

## **Women in Western Religion Religion/WSTU 181.80**

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**classroom:** FNGR 208  
**meeting times:** T, R 12:45-2:00  
**office hours:** T, R 2:30-4:00 & by appointment

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS**

Using historical, theological, and confessional investigations of the images, experiences, and roles of women in a variety of religious traditions (including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and ancient goddess cults), this class will examine women's lives in relationship to the sacred as expressed in symbol, ritual, text, myth, and the realm of public discourse. In seeking to derive a critical assessment of the roles of women and meanings of femininity through the lens of gender, we will investigate such topics as

- a) the dialectic of restriction and empowerment;
- b) discourses about women vs. women's observed practices in the realm of the religious;
- c) dialogues (or lack thereof) between feminist movements and religious communities;
- d) texts about and by women;
- e) women's bodies and the sacred; and
- f) feminist notions of spirituality

The most important goals of this course are as follows:

1. To understand some of the major themes and views that have emerged in the study of women in Western religious traditions and gender as an academic discipline
2. To gain a fundamental understanding of the roles that women have played in the traditions we survey, and how they have been viewed from within these traditions
3. To facilitate understanding of some of the social and institutional pressures and interests that maintain gender inequity.
4. To expand our worldview by considering the lives of women in diverse religious communities, in their similarities and their differences.
5. To sharpen writing and thinking skills: description, comparison, interpretation, and critical inquiry

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES**

#### **Participation and attendance**

Participation is *essential*. Missing more than 3 classes will lower your attendance and participation grade from A to A- and down from there; there will be no excused absences except in cases of severe illness and WITH a doctor's note. Emailing or telling me that you will be missing class does not excuse you from attendance, and it is your responsibility to schedule work/internships, book plane tickets, or make other travel plans in accordance with the academic calendar (for spring break) and final exam schedule.

#### **Format of sessions**

Except during the first few weeks, classes will alternate between two formats: a) lecture by instructor, with time for questions as they arise; b) student presentation/discussion followed by lecture by instructor. The presentation/discussion will be led by a designated discussion leader who will give a 10-15 minute presentation on the materials to be read for the day, and primary respondent who will offer 5-10 minutes of comments, critiques, rebuttal(s), and/or follow-up questions in response to the discussion leader's presentation.

**Grades will be based on the following criteria:**

<b>% of grade</b>	<b>ASSIGNMENT</b>	<b>DUE DATE</b>
30%	three 3-4 page “reflection” papers (10% each); you have a choice between topics I will provide, or you may choose your own, subject to the instructor’s approval. These papers are intended to get you to engage the texts we read in an analytical, comparative way. No outside research is involved. Although you may pose questions as part of your analysis, the papers are not intended for you to simply ask questions. They should be carefully thought-out statements of opinion and observation, in dialogue with the texts we read and the views they offer.	Feb 6; April 3; May 1
10%	Annotated bibliography and synopsis. This is in preparation for your final paper; the bibliography should consist of books you will use (or think you will use) for that paper, and the synopsis should convey the subject, key questions (or argument), and methodology of your final paper.	March 6
15%	Presentation (as discussion leader) and primary response. The presentation should NOT simply be a summary of the author’s or authors’ work, but should be a critical evaluation of the work(s) being read. The responsibility of the discussion leader is to jump-start discussion by providing a critical evaluation of the assigned readings for the day. This evaluation may include but is not limited to, a) posing a set of questions that interrogates the authors’ key ideas and arguments b) extracting the author’s thesis idea or key ideas and comparing and contrasting this (these) against ideas that have emerged from our other readings c) offering suggestions for questions or avenues of inquiry that will push the boundaries of what the author has already presented. The discussion leader <b>must</b> provide hard copies of the presentation to all members of the class on the day of the presentation. The responsibility of the primary respondent is to provide a direct response to the presenter’s material: this may include, but should not be limited to, a rebuttal, critical inquiries, point(s) of agreement, or suggestions for further inquiries. The primary respondent is encouraged, but not required, to provide hard copies of the response to all members of the class on the day of the presentation.	Various
30%	final research paper: 12-15 pages	Due on scheduled date of final exam
15%	attendance and participation	


## Required texts for purchase

1. Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits* (2001)
2. Tivka Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddess* (1993)
3. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: the Story of a Childhood* (2004)
4. Sawyer, *Women and Religion in the First Christian Centuries*
5. Mary Crow Dog, *Lakota Woman* (1991 ed)
6. Coursepack : available at U-Nik Press, 900 Nineteenth St. NW

## Optional texts for purchase

1. Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe, *The Women's Bible Commentary*
2. Alice Bach, *Women in the Hebrew Bible* (1999)
3. Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women* (2002)


### **\*\*Please Note\*\***

Some of the readings for this course have been posted to the course website on Blackboard. You are responsible for completing these and all others noted in the syllabus on or before the **day** that they are noted in the syllabus. Some readings are marked on the syllabus by the notation "Bb" or the symbol . This means that you can find them in the "files" folder, or in the "electronic reserve" folder on Blackboard. All other readings are from the "Required texts for purchase" list. The assigned readings from the "optional texts for purchase" list are on Blackboard. Buy these texts from the GW bookstore only if you have a personal interest in the subject matter or think that the books may be useful to you in other classes.

### **Symbol key for syllabus:**

CP – Required readings in the coursepack

Bb – Required readings in Blackboard, in the "Files" folder (two readings so marked are actually "Optional," and this is noted in the syllabus)

 – Required readings in Blackboard, in the "electronic reserves" folder (two readings so marked are actually "Optional," and this is noted in the syllabus)

*Opt* – optional reading. You are not obliged to do the optional readings, though you will find them helpful for understanding topics we discuss in class.

❖ – a film that we will view in class (it is important that you come to class to view the film!)

## COURSE OUTLINE

### I. Introductory remarks; overview of course

Tuesday, January 16

### II. Ancient goddess cults and divine patriarchy

Thursday, January 18

1. Frymer-Kensky, pp. 1-31
2. Bb: "Inanna and the mes"
3. Bb: "The Descent of Inanna" (Wolkstein-Kramer transl.)

Tuesday, January 23

1. Frymer-Kensky, pp. 32-69
2. Bb: Excerpts from the Gilgamesh epic

Thursday, January 25

1. Frymer-Kensky, pp. 70-99
2. *opt: Bb: Baring and Cashford, pp. 273-98*


*selection of discussion leaders and primary respondents*

### III. Abrahamic transformations: women in the sacred scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Tuesday, January 30

1. Sawyer, pp. 1-48

Thursday, February 1

1. CP: Fuchs, pp. 77-84
2. Bb: read Genesis chs. 2 – 4, book of Ruth, book of Esther in NRSV Bible (OT)
3. *Opt:*  *Women's Bible Commentary (Ruth, Esther)*

Tuesday, February 6


1. CP: Fuchs, pp. 127-139
2. Sawyer, pp. 73-90

**\*\* 1<sup>st</sup> "reflection" paper due\*\***


Thursday, February 8

1. CP: Levine, pp. 367-76
2. Bb: read book of Judith, and Judges chapters 2, 4-5, 9-11, 13-16, and 19-21 in NRSV Bible (OT)
3. *Opt: Bb: Bal, pp. 317-33*

Tuesday, February 13

1. CP: Getty-Sullivan pp. 1-41
2. Bb: read Luke chapters 1-2
3. *Opt:*  *Women's Bible Commentary (Luke)*

Thursday, February 15

1. CP: Getty-Sullivan pp. 163-219
2.  *Women's Bible Commentary (pages TBA)*

Tuesday, February 20

1. Sawyer, pp. 91-116

- Thursday, February 22
1. CP: Wadud I pp. 1-28
  2. Bb: Qur'an, chapters TBA

- Tuesday, February 27
1. CP: Stowasser, pp. 104-18
  1.  Awde, pp. TBA

- Thursday, March 1
1. CP: Wadud II, pp 187-216
  2. CP: Barazangi, pp. 68-85

#### **IV: A Question of authority**

- Tuesday, March 6  
**\*\*Annotated bibliography and synopsis due\*\***
1. Braude, *Radical Spirits* pp. 1-31

- Thursday, March 8
1. Braude, *Radical Spirits* pp. 82-116
  2. Bb: "the Cult of True Womanhood"
  3. *Opt: Braude Radical Spirits pp. 117-41*

#### **Spring Break March 12-16 (M-F) no classes**

- Tuesday, March 20
1. Braude, *Radical Spirits* pp. 162-91
  2. Braude, *Radical Spirits* pp. 192-202

#### **V. Guest speaker; Autobiography and Religion**

- Thursday, March 22
1. **Guest speaker**
  2. Mary Crow Dog, *Lakota Woman* (1<sup>st</sup> third)

- Tuesday, March 27
1. Mary Crow Dog, *Lakota Woman* (2<sup>nd</sup> third)

- Thursday, March 29
1. 1. Mary Crow Dog, *Lakota Woman* (last third)
  2. CP: Donaldson in Castelli and Rodman, pp. 237-256
  3. **exercise:** find an example of NANA online and post to the discussion board.

- Tuesday, April 3  
**\*\* 2<sup>nd</sup> "reflection" paper due\*\***
1. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (1<sup>st</sup> half)

- Thursday, April 5
1. Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (2<sup>nd</sup> half)

