



Yerevan State University

Instructor: Anna Gevorgyan

Anna.gevorgyan@ysu.am

Office hours: Tuesday 10am-2 pm

YSU, Building 7, room 119

Religions and women

(Attitudes of Judaism, Christianity and Islam towards women: Traditional and feminist perspectives)

Course description

In many traditions the subordination of women has been justified by religions. Since the interpretations of religious texts were created by men, for men and about men, women and their religious experience were absent in those texts and gender issues were explained from androcentric perspectives. After the intersection of Women Studies and Religious Studies, Feminist scholarship produced a number of theories and methods for Feminist interpretation of religions. In this course we will examine the traditional attitudes of three major religions of the world towards women as well as interpretation of them from a feminist standpoint. We will try to answer following questions:

- What do spiritual texts of Judaism, Christianity and Islam say about women?
- What role did women play in these religions?
- Is inequality of genders rooted in spiritual texts or in their interpretations?
- What are the changes in the field of Religious Studies within the intersection with Women Studies?

Student learning outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course:

- Students will have learned the reasons of monotheistic religions androcentric attitudes toward women.
- Students will gain knowledge about women's "unspoken worlds".
- Students will be conversant with feminism as an academic method and with its usage in Religious Studies

Required readings

- Religious texts (will be provided)
- Leona M. Anderson, Pamela Dickey Young, “**Women and religious traditions**”, Oxford, 2010
- Blu Greenberg, “**On women and Judaism**”, Philadelphia, 1998
- Anne M. Clifford, “**Introducing feminist theology**”, New York, 2002
- Amina Wadud, “**Quran and woman: Rereading the sacred text from a woman’s perspective**”, Oxford, 1999
- Some articles and chapters of others books.

Requirements and gradings

- Participation-3
- Mid-term exams-4+4
- Participation in mock conference-4
- Final exam-5

Students are required to participate in classes after reading course materials and ready to discuss them. They will write reading responses to the reading materials and prepare discussion questions to raise during the class. Mid-term exams will consist of quizzes. A mock conference concerning Religion and women will be organized for students and they will have to present a paper about the topic they will choose concerning women and one of the religions included in the course. Mock conference will have 4 panels:

- Religious organizations and women
- Places of worship and women
- Sacred texts and women
- Religious laws and customs

Papers of students and their PP presentation will be evaluated by taking into consideration the quality of his/her research, the amount of materials used and his/her creative PP presentation. Students must make sure the thesis question of their paper is examined through at least 3 arguments, they have used at least 3 academic sources, they are able to present their PP within 10 minutes and do not make their audience sleepy. Creativity, using visual and audio materials are encouraged.

Final oral exam will require each student to answer two questions using the sources of the course.

A statement on academic dishonesty

Members of this class are expected to submit their own written work. Plagiarism is defined as taking writings or ideas from someone else and passing them off as one’s own writings or ideas. A student who commits an act of cheating (giving/receiving) or plagiarism will receive a grade of zero for the course. Buying papers falls under this category as well. You are not supposed to write universal truth with perfect arguments, you are supposed to write YOUR opinion and justify it with YOUR arguments, and yes, they can be perfect. Please, use MLA style for citation.

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/08/>

Course itinerary

Week 1: Introduction to the course

- *Religion as a cultural system*
- *The role of women in religions*
- *Women in Religious Studies*

Readings:

- ✓ Leona M. Anderson, "Women and religious traditions", Introduction
- ✓ Malory Nye, "Religion: The basics", Chapter 4, pp.79-104

Week 2: Women and religious studies

- *Women and Religious Studies*
- *Feminism and Religious Studies*

Readings

- ✓ Rita M. Gross, "Feminism and religion", pp.5-29
- ✓ Anne M. Clifford, "Introducing Feminist theology", 13-28

Week 3: Women, patriarchy and pre-patriarchy

- *Women in pre-patriarchal societies*
- *Patriarchy and its challenge for women*

Readings

- ✓ Rita M. Gross, "Feminism and Religion", 149-198
- ✓ Leila Ahmed, "Women and gender in Islam", pp.11-39

Week 4: Women and monotheistic religions

- *Monotheism and male dominance*
- *Gender and God-talk*

Readings

- ✓ Claire M. Renzetti, "Women, men and society", pp.315-329
- ✓ Rita M Gross, "Feminism and religion", pp.121-133

Week 5: Women in sacred texts of Judaism

- *Creation story and a woman in Judaism*
- *Woman and a sin*
- *Symbols and gender*

Readings:

- ✓ Leona M. Anderson, "Women and religious traditions", Chapter 2, pp.50-60
- ✓ Pieter W. Van Der Horst, "Images of women in ancient Judaism", in "Female stereotypes in religious traditions", pp.43-61
- ✓ Judith Plaskow, "Standing again at Sinai: Judaism from a feminist perspective", pp.32-36

Week 6: Customs, laws and women in Judaism

- *Women and the body*
- *Desire and gender*
- *Marriage and divorce*

Readings:

- ✓ Leona Anderson, "Women and religious traditions", Chapter 2, pp.60-63
- ✓ Blu Greenberg, "*Female sexuality and bodily functions in the Jewish traditions*", in "Women, Religion and sexuality, pp.1-45
- ✓ David Novak, "Jewish marriage: Nature, contract and covenant", in "Marriage, sex and family in Judaism", pp. 61-88

Week 7: Women, religious organizations and places of worship in Judaism

- *Religious lives of women*
- *Women and synagogue*
- *Women as priestesses*

Readings:

- ✓ Leona M. Anderson, "Women and religious traditions", Chapter 2, pp.65-72
- ✓ Judith Plaskow, "Standing again at Sinai", pp.25-60
- ✓ Blu Greenberg, "On women and Judaism", pp.75-105

Week 8: Mid-term exam

Week 9: Women and the Sacred texts of Christianity

- Women and creation story of the Bible
- Eve and sin of the human
- Biblical images of women

Readings:

- ✓ Leona Anderson, "Women and religious traditions", Chapter 6, pp.167-172
- ✓ Gerburgis Feld, "Abc of Creation", in "Feminist biblical interpretation", pp.51-68
- ✓ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The women's Bible", pp.113-145

Week 10: Customs, laws and women in Christianity

- *Procreation, sexuality and marriage*
- *Sexuality, marriage and the church*
- *Modesty and Christian woman: Mari as a role model*

Readings:

- ✓ Leona Anderson, "Women and religious traditions", 173-176
- ✓ Jeane Becher, "Women, Religion and sexuality", pp.173-183
- ✓ Daniel Marc Cere, "Marriage, subordination and development of Christian doctrine", in "Does Christianity tech male headship?", pp. 92-111

Week 11: Religious organizations, places of worship and women in Christianity

- *Women as priests*
- *Women as deaconesses*
- *Women's roles in liturgy*

Readings:

- ✓ Leona M. Anderson, "Women and religious traditions", Chapter 6, pp.178-188
- ✓ Debra Campbell, "The Catholic Earth mother: Dorothy day and women's power in the church", in "Unspoken worlds, women's religious lives", pp. 15-25
- ✓ Anne M. Clifford, "Introducing feminist theology", pp.133-148

Week 12 : Women in the Islamic texts (Qur'an and Hadith's)

- *Prophets and women in the Qur'an*
- *Women and the advent of Islam*
- *Wives of prophet Muhammad as role models*

Readings:

- ✓ Leona Anderson, "Women and religious traditions", Chapter 7, pp.194-211
- ✓ Ghasan Ascha, "The "Mothers of the believers": Stereotypes of the prophet Muhammad's wives", at "Female stereotypes in religious traditions", pp. 89-109
- ✓ Amina wadud, "Quran and woman", Chapter 1, pp.15-29

Week 13: Customs, laws , women and Islam

- *Polygamy and temporary marriage*
- *Divorce by men and child custody*
- *Veiling*

Readings:

- ✓ Leona M. Anderson, "Women and religious traditions", Chapter 7, pp. 211-221
- ✓ Ziba Mir-Huseini, "Gender and Islam", pp.30-47, 63-65
- ✓ Leila Ahmed, "Women and gender in Islam", Chapter 8, pp.144-169

Film: "*Divorce, Iranian style*", Ziba Mir-Huseini

Week 14: Religious organizations, places of worship and women in Islam

- *Women and popular religion*
- *Women and pilgrimage*

Readings:

- ✓ Fatima Mernissi, "Women, saints and sanctuaries in Morocco", in "Unspoken Worlds", pp.144-157
- ✓ Anne H. Betteridge, "Muslim women and shrines in Shiraz", in "Everyday life in Muslim Middle East, pp.276-290

Week 15: Mock conference

Week 16: 2-nd mid-term exam

Final Exam