

**WOMEN IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY**  
**COURSE CODE: CH/TH 3XW3/5XW5/6XW6**

**McMaster Divinity College**

Fall Semester 2020

Hybrid Course

Online: Weekly

Face-to-Face: October 27-28

Instructor: Gordon L. Heath

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*Specializations: Christian Culture, Christian History and Worldview, Pastoral Studies*

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

From the book of Acts to the contemporary church, women have played a key role in the life of the church in places such as monasteries, missions, schools, pulpits, home, and hostels. And many have been formally identified as “saints.” This class is a survey and analysis of the roles and impact of such women from the earliest churches to the modern period of global Christianity.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

***Knowing***

- to provide students with an understanding of how women have participated in, and contributed to, the life of the church over the centuries
- to help students place the contemporary debate over gender roles in the church in the larger historical context

***Being***

- to explore - and ultimately appreciate - the diverse ways that women have served in the church
- to create an awareness of the breadth and diversity of the Church, and provide a sense of “place” within the many church traditions

***Doing***

- to develop in each student an ability to assess documents and situations from an historical perspective – and in particular, to be able to assess critically the various claims made about women in leadership throughout the church’s history

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

- Ruth A. Tucker & Walter L. Liefeld. *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987.
- Mary T. Malone. *Women and Christianity: The First Thousand Years*. Mary Knoll, Orbis Books, 2001.
- Karen Jo Torjesen. *When Women Were Priests: Women’s Leadership in the Early Church & the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity*. San Francisco: Harper, 1995.

- Gordon L. Heath. *Doing Church History: A User-friendly Introduction to Researching the History of Christianity*. Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2008.
- There may also be the occasional journal article to be read (distributed by the professor in class).

## ASSIGNMENTS:

- **Online Engagement**

Students will complete weekly readings and post comments, as well as respond to posted comments by other students and professor. This is an important part of the class that allows for interaction and engagement by all.

- **Position Paper**

This assignment is a brief statement on one's own view of women in ministry, as well as one's view of the church's treatment of women in its history.

- **Book Review**

This four-five page review should answer questions such as: what is the author's thesis? How did she go about arguing her thesis (structure, sources, methodology, etc.)? What are the weaknesses and strengths of the book? What is the value of reading the book? See *Doing Church History* for further instructions. A part of your analysis of the book should be an interaction between your specialization and the book. A brief comment on avenetolearn summarizing your view is also required.

- **Research Paper**

This ten-page research paper provides an opportunity for students to pursue an area of research that intrigues them. The topic for the paper should relate to the student's specialization. Results of research will be shared with the class at the end of the semester.

- ***Church and Culture***

The primary focus of this research should be on a theological analysis of a past culture or our contemporary culture in regards to Christian attitudes and actions towards women. The focus should be relatively specific, rather than scattered (eg. "the idealization of virginity in antiquity" rather than "how the church viewed women in antiquity"). The interplay between Christian theology and culture should be a critical part of this analysis.

- ***Christian History and Worldview***

The research for this specialization should focus on developing critical knowledge of a key movement in Christian history, or a deeper awareness of Christian theology related to women and the church (eg. ordination, monasticism, sexuality). Research for this specialization should focus on a construction of one's theological position in regards to an issue related to women and ministry (eg. women's ordination, women and the family, mothering, celibacy).

- ***Pastoral Studies Specialization***

Research for this specialization can go in one of two directions. First, it can focus on a theological construction of one's theological position in regards to an issue related to women and ministry (eg. women's ordination, women and the family, mothering, celibacy). Second, it can deal with developing a strategy for dealing with issues related to women and ministry in the local church.

- **Biographical Presentation**

Each student will post on [avenuetolearn](http://avenuetolearn.com) a five-minute video summary of a prominent woman's life and contribution. Students will comment on [avenuetolearn](http://avenuetolearn.com) on other presentations.

### **GRADING:**

- Weekly Online Engagement: 40%
- Position Paper: 10%
- Book Review: 10%
- Biographical Presentation: 15%
- Research Paper: 25%

### **GENERAL COMMENTS:**

- **Textbook Purchase**  
All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca). Other book services may also carry the texts.
- **Academic Honesty**  
Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College.  
Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty ~ <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>
- **Gender Inclusive Language**  
McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.
- **Style**  
All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/mdcstyleguide.pdf>  
Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.
- **Disclaimer**

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.

- **Due Dates**  
Essays must be handed in at the beginning of the class on the day they are due. All other essays will be considered to be late. Students may be exempted from the late penalty of 3% per day (not including weekends) if they attach to their essay a letter explaining the genuine emergency that delayed them. Late assignments (even ones with an extension) will *not* receive comments and constructive criticism from the professor.
- **Other**  
Please turn off your cell phone and/or pager before the class begins. Please do not attend class if you are ill and contagious (e.g. the flu). Respectful dialogue and disagreement is expected.

### **CLASS SCHEDULE:**

*Some weeks will have a synchronous Webex face-to-face component. Time TBD.*

Week Starting Sept 14: Introduction to the Class

Reading: *Doing Church History* (all)

Week Starting Sept 21: Women in the Early Church I

Reading: *Daughters of the Church* (chs.1-3), *Women and Christianity* (chs.1-4)

*\*Position Paper Due\**

Week Starting Sept 28: Women in the Early Church II

Reading: *Women and Christianity* (chs.5-7)

*\*Book Review Due\**

Week Starting Oct 5: Medieval Female Monastic Orders

Reading: *Daughters of the Church* (ch.4), *Women and Christianity* (chs.8-10)

Week Starting Oct 12: Medieval Women: Sainthood and Motherhood

Week Starting Oct 19: Women as Reformers in the Reformation

Reading: *Daughters of the Church* (ch.5)

*Week Starting Oct 26: On Campus face-to-Face Component (Oct 27-28)*

- *This two-day on-campus component is comprised of professor's lectures and group discussions.*
  - *Depending on the COVID-19 situation, this part of the course will be either face-to-face or through synchronous Webex participation. The option chosen will be a "game time decision."*
  - *Topics for the two days:*
    - Resources for Ministry
    - Issues in Ministry
    - Evangelicalism, Missions, and Women
- Reading: *Daughters of the Church* (chs.6-8)

- Women in the Modern West  
Reading: *Daughters of the Church* (chs.10-11)

Week Starting Nov 2: Biographical Presentations

Week Starting Nov 9: Biographical Presentations

Week Starting Nov 16: Women in the Global Church  
Reading: *Daughters of the Church* (ch.9)

Week Starting Nov 23: Research Paper Presentations  
*\*Research Paper Due\**

Week Starting Nov 30: Women in Modern Orthodoxy and Catholicism

Week Starting Dec 7: Looking to the Future