

Jewish and Christian Feminism
Fall, 2009
REL 240/WS 240, Sections A/B
Mon. /Wed. 10:20 – 11:30, 1:20 – 2:30, Comen. 114
Instructor: Dr. Kelly Denton-Borhaug
Office: Comen 214; Office Phone x7104; email: kdenton@moravian.edu
Office Hours: T/TR, 11: 45 – 1:00 PM (every Tuesday, every other Thursday); 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 emerged in the last forty 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, kyriarchy, sacred texts, *halakhah*, understanding of community, sexuality, and ritual. In addition to one required book for purchase, most other resources are available as scanned documents in our Blackboard Course Shell. *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 gain an introductory understanding of key issues and themes in feminist theory as it intersects with the religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity. Along the way they will be encouraged to sink into the huge questions raised by the encounter of feminism and Christianity and/or Judaism; in the process students' understandings of religion(s) and feminist theory and values will be challenged and widened;

2) Student appreciation and awareness of diversity will grow through our study in two ways: first, the diverse perspectives and international 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, reading, speaking and writing skills will be challenged in this course, through in depth reading and class discussion of readings in an area most students have not been exposed to before; and through finding a research topic, augmenting research skills, and working with their topic to completion in a paper and oral presentation;

4) Listening and collaborative skills will be strengthened 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.

Required Readings

The Coming of Lilith, Judith Plaskow (to be purchased in the bookstore)

The Power of Naming, Ed. Elisabeth Shussler Fiorenza (this resource is NOT in the bookstore; the required readings are available through our Blackboard site. You are also invited to purchase a used copy of this out of print resource either through Amazon.com or elsewhere. If you do not purchase a used copy of this book, students are required to download these readings, print them out, and bring them to class.

Please note additional assigned readings in the syllabus that will be made available through Blackboard, 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!

- We will view the film, *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* on Monday, Sept. 21, 6:00 – 8:30 pm, Prosser Auditorium (if another course conflicts with this event, please speak with the professor)
- 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, [p:\hsirb](#).

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). 10% 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.

Additional notes: Students are responsible for adherence to Moravian College's Academic Honesty Policy, found in the Student Handbook. Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Mr. Joe Kempfer, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street (extension 1510). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the office of Learning Services. Please be alert to any changes we may find we need to make to the syllabus along the way of our course.

Quizzes and Midterm: During the first unit of our course we will have a quiz every week in preparation for our work toward the midterm. Each quiz will be worth 10 points, and all four quizzes will comprise 10% of your total grade for the course. The quizzes are meant to "keep us honest" with respect to sustained, deep, careful and thoughtful reading of our course resources. The midterm will comprise 25% of your total grade for the course, and will involve you writing one or two essays using your own critical thinking and analysis in combination with our course readings, class lecture and discussion. The midterm exam will take place in one of the computer labs. You will be permitted to make use of your books and notes.

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. Students will present their findings in a research paper (a format other than a paper may be chosen with permission from the instructor). Papers will be approximately 8 pages of written material. In addition to your 8 pages, you will submit a Works Cited Page and attach as an addendum your annotated bibliography. You may use internal citation or footnotes to document your use of resources.

You will choose one essay from either of the two books we study in our first unit of the course, and use that essay as a beginning for your research. Given that the essays largely come from the second wave of feminism, your project will be to take the essay and explore the topic in terms of how feminist, womanist, mujerista and other women thinkers have continued to develop/analyze the essay's themes and questions since 2000. *All your research resources will be from 2000 to the present, in order to take advantage of third wave feminist resources.*

Key dates for the research project:

Oct. 5: You will submit a typewritten, thoughtful and well-written paragraph at the end of class that informs me of the essay you have chosen *and* the specific questions and directions you intend to explore/research in connection with that essay. We will talk more about this in class.

Oct. 21: Your annotated bibliography is due today at the end of class. Please model your annotated bibliographies on the examples found at the Cornell University website (<http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm>). You will have *six* resources (at a minimum) on your annotated bibliography. These may be book chapters,

articles, works of art, etc. If you decide to focus on an entire book for your research project, please speak with me about adjusting the number of sources in your annotated bibliography accordingly. In addition to the information on the Cornell Model, I am asking you to add two additional pieces of information for every resource: 1) the library database, and/or catalog (including interlibrary loan) from which you discovered this resource; (popular search engines will not be acceptable for your research); 2) your beginning thoughts about how/why this particular resource will aid you in your research project. A sentence or two will do. *Note: By the time you hand in your annotated bibliography, you should be well on the way with your research reading/note taking/analysis of resources.*

Nov. 2 and 4: Each of these days you are required to bring into class your rough draft of the paper in progress. I will divide you into groups of three and you will read and talk through your work with one another, discuss issues and problems you are experiencing, and use one another for constructive critique.

Nov. 9 and 11: Research Roundtables! Each student will have 5 to 7 minutes to present the results of their research to the entire class on one of these days. More details to come. We will provide snacks and drinks for one another on whatever day you are *not* presenting.

Nov. 11: Your final hard copy of your research paper is due at the end of class.

Rubric for grading: 10% for oral presentation at the Research Roundtable
80% for final paper
10% for engaged and prepared participation in all the class activities that are a part of this process

The complete grade for this unit is 35% of your total grade

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 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. Choose someone who has some sort of strong connection to either Judaism or Christianity, and pay attention to the changes and rhythms in her feminist consciousness and religious convictions over the course of her life. Again, we'll speak more about this in class. 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;

please go to p:hsirb for background information. You will need my signature and will submit this paperwork to the Moravian IRB Officer, Dr. George Bower.

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 very 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;
- more 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? How does what you have learned from this interview compare/contrast with your overall learning about Jewish and Christian feminism in our course? 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.

Oct. 28: HIRSB forms due at Dr. Bower's Office. In class: one short paragraph for me with 2-3 sentences about the woman you have selected and why you chose this individual for your interview. Do NOT share the name of the woman with me in this paragraph.

Nov. 30, Dec. 2 and 7: In class oral presentations of interview analysis

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.

Schedule of Class Readings Experiences:

Unit One: Introduction to Feminism, Christianity and Judaism

Aug. 31 Introduction to our course

Handouts: syllabus and short articles on critical reading

Sept. 2 Read: 1) Selection from Serene Jones, Chapter Four, "Oppression," *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology* (available on Blackboard)

2) Chapter One, Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, "For Women in Men's World,"
The Power of Naming

3) Judith Plaskow, "Intersections: An Introduction," *The Coming of Lilith*
Quiz and Guest presenter: Dr. Jason Radine: "Introduction to Judaism"

Sept. 7 **FEMINISM AND FOUNDATIONAL RELIGIOUS TEXTS**

Read: 1) Genesis, Chapters 1 and 2; handout on Lilith in foundational Jewish texts
2) Plaskow, "The Coming of Lilith: Toward a Feminist Theology"

Special note: I have reduced your readings for this day, given that we don't have class due to Labor Day.

Sept. 9 Read: 1) *Power of Naming*: Chapter 11, "Conquered and Violated Women"
2) Chapter 17: "Breaking the Silence – Becoming Visible,"
3) Chapter 18: "Images of Women in the Lectionary"

Quiz

FEMINIST QUESTIONS AND IMAGES OF GOD

Sept. 14 Read:

- 1) *Power of Naming*: Chapter 14, "The Rape of Mother Earth";
- 2) Chapter 15, "Option for the Poor as an Option for Poor Women"
- 3) Chapter 16, "Paternalistic Religion"; Chapter 32, "Maleness of Christ"

Sept. 16 Read:

- 1) Plaskow, "Male Theology and Women's Experience"
- 2) "Jewish Theology in Feminist Perspective"
- 3) "God: Some Feminist Questions"
- 4) "Feminist Anti-Judaism and the Christian God"

Quiz

THE DIVERSITY OF WOMEN'S VOICES

Sept. 21 Read:

- 1) *Power of Naming*: Chapter 5, "South Asian Feminist Theory and its Significance for Feminist Theology"
- 2) Chapter 8, "Women, Work and Poverty"
- 3) Chapter 9, "Uneven Development, Capitalism, and Patriarchy"
- 4) Chapter 10, "African-American Women and Domestic Violence"

Required Evening Event! Meet at Prosser Auditorium at 6:00 pm to view and discuss the film, Pray the Devil Back to Hell. You are welcome to bring your dinner with you and chew while you view the film! The Leadership Center will provide desert for us to share over conversation following the film. This event will be over by 8:30 pm.

Sept. 23 Read:

- 1) Selection, *Enrique's Journey*, Sonia Nazario
- 2) *Power of Naming*, Chapter 12, "To Bear Children for the Fatherland: Mothers and Militarism"

- 3) Chapter 16, "Paternalistic Religion"

Quiz

Sept. 28 Read:

- 1) *Power of Naming*, Chapter 26, "The Image of the 'White Lady': Gender and Race in Christian Mission,
- 2) Chapter 33, "Jewish Feminist Theological Discourses"
- 3) Chapter 36, "Justified by All Her Children, Struggle, Memory and Vision"

Sept. 30 Read:

- 1) Plaskow, ALL of Section IV, "Sexuality, Authority, and Tradition"

Quiz

FEMINISM, RELIGION, SEXUALITY, LEADERSHIP

Oct. 5 Read:

- 1) *Power of Naming*, Chapter 23, "Maria Goretti: Rape and the Politics of Sainthood,"
- 2) Chapter 31, Transforming Moral Theology
Workshop/Research Paragraph Due
In class: Strategies for Researching Your Topic

Oct. 7 Read,

- 1) *Power of Naming*, 21, "Women's Difference and the Equal Rights in the Church,"
- 2) Plaskow, "What's Wrong with Hierarchy?"
- 3) Plaskow, "Beyond Egalitarianism"

Guest Speakers: Regina Bannan and Judy Heferman in class

Oct. 12 (no class; fall recess) over fall recess spend time researching the library catalog, *WorldCat*, Library databases; plan to submit your interlibrary loan requests by the end of the weekend, so you receive your books by end of next week.

Oct. 14 Midterm Exam in class covering all of Unit One

--you may use your books and notes for this midterm

--Our exam will take place in a computer classroom so that you may type and print your exam

Unit Two: Research Projects

Note: The Second Unit does not utilize course readings, in order for you to maximize your out of class time for research, reading, thinking, analysis and writing of your research papers. During these four weeks, in order to do excellent work, you should allot no less than 10 hours a week to this endeavor.

Oct. 19 In Class: Review HIRSB Process/Interview Assignment/Final questions regarding Annotated Bibliographies

Oct. 21 Annotated Bibliography Due in class today

In Class: View *The Congregation: Questions of Faith in Changing Times*

Oct. 26 In Class: View: Second half of *The Congregation* and class discussion

Oct. 28 HSIRB forms for interview project due to Dr. George Bower today; one short paragraph in hard copy due to Dr. D-B about your interview selection. See notes above in syllabus regarding this process.

Nov. 2 Research workshop –First four pages due in class

Nov. 4 Research workshop --All eight pages in draft form due in class

Nov. 9 research roundtable

Nov. 11 research roundtable

Final copy of research paper due in class in hard copy today. Please print double-sided in order to conserve paper.

Unit Three: Listening More Deeply to the Complexities of Women's Religious/Spiritual Lives

Nov. 16 Read: Selection from Julie Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women*

Nov. 18 Read: *Girlfriend Theology*, Chapter One

In class: interviewing one another

Nov. 23 Read: *Girlfriend Theology*, Chapter Two

In class: professor models interview of adult woman

Nov. 25 (no class; Thanksgiving holiday)

Nov. 30 presentations of interviews

Important Reminder: Students will engage in peer evaluation of one another for these presentations. Please come ready to provide alert and intelligent attention, analysis and response.

Dec. 2 presentations of interviews

Dec. 7 presentations of interviews

Dec. 9 (last class) Final conclusions, questions, evaluation