How does religion both empower and disempower women? How have women been understood by religious thinkers? Why and how do women participate in religious institutions? How does a gendered understanding of the divine relate to the social and economic status of women? In this course we will consider these and other questions about the role of women in western religion. We will begin by looking at the concept of “The Goddess” and why that image has been and is appealing for both ancient and modern women. We will move to the rise of monotheism and its effect on both the gender of the divine and the role of women in society, and then examine the role of gender in different texts and historical periods, such as the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the medieval period, and the witch hunts in both Europe and America. Finally we will turn to the modern era and study some important female religious thinkers including Mary Baker Eddy, Mother Ann Lee, Mary Daly, and practitioners of Wicca and modern Goddess worship.

During this class students will:

- Reflect on the meaning, nature and function of “religion”
- Consider the relationship between religious imagery/doctrines/stories and the role of women in society
- Understand the nature of rituals and how they aid in the performance and construction of gender
- Consider a variety of perspectives on women’s religious experience
- Gain skills in close-reading texts, especially primary texts from several time periods
- Learn about arguably the most important religious thinker from New Hampshire (Mary Baker Eddy)

**Required Texts:**

Course Requirements

1. **Class participation (10%)**. This class will not work well unless you come prepared and ready to participate. You need to have done and thought about the readings for each day. I will routinely ask you to comment on the following issues about your reading: 1. What is the main point of this reading? 2. What arguments or issues are brought up in the course of the reading? 3. What are any problematic issues about the reading? 4. What did you like/dislike or find interesting about the reading?

2. **Three tests (25% each)**. These will not be cumulative. They will be in-class essay tests.

3. **A class presentation (15%)**. Students will lead class and will present information on the topic of the day.

**Plagiarism**

The University of New Hampshire defines plagiarism as:

The unattributed use of the ideas, evidence, or words of another person, or the conveying of the false impression that the arguments and writing in a paper are the student's own. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to the following: 1. The acquisition by purchase or otherwise of a part or the whole of a piece of work which is represented as the student's own; 2. The representation of the ideas, data, or writing of another person as the student's own work, even though some wording, methods of citation, or arrangement of evidence, ideas, or arguments have been altered; 3. Concealment of the true sources of information, ideas, or argument in any piece of work.

Plagiarizing in this class will result in failure and will be reported to the Dean of your home college. You may, and are encouraged to, study with fellow classmates, but all written materials must be your own work. For further information, see the link below and consult with the instructor. [http://www.unh.edu/vpsas/handbook/academic-honesty](http://www.unh.edu/vpsas/handbook/academic-honesty)

Course Schedule (assignments due on the date they appear)

**METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS**

F. 1/23  
Introduction to the Course; Alice Walker, “God is Inside You and Everyone Else”

M. 1/27  
What Do We Mean by ‘Religion’? What Do We Mean by ‘Women’ in Religion? Do Women Need Religion?

**Read:** 1. Carol Christ, “Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological and Political Reflections” (BB)


W. 1/29  
Women and Men, Body and Spirit, Nature and Culture: (False?) Dichotomies in Religion and Gender

**Read**: Sherri Ortner: “Is Woman to Man as Nature is to Culture?” (BB)

ANCIENT GODDESSES

F. 1/31  
The Great Goddess? In-class viewing of “The Goddess Remembered”

**Read**: Merlin Stone, “When God Was a Woman” (BB)

M. 2/3  
Problems with the Goddess

**Read**: Helen P. Foley, “A Question of Origins: Goddess Cults Greek and Modern” (BB)

W. 2/5  
Gods and Goddesses in Mesopotamia

**Read**: *In the Wake of the Goddesses* chapters 1-6

F. 2/7  
The Demise of the Goddesses

**Read**: *In the Wake of the Goddesses* chapters 7-9

MONOTHEISM

M. 2/10  
Problems of Monotheism: The Relationship of Humanity and the Divine in Monotheism

**Read**: *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, chapter 13, 17

W. 2/12  
NO CLASS – INSTRUCTOR OUT OF TOWN
Watch on YouTube “The Bible’s Buried Secrets: Did God Have a Wife?”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyfFd4iBIQ&list=PLI1m4mzLPO80AGL5iB_Xqx5JMyfmH7l5X

F. 2/14 Problems of Monotheism: God and Patriarchy
Read: 1. Bible: Genesis 12-25
2. Carol Delaney, “Abraham and the Seeds of Patriarchy” (BB)

M. 2/17 Problems of Monotheism: Men, Women and the Male God
Read: Selection from Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, God’s Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism (BB)

WOMEN IN THE HEBREW BIBLE
W. 2/19 The Story of Eden
Read: 1. Genesis 1-4
2. Traditional Interpretations of the Eden Story (BB)

F.2/21 The Story of Eden – Modern Analysis
Read: Phyllis Trible, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Re-read” (BB)

M. 2/24 The Story of Eden Embellished: Lilith
Read: Documents about Lilith (BB)

W. 2/26 Women in Biblical Law
Read: 1. Exodus 19-24

F. 2/28 Ritual, Sacrifice and Priesthood
**Read:** 1. Bible: Skim Leviticus 1-7, 21; Exodus 1, 15, Numbers 12

   2. Nancy Jay, “Sacrifice as a Remedy for Having Been Born of Woman” (BB)

**M. 3/3**  
**Purity**

**Read:** 1. Bible: Leviticus 12, 13, 15; Numbers 19

   2. Susan K. Roll “The Old Rite of Churching Women after Childbirth” (BB)


   5. Gloria Steinem, “If Men Could Menstruate” at http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/circulation/ereserves/pdfs/courses/FALL/ENGL%201260,%20WMST%201260,%20STOCKHO/ON%20COURSE%20NOW/IF%20MEN%20COULD%20MENSTRUATE.pdf

**W. 3/5**  
**Test #1**

**WOMEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY**

**F. 3/7**  
**Mary Magdalene**


   2. Jane Schaberg, “How Mary Magdalene Became a Whore” (BB)

**M. 3/10**  
**NO CLASS SPRING BREAK**

**W. 3/12**  
**NO CLASS SPRING BREAK**

**F. 3/14**  
**NO CLASS SPRING BREAK**
M. 3/17  Mary, Mother of Jesus  
**Read:** 1. Women in Religion, 41-42  
2. Rev. John Shelby Spong, “The Virgin Mary is No Wonder Woman”  
4. The Protogospel of James, at least chapters 5-20 at  
5. Pope Pius XII “Defining the Dogma of the Assumption” especially paragraphs 2, 3, 5, 6, 14, 15, 17, 21, 22, 25, 27, 32, 33, 39, 40, 42 at  
   [http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus_en.html)  
6. Pope Pius IX “Ineffabilis Deus”: First three paragraphs, then “Mary Compared with Eve” and “…of a Supereminent Sanctity” at  

W. 3/19  Women in the Early Church  
**Read:** 1. *Women in Religion*, 9-18 and the Bible references on p. 18  
2. Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, “Women in the Early Christian Movement” (BB)

F. 3/21  Women in Gnostic Christianity  
**Read:** 1. 19-23, 33-37  
2. Elaine Pagels, “What Became of God the Mother?” (BB)

M. 3/24  Christian Women in the Middle Ages  
**Read:** 1. *Women and Religion*, 90-97 and skim readings in 98-118  
2. Caroline Walker Bynum “‘And Woman His Humanity’: Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages” (BB)

W. 3/26  Witchcraft in Europe (Class Presentation)
**Read:** *Women and Religion*, 119-135

F. 3/28  Selections from *Malleus Maleficarum*

M. 3/31  Witchcraft in America – The Salem Witch Affair (Class Presentation)
**Read:** *Women and Religion*, 135-143

W. 4/2   Viewing and Discussion of “The Burning Times”; Review for Test

F. 4/4   **Test #2**

**WOMEN AND RELIGION IN THE MODERN ERA**

M. 4/7   Elizabeth Cady Stanton and The Women’s Bible
**Read:** *Women and Religion*, 246-257

W. 4/9   Mother Ann Lee and Shakerism (Class Presentation)
**Read:** *Women and Religion*, 201-213

F. 4/11  Mary Baker Eddy and Christian Science (Class Presentation)
**Read:** 1. *Women and Religion*, 260-264

   2. Susan Setta, “Denial of the Female; Affirmation of the Feminine. The Father-Mother God of Mary Baker Eddy” (BB)

M. 4/14  Readings from *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*
**Read:** Selections from *Science and Health* (BB)

**PROBLEMS IN WOMEN AND RELIGION**

W. 4/16  The Bible and Homosexuality
**Read:** 1. Bible: Genesis 19, Leviticus 18 and 20, Judges 19, Ezekiel 16:49-50, 1 Corinthians 6:9, 2 Peter 2:4-10, and Romans 1:18-32
2. Carter Heyward in *Women and Religion*, 291-205
3. Rebecca Alpert, “Coming to Terms with Leviticus” (BB)

**F. 4/18**  
Contraception and Abortion  
**Read:** 1. *Women and Religion*, 265-291  
   2. Exodus 21:22-25

**M. 4/21**  
Women and the Roman Catholic Priesthood  
**Read:** 1. *Women and Religion* 263-264  
   2. “Inter Insigniores”  
   http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6interi.htm  

SECOND/THIRD WAVE FEMINISM AND RELIGION

**W. 4/23**  
Christian Feminist Theology  
**Read:** 1. Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether in *Women and Religion* (306-323)  
   2. Mary Daly, “After the Death of God the Father” (BB)

**F. 4/25**  
Christian Womanist Theology  
**Read:** 1. Jacqueline Grant and Ada María Isasi-Díaz in *Women and Religion* (324 -337)  
   2. Delores Williams, Selection from *Sisters in the Wilderness* (BB)

**M. 4/28**  
Jewish Feminist Theology  
**Read:** 1. Selections from Judith Plaskow (BB)


W. 4/30 Wicca and Modern Goddess Worship (Class Presentation)

Read: Selection from Margot Adler, Drawing Down the Moon (BB)

F. 5/2 Wicca; Viewing and Discussion of “Full Circle”


M. 5/5 Scenes from “Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer”; Review and Wrap-up