

Women and Religion

REL 3145 RVC (86772)

Department of Religious Studies

Florida International University

FALL 2023

Creation of God by Harmonia Rosales



“Woman is the light of God” –RUMI

“There is a place where women live near trees that, blowing in the wind, sound like music ... These women, they are fluttering lanterns on the hills, the fireflies in the night ... There is always a place where women, like cardinal birds return to look at their own faces in stagnant bodies of water ... Where women return to their children as butterflies ... My mother was as brave as stars at dawn.” Edwidge Danticat.

Instructor: Stephanie Londono

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Office Hours: MWF from 2-5 PM, through Zoom or phone

Course Description and Purpose

This course will examine the treatment of women in the world's major religions, the theories for that treatment, and patterns of women's response, both resistance, and adaptation, to their treatment within religions.

In a general sense, our inquiry is guided by an ethical concern, namely the dehumanization of women and other “feminized/wayward bodies,” and how religions have been used to challenge and enable their mistreatment. To be sure, sacred have a unique capacity to shape a society's disposition to view the stranger/other with eyes of hostility or hospitality. Our ultimate goal, then, is to explore how different interpretations of sacred texts affect the sacrality of humanity’s diverse sexual anatomies in a twofold manner: First, by identifying the sexual theologies that dehumanize women (and feminized bodies) by promoting sexism, homophobia, racism (and so on); and second, by exploring the many pedagogical tools that religions offer for redeeming the sacrality of women, in all their diverse expressions. As the “lowest of the low,” women’s humanity must be recognized before all “wayward” bodies are sacralized.

We will address burning questions such as Are all world religions sexist? Does God have a gender? Does Genesis establish women as morally inferior to men through the story of Eve? Why is there controversy over women as religious leaders? Are men and women created equal? Where are women leaders in the history of world religions? Is there a connection between violence against women and chauvinistic interpretations of sacred texts? What is feminism and why is it important for the study of religion and the practice of democracy?

Our inquiry will be guided by three intersecting themes: 1) religion and the problem of the dehumanization of women, 2) sacred texts and the social consequences of patriarchal interpretations, 3) definitions and purposes of feminist theology. Classes will be filled with a mixture of readings, films, podcasts, and discussions.

Course Requirements	Number of Items	Points for Each	Total Available	Points	Weight
Discussions	13	10	130		20%
Women, Religion, and Civic Engagement Slideshow	1	100	100		15%
Final paper (Part A and B)	2	10-90	100		30%
Midterm or Final Exam	1	100	200		20%
Creative Journal	1	100	100		15%
Total	19	N/A	630		100%

Letter	Range%	Letter	Range%	Letter	Range%
A	95 or above	B	83 - 86	C	70 - 76
A-	90 - 94	B-	80 - 82	D	60 - 69
B+	87 - 89	C+	77 - 79	F	59 or less

Course Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Understand the significance and definitions of religion and gender and their influence in everyday life.
- Explain the interconnectivity between gender, race, class, and religion.
- Identify what roles have been assigned to women within world religions in various time periods.
- Recognize and explain the patterns in women's religious lives and how they respond to exclusion from central areas of the tradition, or from gender-based assignments within the tradition.
- Describe what the sacred texts of world religions have said about women.
- Evaluate the diverse feminist perspectives and interpretations that have reshaped the meaning of womanhood within religion.
- Describe the contemporary issues of women within the religions of the world.
- Understand how religion influences and informs women's secular participation and exclusion.

Important Information

Policies

Before starting this course, please review the following pages:

- [Policies](#)
- [Netiquette \(Links to an external site.\)](#)
- [Technical Requirements and Skills](#)
- [Accessibility and Accommodation](#)
- [Academic Misconduct Statement](#)
- [Panthers Care & Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#)

Course Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Textbook and Course Materials

Required: They are available in our bookstore, but make sure to search the internet for the cheapest copy! Other materials will be made available through Canvas.

- Women and Religious Traditions, by Leona M. Anderson and Pamela Dickey Young (Third or Second Edition)
- *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* by Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ

Recommended: (There will be more recommended material in each module)

- *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* by Delores S. Williams

Expectations of this Course

This is an online course, which means most (if not all) of the course work will be conducted online. Expectations for performance in an online course are the same for a traditional course. In fact, online courses require a degree of self-motivation, self-discipline, and technology skills, which can make these courses more demanding for some students.

Students are expected to:

- **Review how to get started information** located in the course content
- **Introduce yourself to the class** during the first week by posting a self-introduction in the appropriate discussion forum
- **Take the practice quiz** to ensure that your computer is compatible with Canvas
- **Interact** online with instructor and peers
- **Review** and follow the course calendar
- Log in to the course **at least three times** per week
- Respond to discussion boards, blogs, and journal postings with **four days**
- Respond to **Canvas messages** within **two days**
- Submit assignments by the corresponding deadline

The instructor will:

- Log in to the course **five times** per week
- Respond to discussion boards, blogs, and journal postings within **two days**
- Respond to **Canvas messages** within **one to two days**
- Grade assignments within **three days** of the assignment deadline

Discussion Forums - 20%

Keep in mind that your discussion forum postings will be seen by other members of the course. Although your post is expected to be conversational, be mindful of your grammar, delivery, clarity, and respect.

Do not wait until the last minute to reply to your classmates, or they won't have a chance to respond to you! Try to spread out your answers between Thursday and Sunday. Visit the discussion board, and don't leave your classmates hanging even if you have posted your two replies.

See [the rubric](#)  for further details.

- Discussion **topics** are **listed** for the semester. You are expected to post your **initial** response by **Thursdays at 6 PM**, and your **two replies** must be submitted by **Sunday** at 6 PM. This means that by Sunday, you should have at least a **total of three posts**.
 - **Length/ How many posts/ replies?**

- Initial post due **Thursday, 6 PM**. Approx. 200-250 words
- Three Peer responses due **Sunday, 6 PM**. Approx. 65-75 words
- **Style:**
 - **Develop your post in essay format:** Introduction, body, and conclusion. Use the new **vocabulary and concepts** learned in the reading material.
 - Although you may have experience using this type of asynchronous communication through texting or Facebook, your posts should be composed of complete and grammatically accurate sentences (no abbreviations please). Avoid writing in all caps (all caps = yelling).
- **Content:**
 - “I agree” is not enough: Avoid postings that are limited to 'I agree' or 'great idea', etc. “I agree” type of answers crowd the discussion board and make it harder for everybody to navigate the discussion. If you agree (or disagree) with a posting, then say why you agree/disagree by supporting your statement with concepts from the readings or by bringing in a related example or experience. Make each post count! Again, ask yourself whether your post brings value to the discussion.
 - **Quote your sources:** As you read, listen, and watch the material of week, jot down your favorite quotes and zingers. They will become a rich source of support you’re your discussions and essays. No need to use a particular style, just mention the last name of the author and page number: (Smith 10).
 - **Stick to the point:** Address the questions as much as possible (don't let the discussion stray).
 - **Connect to prior knowledge:** Bring in related prior knowledge (work experience, prior coursework, readings, etc.)
 - **Respond rather than add-on:** You will not get credit for any posts such as “I agree with x” or “Great job Y”. You’re expected to provide real contributions. Build on other's responses to create threads.
 - **Innovate, don’t replicate:** You usually have the choice between several questions. If you’re late contributing to the initial posts, try to answer questions that have not been addressed yet, even if they wouldn’t have been your first pick. The early bird...
 - **Take it beyond the readings:** Do quote the readings, but don’t stop there. Do your best to add value to the discussion. Ask questions you really want to find answers to, discuss what you found intriguing, confusing, share your top takeaways.
 - **Include links with current events to enhance your grade. Above all- be critical and enjoy the conversations!**
 - Feedback and grades will be available within two days.

- There will be **two examinations**, a Midterm and a Final. Each test will contain 25 objective questions (multiple-choice, true/false, matching).
- Examinations will become available from **Thursdays 10:00 am – Sundays 11:59 pm**, and will last for **60 minutes**. Students will have the opportunity to take the examination **twice**. The **highest grade will be recorded**.
- **There will be practice quizzes available before the examinations.**
- Results:
 1. Students will be able to see the results after the availability period has ended.
 2. Students will be able to see all of the questions and answers.
- Turn-around time for feedback or grade – up to two days.

To mitigate any issues with your computer and online assessments, it is **imperative** that you take the [Practice Quiz](#) from each computer you will be using to take your graded quizzes and exams. For quiz duration, grading criteria, and feedback response time, please review the [important information about quizzes](#) page.

Written Assignments - 30%

Essays will be turned into Turnitin via Assignments in Canvas. It is not necessary to create a separate Turnitin account. Keep electronic and paper copies of all written work. For your own protection, keep a copy of your Turnitin electronic receipt until you have received your final grade for the course.

- Each paper has specific instructions posted on Canvas.
- **Extra Credit:** You can earn up to five points toward your paper by making an appointment with our Writing Center. You only need to paste the appointment confirmation number and name of your writing assistant.
- **Plagiarism:** What is it? How to avoid it? Please go to <http://integrity.fiu.edu/plagiarism.html> and learn the easy ways to prevent plagiarism. Do not use someone else's work as yours.
- **Late Assignments:** Check with the professor about your options. If possible, reach out before you fall behind.

Final Paper –20%: A list of topics for the final paper will be provided. Students are also encouraged to propose their own topics for the research paper; however, you must confirm your topic with the instructor to make sure that your thesis is not too broad or narrow. You may also choose one of the books below and write a book review. If you choose this option, make sure to get the book early during the semester. All books are available at the FIU library. If you are interested in a book that is not on the list, please inform the professor for consideration.

This paper is divided into two sections: Part A (10%) for the submission of your thesis statement, outline, and bibliography, and Part B for the complete report (20%). See module for further instructions.

- **Length:** 550-750 words, double-spaced, 12-sized-font, Times New Roman

- **Academic sources:** At least three (use our course material and check our library's website!)
- **Follow the MLA** (Links to an external site.) style to structure your paper. Reach out if you have questions about citations or any other matter about academic writing.
- See written communication rubric
- Please review the [important information about assignments](#) page.

Book Review options

- *The Veil and the Male Elite* – Fatima Mernissi
- *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* – Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza
- *Standing again at Sinai* – Judith Plaskow
- *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Goddess* – Starhawk
- *Buddhism after Patriarchy* – Rita Gross
- *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* – Gloria Anzaldua
- *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* – Jaquelyn Grant.
- *Body, Sex, and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* – Christine Gudorf
- *Blessing Same-Sex Unions: The Perils of Queer Romance and the Confusions of Christian Marriage* – Mark D. Jordan,
- *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* – Carolyn Merchant.
- *The Church and the Second Sex* – Mary Daly.
- *Encountering Kali: In the Margins, at the Center, in West* – Rachel Fell.

Creative Journal - 15%

- The Creative Journal is a free and safe space for you to respond, reflect, and creatively engage with the class material that has most resonated with you. It is designed to help you express and explore your creative side in order to enter into a deeper dialogue with the material beyond the constraints of "academic writing. In other words, I want you to wrestle with the material in a more intimate way, through whatever creative means speak to you most: poetry, music, video, photography, paintings, short stories, and so on.
 - The only requirement is that you have five entries in your journal, which can be submitted as a document, video, podcast, song, etc. – or a mixture of these. Just make sure that if you are turning in a mixture of media, you convert your audio or video into a shareable YouTube link (you can make it private to only share with me) and paste this into a single word doc, PowerPoint, PDF, etc.
 - Some artistic ideas: poems, sound clips, photos, articles, paintings, movie clips, and so on. These can be authored by you or borrowed from other artists.

[Course Calendar](#)

Access your [Course Calendar](#) for course topics and assignments.

COURSE TOPICS

- See canvas for media (videos, podcasts, and news articles) and recommended readings*

Theoretical and Scriptural Introductions

Week 1: Why women and religion: Feminism and the Anatomy of the Sacred

- Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View" (Canvas)
- R. Gross, "Defining Feminism, Religion, and the Study of Religion" (Canvas)
- M. Walters, "The religious roots of feminism?" (Canvas)
- Pew study, The Gender Gap in Religion Around the World (Canvas)
- [Task: Discussion question #1](#)

Week 2: Naming the Sacred: Hermeneutics and the Power of Language

- D.M. Juschka, "Gender: What is gender? What is sex? What is gender/sex?" (Canvas)
- Reuther, "Sexism and God-Language" In Weaving the Visions
- Gross, "Has it always been that way?" (Canvas)
- "Selections from the inclusive language lectionary" in Weaving the Visions
- Recommended: Daly, "After the Death of God the Father" (Canvas)
- [Due: Discussion question #2](#)

Week 3: The Problem of Dehumanization: Theodicies and the Practice of *Othering* Women—

* Labor Day, NO ASSIGNMENTS

- Merchant - "Nature as Disorder: Women and Witches" (Canvas)Actions
- Wood, "The Doctor's Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought"Actions
- Tribble, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread" In Womanspirit Rising, (Canvas)
- Wessinger, pp. 112-116, 119-127.
- The Devil's Gateway.
- [Due: Discussion question #3](#)

Women in Ancient Religions

- Stone, "When God was a Woman" in Womanspirit Rising (Canvas)
- M. Gimbutas, "Women and Culture in Goddess-Oriented Old Europe" in *Weaving the Visions*
- Case study: Choose one of the following
 - B. Moon, "The Star who Became Queen" (Canvas)
 - C. Spretnak, "The myth of Demeter and Persephone" In *Weaving the Visions*
- Recommended: C. Downing, "Artemis" In *Weaving the Visions*
- [Due: Discussion question #3](#)

Week 4: Hinduism

- in *What men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Ch 1, Women in Hindu Traditions, Anderson and Young
- Case Study: Folk, “Both Guru and Goddess: Mātā Amritānandamayī of Kerala” In Anderson and Young (p. 287)
- [Due: Discussion question #4](#)
- [Due: Women, Religion, and Civic Engagement Slideshow – Friday, Sept. 23, 11:59 PM](#)

Week 5: Buddhism

- Puntarigivat, “A Thai Buddhist Perspective” in *What Men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Ch 3, Women in Buddhist Traditions, Anderson and Young
- Case Study: Falk, “The Case of the Vanishing Nuns: The Fruits of Ambivalence in Ancient Indian Buddhism”
- [Due: Discussion question #5](#)

Week 6: Local Asian Religions

- Ch 4, Women in Chinese Traditions, Anderson and Young
- Xiaogan, “A Taoist Perspective: Appreciating and Applying the Principle of Femininity” in *What men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Case Study: Choose one of the following:
 - Harvey, “Possession, Sickness, and Women Shamans in Korea” (Canvas)
 - Nadeau, “Harmonizing Family and Cosmos: Shamanic in Chinese Religions” (Canvas)
- [Due: Discussion question #6](#)
- [Midterm Opens Oct 6th-Due Oct. 9th by 11:59 PM.](#)

Week 7: African and Afro-Caribbean Religions

- **October 14, Fall Wellness Day – No assignments.**
- Nkulu-N’Senga, “Bumuntu Paradigm and Gender Justice” in *What men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Teish, “Ancestor Reverence” in *Weaving the Visions*
- Case study: Choose one of the following
 - Brow, “Women’s Leadership in Haitian Vodou” in *Weaving the Visions*
 - Baum, “Alinesitoué: A Diola Woman Prophet in West Africa” (Canvas)
- [Due: Discussion question #7](#)

Week 8: Indigenous Religions: Australia, North, and Latin America

- Women in Indigenous Traditions, in Anderson and Young
- Ronwanièn:te Jocks – “A Native American Perspective: To Protect the Ground We Walk on” in *What men Owe to Women* (Canvas)

- Collins, “Theology in the Politics of the Appalachian Women” In *Womanspirit Rising*, (Canvas)
- Case study: Choose one of the following
 - Marcos, “Beyond Binary Categories: Mesoamerica Religious Sexuality” (Canvas)
 - Gross, “Menstruation and Childbirth as Ritual and Religious Experience Among Native (Canvas)
- [Due: Discussion question #8](#)

Week 9: Judaism

- Falk, “A Jewish Perspective” in *What men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Ch 2, Women in Judaism, Anderson and Young
- Plaskow, “Jewish Memory from a Feminist Perspective” in *Weaving the Visions*
- Case study: Neudel, “Innovation and Tradition in Contemporary Midwestern Jewish Congregation” (Canvas)
- Recommended: Plaskow, “The Coming of Lilith” (Canvas)
- [Due: Midterm, Content from Weeks 1-8, See practice quizzes and review sheet on Canvas.](#)
- [Due: Discussion question #9](#)

Week 10: Christianity 1: Catholicism

- Fiorenza, “Feminist Spirituality, Christian Identity, and Catholic Vision” In *Womanspirit Rising*, (Canvas)
- Tribble, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread” In *Womanspirit Rising*, (Canvas)
- Royan “A Catholic Perspective” in *What Men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Case study: Choose one of the following
 - Strasser, “Bones of Contention: Catholic Nuns Resist their Enclosure” (Canvas)
 - Campbell, “Dorothy Day and Women’s Power in the Church” (Canvas)
- [Due: Discussion question #10](#)
- [Submit Creative Journal, Nov. 6 by 11:59 PM](#)

Week 11: Christianity 2: Protestantism

- Pagels, “What became of God the Mother” in *Womanspirit Rising* (Canvas)
- Women in Christianity, Anderson and Young
- Ellison, “A protestant Christian Perspective” in *What Men Owe to Women* (Canvas)
- Pew Study: The Divide over Ordaining Women
- Case study: Choose one of the following
 - Ross, “Religious Responsibility and Community Service: The Activism of Victoria DeLee”
 - Setta, “When Christ was a Woman Theology and Practice in the Shaker Tradition”
- [Due: Discussion question #11](#)

Week 12: Islam

- Engineer, “Islam, Women, and Gender in *What Men Owe to Women* (Canvas)

- Ahmed, “The Discourse of the Veil”
- Case Study: Choose one of the following
 - Mernissi, “Women, Saints, and Sanctuaries in Morocco”
- Hosseini, “The Construction of Gender in Islamic Legal Thought and Strategies for Change.”
- [Due: Discussion question #12](#)
- [Due: Final Paper Part A – Sunday, Sept. 20th, 11:59 PM](#)

Week 13:

- **Fall Break/Thanksgiving Break- No Assignments**

Week 14: Women, Power, and Religion: Witches, Womanists, and Mujeristas - November 28- 4

- Starhawk, “Witchcraft and Women’s Culture” in *Womanspirit Rising* (Canvas)
- K. Blee, “Joining the Ladies’ Organization” in *Religious Women and Racism: KKK and Black Churches* (Canvas)
- Anzaldúa, “Entering into the Serpent” in *Weaving the Visions*
- D.S. Williams, “Womanist Theology”
- Recommended: Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic” in *Weaving the Vision*
- [Due: Discussion Question#13](#)

Weeks 15-16: Study and Final’s Week

- **December 5- Last Day of Classes**
- [Due:](#)
 - [Turn in your Final Paper – Friday, December 9th by 11:59 PM.](#)
 - [Final Exam Opens December 5th- Due by Dec. 11, 11:59 PM \(Keep in mind that if you submitted your Midterm, it is optional to complete the Final Exam- the highest grade will be recorded\).](#)

Extra Credit

You will see extra credit opportunities appear throughout the semester. I will provide you with a list of articles and movies to choose from (you can also propose your own) if you wish to write a review. You will also receive the requirements if you are interested in writing a song, poem, interview, short story, or create an Instagram account or blog.

- Movie Review- up to 25 points EC
- Article Review – up to 25 points
- Poetry – up to 15 points EC
- Song– up to 15 points EC
- Short Story – up to 20 points EC
- Instagram account – Up to 30 points
- Blog- Up to 50 points
- Interview – Up to 25 points

