and reflections, and come to class ready to discuss, share and raise questions. **Bring whatever text(s) we are reading with you to class every time! We will regularly use them and read aloud from them in our seminar!** If you feel shy or uneasy about speaking up in class, please come see me during office hours for help on this issue; an important part of your liberal arts education is learning to speak in group settings in your own voice with intelligence, passion, confidence and power (this is also a feminist value). Use the response papers as a way to continue thinking through what you are reading, and as a way for you to respond to the material with your own experience and ideas. 25% of course grade.

Religious holidays, serious illness and family emergency are the only accepted reasons for missing class. Students with more than two unexcused absences will lose at least a letter grade for participation (those students who need to miss classes because of religious observance will have the option to make up what they have missed – if you fall into this category, please inform me immediately!). *In case of excused absences, please contact me and let me know (in advance of class!).* In any event, you are responsible for every class session's material, notes and assignments.

Short response papers with hard copy to be handed in at the beginning of class as assigned. Each of these papers will take up questions and issues from our reading. I will pose questions for your reflection or you may choose your own direction for each paper (please check with me first if you decide to go in a different direction). Overall these response papers count for 30% of the course grade. **Late papers will not be accepted.** In order to produce a high-quality short paper such as this, you will need time to read, think about the material, and make careful decisions about what you choose to include in your papers.

Collaborative Oral Histories You will choose a partner in the class with whom to work on this project. Together you will decide upon an adult Jewish or Christian woman to interview, focusing on the woman's life journey and her identity, struggles, joys, conflicts and questions with respect to her development religiously/spiritually and with respect to her awareness of gender and feminism. In order to benefit from someone's life experience, please choose a woman who is at least 35 years old. 20% of course grade.

Additional Information on Class Presentations of Women's Religious Histories

Each class pair (or trio) will have 15 minutes to present their findings from their interview. You do not need to hand in any written material for this assignment; however, you will find that you need very well organized notes in order to prepare a thorough and in depth oral presentation. Once you and your partner have selected someone to interview, please review the HSIRB information on the Moravian intranet to complete the necessary IRB paperwork for human subject research (we will talk about this in class). You will need my signature and will submit this paperwork to the Moravian IRB Officer. Additionally, you will wish to use your own notes to make sure in your presentation to include the following:

--careful decision-making regarding what each member of the pair (trio) will present from the interview (each member should have an equal part in the presentation);

--a brief summary of this woman's history, where she is from, her accomplishments, struggles, family, race/ethnicity, any other background you deem important for us to know;

--specific detail regarding the dynamic of her own religious/spiritual convictions, commitments, questions, struggles, searching, practices, leadership, etc. within her life as a whole. Are there contradictions between her feminist ideals and religious convictions? What do these contradictions reveal? *Remember that it is particularly through being aware of and exploring the contradictions between feminist and religious/spiritual consciousness/commitments that your real learning will emerge out of this assignment.*

--specific detail regarding the woman's feminist consciousness. Does she claim a feminist perspective? How did this perspective develop in her life? Why or why not and how has that influenced her life, and particularly, her religious/spiritual life? How does this interview compare and contrast with what you are learning in our class?

--what have each of you (members of the pair/trio) learned from your interview with this woman? What questions does this interview raise for you that you will continue to explore? Your grade for this assignment will be based on how well and thoroughly you cover each of the bullet points above.

Feb. 27: Each class pair will report to me their own names, plus the name of their woman interviewee and a couple of sentences about her.

April 3, 5, 12: In class oral reports

Note: Class members will provide critical/constructive feedback to one another for this assignment, and the professor will take this feedback into consideration for the assignment of the grade for this assignment.

Researching a theme important to you Every student will have the opportunity to choose and research a question or theme somehow significant or important to her/him and related to the topic of our class and will present her/his findings in a research paper (a format other than a paper may be chosen with permission from the instructor). Papers will be approximately 10 pages (not including your bibliography), will utilize footnotes or internal citation and include a complete bibliography/works cited of not fewer than 5 resources (in addition to any course resources you wish to use). Your paper is worth 25% of your total course grade. Surf the following website put together by scholar Kathleen O'Grady at Toronto University and others to get ideas about what you might like to research:

http://www.aarweb.org/syllabus/syllabi/o/ogrady/women_and_religion_web_resources-ogrady.html Below are some key dates to keep you on track with this project:

Mar. 15: Research workshop at Reeve's Library

Mar. 22: Hand in a short paragraph which clearly states the theme/question you intend to research and your initial thoughts about how you will proceed.

April 5: Hand in your research annotated bibliography. You should have consulted at least 6 different resources. Your sources may include books, visual art, chapters and articles, dissertations, internet material, music, etc. Please consult the Cornell University website on how to put together an annotated bibliography

(<http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm>), and please note that

this means you will need to have made good progress in your research by this date. Make sure you have material from a variety of different sources.

April 17, 19, 24: Students will meet during class time with the professor to review their research progress and to discuss any issues and challenges they are experiencing with this project. You will sign up to meet for one ½ meeting during these two days, and need not plan on being in class the other days. Use the time to work on your research! You should plan on bringing in an outline of your project and plan on presenting your project in 2 or 3 minutes to the small group.

April 30: Hardcopy of your paper is due at the professor's office (Comen. 214) by 5 pm. If you wish for your graded paper to be returned to you, please also attach a stamped manilla envelope with your home address so that I may mail it back to you with my remarks and your grade.

Schedule of Class Readings/Field Experiences:

Unit One: Introduction to Feminism and Theology

Jan. 16 Introduction to Course

Jan 18 Read: "Identity, Feminist Theory, and Theology," Linell Elizabeth Cady, in *Horizons in Feminist Theology*, Eds. Rebecca Chopp and Sheila Greeve Devaney (on reserve in Reeve's; make your own copy of these items so that you may write on them and later on bring them with you to class)

--questions: What IS feminism? What is theology?

Jan. 23 Read: *Feminism and Theology*, pp 1-25

Jan. 25 Read: *Feminism and Theology*, pp 23-33; 41-46

3 page, double-spaced response paper due at beginning of class. Question for paper: What are the problems in religions addressed by the feminist analysis you have read the past two weeks? What is feminism? What does it have to do with religion(s)? What is striking to you about the material you have read and why?

Unit Two: Christianity, Judaism and Women's Identities

Jan. 30 Read: *Feminism and Theology*, pp 72-90; 102-108

Feb. 1 Lunch Gathering among women students on campus, led by Drs. Stacey Zaremba and Kelly Denton-Borhaug -- meet in the HUB, room TBA

Read: 109-120, *Feminism and Theology*

Feb. 6 Read: *Feminism and Theology*, 91-101; 302-311

3 page, double-spaced response paper due at beginning of class: Questions for paper: What identity issues are raised by the chapters you read? How if at all are these concerns related to concerns you heard raised at the lunch gathering with Moravian women (and/or men) students? What are the concerns feminists, mujeristas and womanists raise regarding the ways women are portrayed in religions? What is your response to what you have learned?

Unit Three: A Deeper Dive into Feminism and Judaism

Feb. 8 Read: *On Women and Judaism*, Blu Greenberg, preface through p 20.

Feb. 13 Read: *On Women and Judaism*, pp 21-55

Feb. 15 Read: *On Women and Judaism*, pp 57-73; 105-123

Feb.20 *Due: 1 paragraph (hard copy) with theme/question/issue you intend to research*
Read: *Yentl's Revenge*, Forward, Introduction, pp 3-13, 14-23, 44-51

Feb. 22 Read: *Yentl's Revenge*, pp 77-87, 102-118

Feb. 27 Read: *Yentl's Revenge*, pp 161-167, 189-193, 206-211

Due: In class each interviewing pair will hand in a paper with your own names, plus the name and a sentence or two about the woman you have planned to interview, and the proposed date for your interview.

Mar. 1 ****Paper Due in hard copy at beginning of class****

Assignment: Write an elegant, in depth and cogent 5 page double-spaced response paper addressing the following questions: Is feminism “good for the Jews”? Compare and contrast Greenberg and the authors of *Yentl's Revenge* with respect to this question. Why or why not? How do these authors hold together history and tradition with contemporary notions of freedom and equality? How is this same relationship challenged by other authors? Where do you find yourself in this mix?

In class: we will share parts of our papers with one another and look to our next unit of study.

Spring recess: Mar. 3 – 11

**Unit Four: A Deeper Dive into One Feminist Religious Issue:
Women's Ordination -- PLUS: Deeper Reflection about the complexity
of women's religious/feminist consciousness**

Mar. 13 In class: Modeling the interview: Professor interviews local clergy woman,
Rev. Susan McFadden

Read: *The Papal “No”*, pp xiii - 19

Mar. 15 Read: *Papal “No”*, pp 20 - 41

Research Workshop at the library during class

Mar 20 Read: *Papal “No”*, pp 42--62

Mar 22 Read: *Papal “No”*, pp 65-85

Hand in 1 paragraph outlining the topic/thesis/question you wish to explore in your research project

Mar 27 Read: *Papal “No”*, pp 86-107

Mar 29 Read: *Papal “No”*, pp 108-127

April 3 Read: *Papal “No”*, pp 128-150

In class: Student oral reports: the possibilities and paradoxes in women's religious and feminist consciousness

April 5 Read: *Papal “No”*, pp 150-173

Hand in your research annotated bibliography

In class: Student oral reports: the possibilities and paradoxes in women's religious and feminist consciousness

April 10 **Due: 4-page reflection paper on *The Papal “No”*. What have been the primary arguments against women's ordination in the Catholic Church? What**

philosophical/theological/anthropological foundations are these arguments based on? How have these same arguments been critiqued? What stands out for you regarding the history of this religious debate? Why is it significant? What meaning do you draw from it? What continuing questions do you have at the conclusion of reading this book?

April 12

In class: student oral reports: the possibilities and paradoxes in women's religious and feminist consciousness

April 17

Meet with students in small groups to review research projects/papers

April 19

Meet with students in small groups to review research projects/papers

April 24

Meet with students in small groups to review research projects/papers

April 26

Wrap up of our course: 2-minute reports on research projects, course evaluation

Also April 26: Attend Lecture by Dr. Susan Stocker, 7:30 pm