

WOMEN IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY
CH 3P1051
CH 5P1030

McMaster Divinity College
Fall 2024

In person and Live Stream
Monday 4:00-5:50pm

Professor 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.
- Kathryn Spink. *Mother Teresa: An Authorized Biography (Revised Edition)*. New York: HarperCollins, 2011.
- 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).

All required and recommended books for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

BIBLIOGRAPHY (not required for purchasing):

The following books are related to the course material and provide a helpful reading list for those who would like to pursue the course material further. Students are NOT required to purchase or read these books.

- Barbara J. MacHaffie, ed., *Readings in Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992.
- Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjection of Women Became Gospel Truth*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2021.
- Amy Oden, ed., *In Her Words: Women's Writings in the History of Christian Thought*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.
- Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women*. New York: Paulist, 2001.
- Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Roland Bainton. *Women of the Reformation in France and England*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973.
- Roland Bainton. *In Germany and Italy*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1971.
- Roland Bainton. *From Spain to Scandinavia*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977.
- Paul F.M. Zahl. *Five Women of the English Reformation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

- Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe*. Cambridge, Mass./London: Harvard University Press, 1983.

COMMENTS ON ASSIGNMENTS

- Position Paper (10%)

This assignment is a brief (two page) 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 (20%)

This 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.

- Research Paper (40%)

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 regarding 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 regarding 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 regarding 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 (20%)

Students will deliver a five minute "TED Talk" on a woman of their choice from any period of the church's history. A one-page outline and bibliography are to be submitted with this oral presentation.

- Participation (10%)

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

A special note about AI: You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc., and not to have AI do this work for you. There may be value in using an AI tool to help you locate and collate resources or to help you "tidy up" your English grammar, usage, and mechanics, especially if English is not your native language. However, using AI to create content for you and then submitting that content as if you created it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one's own as if it is one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy.

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), the content of this course is intended to be accessible to all students who are enrolled in the course, including those with disabilities. If a student requires accommodation to participate fully in this course, that student is to contact SAS at McMaster University, who will then work directly with the McMaster Divinity College Registrar to negotiate reasonably appropriate accommodation for the student. The MDC Registrar will communicate with faculty regarding necessary accommodations. Please note that an accommodation is not retroactive and must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation.

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as, for example, the following: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and the CEB (2011).

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 5% 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 and may not be returned at the same time as the papers submitted on the due date.

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).

CLASS SCHEDULE:

Sept 9: Introduction to the Class

Reading: *Doing Church History* (all)

Sept 16: Women in the Early Church I

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

Position Paper Due

Sept 23: Women in the Early Church II

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

Sept 30: Medieval Female Monastic Orders

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

Oct 7: Medieval Women: Sainthood and Motherhood

Oct 14: *Reading Week (no class)*

Oct 21: Biographical Presentations (as well as some themes chosen by professor – TBD)

Biographical Presentations Due

Oct 28: Women as Reformers in the Reformation

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

Nov 4: Evangelicalism, Missions, and Women

Reading: *Daughters of the Church* (chs.6-8)

Book Review Due

Nov 11: Women in the Global Church I

Reading: *Daughters of the Church* (ch.9)

Nov 18: Women in the Global Church II

Reading: *Daughters of the Church* (chs.10-11)

Nov 25: Canadian Issues

Dec 2: Research Paper Presentations

Research Paper Due

Dec 9: Looking to the Future