

SANTA CLARA UNIVERSITY • OSHER LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE
DYING FOR A LIFE: WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SPRING 2010

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Class Time: W 1:00–3:00 p.m.
Dates: March 31–April 28
Classroom: Casa Commons

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Contemporary debates about the proper role of women in church, society and family are often grounded on claims about the Bible and early Christianity. How true are these claims? In this class, you'll explore the way women were viewed in Greco-Roman society and the revolutionary, if not entirely liberating, way Christians regarded women instead. In particular, we'll explore the theme common to much early Christian (and male-authored) literature that women could not be saved as such, but that their path to salvation--and church leadership--lay in "becoming men" first. What was it about the cultural construction of women that placed that extra hurdle in their path on the way to heavenly life? How did early Christian women deacons, missionaries, prophets, martyrs and ascetics take up that challenge? And why did so many early Christian men write women's stories in this way?

You might be interested in the Web site I've developed for an undergraduate course at Santa Clara University titled SCTR 26 Gender in Early Christianity:

<http://www-relg-studies.scu.edu/facstaff/murphy/courses/sctr026/index.htm>

SOME GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anthologies of Primary Texts

- Clark, Elizabeth A. *Women in the Early Church*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1990.
- Kraemer, Ross Shepard. *Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook*, rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Meyers, Carol, Toni Craven and Ross S. Kraemer, eds. *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2000.
- Miller, Robert J., ed. *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version*. Sonoma, California: Polebridge, 1995.

Books about Them

- Brown, Peter Robert Lamont. *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
- Kraemer, Ross Shepard. *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Kraemer, Ross Shepard and Mary Rose D'Angelo, eds. *Women and Christian Origins*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Martin, Dale B. *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006.
- Matter, E. Ann. "Christ, God and Women." In *Augustine and His Critics* (ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless; New York: Routledge, 2000) 164-75.
- Power, Kim E. *In Veiled Desire: Augustine on Women*. New York: Continuum, 1996.
- Schäfer, Peter. *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah, Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002.

SCHEDULE

MARCH 31

WHAT DID JESUS DO?



Giancola's "First Century Jewish Man"

A lot of people today would like to hope that "what Jesus would do" about the inequality of the sexes is eradicate it. But what we want might not be what the historical record allows. How much was Jesus a product of his (patriarchal) culture, and how much did he break with it? How did he treat women, and was this a radical departure from common Jewish practice? How "masculine" is the portrait of Jesus in the gospels compared to the conventions of the time? And what evidence do we use to reconstruct these historical scenarios?

Further Reading

On Women in Jewish Society at the Time of Jesus

Ilan, Tal. *Integrating Women into Second Temple History*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999.

Kraemer, Ross S. "Jewish Women and Christian Origins: Some Caveats," and "Jewish Women and Women's Judaism(s) at the Beginning of Christianity." In *Women and Christian Origins* (ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 35-79.

Levine, Amy-Jill. *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006 (esp. pp. 131-43)

Lewis, Naphtali, Yigael Yadin and Jonas C. Greenfield, eds. *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters, Greek Papyri*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Shrine of the Book, 1989.

Schuller, Eileen M. and Cecilia Wassen. "Women: Daily Life." In *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 2.981-4.

Wassen, Cecilia. *Women in the Damascus Document*, Academia Biblica. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005.

On Jesus, the Gospels & Women

D'Angelo, Mary Rose. "Reconstructing 'Real' Women in Gospel Literature: The Case of Mary Magdalene," "(Re)Presentations of Women in the Gospels: John and Mark," and "(Re)Presentations of Women in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke-Acts." In *Women and Christian Origins* (ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 105-149 and 171-95.

Corley, Kathleen E. *Women and the Historical Jesus: Feminist Myths of Christian Origins*. Santa Rosa, California: Polebridge, 2002.

Levine, Amy-Jill. "Women in Q Communit(ies) and Traditions." In *Women and Christian Origins* (ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 150-70.

Schottroff, Luise. "Itinerant Prophetesses: A Feminist Analysis of the Sayings Source Q." In *The Gospel behind the Gospels: Current Studies in Q* (ed. Roland A. Piper; NovTSup 75; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995) 347-60.

Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context*. Boston: Beacon, 1998.

APRIL 7

SAVED BY CHILDBIRTH OR CELIBACY? PAUL & HIS INTERPRETERS



Thecla Pilgram Flask

The seven genuine letters of Paul are our earliest pieces of the New Testament. In them, Paul speaks of women as deacons, co-workers, and benefactors. There's even a female apostle (Rom 16:7)! But does this mean that Paul thought that in Christ, there was "no male and female," or did he still hold to a gender hierarchy? In either case, he definitely advocated celibacy for both sexes. So why, after his death, did people invoke his name in support of two diametrically opposed positions: (1) that women must marry and can only be saved through childbirth, and (2) women must be celibate and avoid marriage? What social tensions do these practices reveal as Christianity spread in the Roman Empire?

Further Reading

The Actual Texts

(of course, Paul's letters and the deutero-Pauline letters can be found in the Bible)

"Noncanonical Literature." *Wesley Center Online*. Online, http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/.

Schneemelcher, Wilhelm ed. *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans. R. McL. Wilson, 2 vols. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006.

[See also the Clark and Kraemer titles on p. 1, under anthologies]

Books About Them

Castelli, Elizabeth A. *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991.

Cooper, Kate. *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996.

D'Angelo, Mary Rose. "Εὐσεβεία: Roman Imperial Family Values and the Sexual Politics of 4 Maccabees and the Pastorals." *Biblical Interpretation* 11:2 (2003) 139-65.

Davis, Stephen J. *The Cult of St. Thecla: a Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Epp, Eldon J. *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005. Description.

Foster, Paul. *The Apocryphal Gospels: A Very Short Introduction, Very Short Introductions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Konstan, David. "Acts of Love: A Narrative Pattern in the Apocryphal Acts." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6:1 (1998) 15-36.

MacDonald, Margaret Y. *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Madigan, Kevin and Carolyn Osiek. *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Martin, Dale B. *The Corinthian Body*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1999.

Osiek, Carolyn and Margaret Y. MacDonald, with Janet H. Tulloch. *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.

Torjesen, Karen Jo. *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

Wire, Antoinette Clark. *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990.

APRIL 14

DYING FOR A LIFE: THE GENDER DIFFERENCE IN THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP



Beginning with Jesus, many Christians were persecuted for their faith in the first three centuries of the new millennium. The persecutions were sporadic and regional until the mid-200s, when inflation, border incursions by Rome's enemies, and a series of plagues and other disasters led to a long-term crisis for which Rome sought scapegoats. Christians proved to be one easy target, for they had a history of distancing themselves from public, civic duties. Men and women were harassed, arrested, publically humiliated and executed.

Because of the assumptions about men and women, the accounts of martyrdom took on a different cast for men than for women. We'll start today with the graphic account of the Lamb in Revelation as an example of how the martyrdom of a male figure (Jesus) is recounted. Then we'll look at two accounts of female martyrs, the martyrdom of Perpetua and her slave Felicitas in North Africa, and the account of the young adolescent Agnes' martyrdom in Rome. How does the author of Revelation deal with the penetration and conquest of Jesus and the 144,000 celibate male martyrs, given that this would have rendered them "effeminate" in people's eyes? And how are the normal feminine virtues of modesty and virginity transgressed in female martyr accounts? Why is the account of the virginal Agnes' execution so heavily eroticized that it verges on pornography? And why does it seem that the women's virginity—and therefore their sanctity—is never quite secured until they manage to die?

Further Reading

The Actual Texts [see the Clark and Kraemer titles on p. 1 under anthologies]

Books About Them

- Boyarin, Daniel. *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Burrus, Virginia. "Begotten, Not Made": *Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity*, Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture 39. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- , "Dying for a Life: Martyrdom, Masochism, and Female (Auto)Biography." In *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) 53-90, but especially pages 69-76.
- Castelli, Elizabeth. *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*, Gender, Theory and Religion. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Frilingos, Christopher A. *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation*, Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
- Kuefler, Mathew. *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity*, The Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- Perkins, Judith. *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Ross, Jill. "Dynamic Writing and Martyrs' Bodies in Prudentius' *Peristephanon*." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995) 325-55.
- Schroeder, Joy A. "Virgin and Martyr: Divine Protection from Sexual Assault in the *Peristephanon* of Prudentius." In *Miracles in Jewish and Christian Antiquity: Imagining Truth* (ed. John C. Cavadini; Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999) 169-91.
- Shaw, Brent D. "Body/Power/Identity: The Passion of the Martyrs." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996) 269-312.

APRIL 21

READING GENDER IN THE Gnostic TEXTS



The 13 Nag Hammadi Codices



A fragment of the Berlin Gnostic Codex
with the Gospel of Mary Magdalene

Gender is put to multiple uses in the gnostic material from Nag Hammadi. Here is a body of (heretical) literature that features women prominently as protagonists and recipients of special revelation. For example, this is the group of texts that includes the Gospel of Mary (Magdalene), in which Mary is the privileged recipient of Jesus' most important post-resurrection revelation. In other Gnostic texts, salvation is conceived as the consummation of a relationship between the Gnostic and his God, and so the metaphor of a bridal chamber and sexual consummation is used.

So are we to agree with Dan Brown that sex lies at the true heart of the Christian tradition and that is why the Gnostics were suppressed? We will take a closer look than Dan Brown did into how is "the feminine" is figured in these books. And more importantly, we will ask why are female characters and attributes deployed in this way.

Further Reading

The Actual Texts

The Gnostic Society Library, <http://www.gnosis.org/library.html>.

Meyer, Marvin, ed. *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts Complete in One Volume*. New York: HarperOne, 2009.

Miller, Robert J., ed. *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version*. Sonoma, California: Polebridge, 1995.

Books About Them

Bock, Darrell L. *Breaking The Da Vinci Code: Answers to the Questions Everybody's Asking*. New York: Nelson, 2004.

Brock, Ann Graham. *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Ehrman, Bart D. *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

King, Karen L. *What Is Gnosticism?* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005.

King, Karen L., ed. *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity*. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2000; original, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.

MacDonald, Dennis R. *There Is No Male and Female: The Fate of a Dominical Saying in Paul and Gnosticism*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987.

Pearson, Birger A. *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007.

Schaberg, Jane. *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha and the Christian Testament*. New York: Continuum, 2002.

APRIL 28

HOLY HARLOTS & TRANSVESTITE SAINTS: GENDER TRANSGRESSIONS & REDEMPTIONS



Quentin Metsys (1466-1530)
Mary Magdalene (left) and Mary of Egypt (right)

In the fourth and fifth centuries, with the legalization of Christianity and its eventual institutionalization as the only legal religion in the Roman Empire, stories of martyrs and penitents from the past became all the rage. This is when the notion that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute began to be fixed (one wonders if in response to her popularity in Gnostic circles?). But there were other famous whores like Mary of Egypt and Pelagia the actress who renounced their wicked ways, only to be made the objects of the lust for holiness in Christian literature. In renouncing their wicked ways, they often renounce their clothing as well—assuming the garb or the physique of men in the process. What social forces were at work to create this representation of female holiness as the Roman Empire was disintegrating? Why, in the final analysis, do women's bodies always have to be destroyed as such in order for the women to achieve sanctity?

Further Reading

The Actual Texts

[see the Clark and Kraemer entries on p. 1 under anthologies]

Books About Them

- Burrus, Virginia. "Secrets of Seduction: The Lives of Holy Harlots." In *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) 128-59.
- Davis, Stephen J. "Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10 (2002) 1-36.
- Dean-Jones, Lesley. *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Harvey, Susan Ashbrook. "Is there a Harlot in This Text? Asceticism and the Grotesque." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33 (2003) 419-35.
- Laqueur, Thomas W. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Miller, Patricia Cox. "Desert Asceticism and 'The Body from Nowhere.'" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994) 137-53.
- Shaw, Teresa M. *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998.