

## Feminist and Womanist Ethics

June 4-19, 2012

Amy Plantinga Pauw

Schlegel 121

M-Th 9-11:30am

### Course Description:

This course will examine the writings of contemporary feminist and womanist Christian ethicists.

### Objectives:

1. To acquaint students with the distinctive emphases and controversies of contemporary feminist and womanist ethics
2. To encourage students to assess the relevance of this ethical reflection for the contemporary church and world.
3. To help students hone their own theological and ethical perspectives in dialogue with these scholars.

### Requirements for 3 credits:

1. Conscientious attendance and participation in discussion. (25%)

*Showing up with your reading and 50-word sentence done is an important component of your work in this course. Lack of attendance and of thorough and timely class preparation will adversely affect your course grade. Please inform me ahead of time if you have to miss class. Because of the intensive nature of this course, missing more than 2 sessions of class puts you in danger of failing the course.*

2. 50-word sentences (50%)

*Students will record their response to the **Journal Question** posed in the syllabus for each class's reading; these will take the form of one 50-word sentence (see description by Professor Charles Cohen of the University of Wisconsin below). We will start each session by reading some of these aloud. I will collect these short assignments the last class period of every week, and turn them back to you the first class period of the following week. The sentences will focus on the content of the readings. **You are required to do 7 sentences.***

3. Take-home exam. (25%) **Due June 21**

*Questions will be distributed on June 14. You will answer your choice of 2 questions (3 pp. each). This exam will give you opportunities to develop your own constructive statement on the ethical issues explored in this class. If you prefer instead to write a short research paper on a particular topic in feminist and womanist ethics, please set up an appointment to discuss this with me.*

*Note: You may take this course for 2 credits and still fulfill an Area B elective requirement. Please see me if you are interested in this 2-credit option.*

Charles L. Cohen on the 50-word assignment:

“A single-sentence exercise with a finite word limit counters students’ proclivity for aerating their prose with superfluities. Given at most fifty words, students must distill their arguments’ fundamentals and phrase them concisely, for, as my syllabus warns, the fifty-first word and its successors face a terrible fate. (I have been known to cut out extraneous verbiage and turn the tattered remnant into a paper airplane—a practice proved sound pedagogically if not aerodynamically.)

Fifty words might appear too many—the contests cereal companies run, after all, ask for only twenty five—but I prefer giving students sufficient rope. For one thing, the fifty-word limit allows them to cope with the assignment, which often requires complicated responses. For another, it weans them from dependency on simple declarative sentences and challenges them to experiment with multiple clauses. Some can handle compound-complex sentences, but most require—and appreciate—tutelage in them. Nor are fifty words too few; no student has ever complained about an inability to pare down the verbiage. Had Goldilocks stumbled into my section instead of the Three Bears’ den, she would have found the word limit “just right.”

Consider, for example, the assignment that I recently gave students in History/Religious Studies 451, entitled “Constructing a hypothesis”: “Using the maps in the front of the packet, compare the distribution of churches within Anglo-America east of the Mississippi River in 1750 with the distribution in 1850 and, in one sentence NOT EXCEEDING 50 words (need I say more?), hypothesize the reasons for the difference.” To complete the exercise, students must examine a series of maps, aggregate data presented graphically and convert it into written form, analyze that data and develop a hypothesis to explain patterns they may have found. They must attend carefully to the material (not the least of the minor assignment’s benefits is its capacity to monitor students’ preparation), read the maps against each other, and offer a succinct but accurate conclusion, thereby rehearsing several critical skills simultaneously.

The quality of the responses varied, as one might expect, but the best submission hit the mark exactly, intellectually and, at fifty words, quantitatively: ‘The maps show a relative decline in Anglican and Congregational Churches in relation to the growth of other churches between 1750 and 1850, which reflects the shift towards the disestablishment of state churches and the demand for a constitutional guaranty of religious freedom that occurred during the American Revolutionary Settlement.’ Even more impressive, English is not the writer’s native language.”

### **Academic honesty:**

All work you submit in this class is expected to be yours. Any quotation of the words of others must be clearly indicated, and all direct indebtedness must be acknowledged by citation of author and source. Students unfamiliar with issues relating to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center and should make use of the available resources at an early date, since violations of Seminary policy on academic honesty can lead to a failing grade for the course.

### **Inclusive Language:**

In your writing, avoid language for people that leaves out part of the population or perpetuates stereotypes. Avoid gender specific pronouns when gender is unknown. Gender specific pronouns should generally be avoided when referring to God unless you are quoting from a theological text or a translation of the Bible that uses them.

**Required Text:**

*Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, eds. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela D. Sims (Westminster John Knox, 2011) Readings from this text will be in CAPS in the Course Calendar.

**Course Calendar**

June 4

Mary Daly, "After the Death of God the Father"

<http://womenshistory.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/after/>

Beverly Harrison, "Keeping Faith in a Sexist Church: Not for Women Only," in Carol S. Robb, ed., *Making the Connections*, 206-234. [CAMS]

**Journal Question:** Why does Harrison reject Daly's approach to overcoming sexism?

June 5

Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, xi-xii. [distributed]

"Can We Be Different but not Alienated? An Exchange of Letters" (Katie Cannon and Carter Heyward) in Lois Daly, ed., *Feminist Theological Ethics*, pp. 59-76. [CAMS]

Brown-Douglass, Kelly. "Womanist Theology: What is its Relationship to Black Theology?" in Cone and Wilmore, eds., *Black theology: A documentary history, volume two: 1980-1992*, pp. 290-299. [CAMS]

TOWNES, ch. 3

WEEMS, ch. 4

Eugene, Toinette M. "Appropriation and Reciprocity in Womanist/Mujerista/Feminist Work" in Lois Daly, ed., *Feminist Theological Ethics*, pp. 88-117. [CAMS]

**Journal Question:** Why is it important for womanist theology to distinguish itself from both black theology and various expressions of feminist theology?

June 6

Sanders, Cheryl J. "Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5 (Fall 1989): 83-91. [ATLA]

Coleman, Monica A. "Must I Be a Womanist?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22 (Spring 2006): 85-96 [ATLA]

NOTE: please also read the responses to the Sanders and Coleman articles

Katie Cannon, "Appropriation and Reciprocity in the Doing of Womanist Ethics" in *Katie's Canon*, 129-135 [CAMS]

GILKES, ch. 6

**Journal Question:** What are Sanders' and Coleman's criticisms of mainstream womanist ethics and theology? Are there ways in which these two scholars agree?

June 7

Collins, Patricia Hill. "Black Women and Motherhood [1991]," in Virginia Held, ed., *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, 117-135. [CAMS]

Ruddick, Sara. "Injustice in Families: Assault and Domination [1995]," in Virginia Held, ed., *Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, 203-223. [CAMS]

Soskice, Janet Martin. "Love and Attention." In *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender and Religious Language*, 7-34. [CAMS]

Purvis, Sally. "A Common Love: Christian Feminist Ethics and the Family," pp. 111-124; in Anne Carr & Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, eds., *Religion, Feminism, and the Family* [CAMS]

Hayes, Diana L. "Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made: The Making of a Catholic Womanist Theologian," in Stacey Floyd-Thomas, ed., *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, 54-76. [CAMS]

**Journal Question:** Which traditional Christian teachings about family are affirmed by these writers, and which are contested?

June 11

COPELAND, ch. 9

BAKER-FLETCHER, ch. 10

TOWNES, ch. 11

SIMS, ch. 12

SIMS, ch. 16

**Journal Question:** What connections can be drawn between lynching and other forms of African-American oppression and suffering?

June 12

Collins, Patricia Hill. "Like One of the Family: Face, Ethnicity, and the Paradox of American National Identity." In *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism*, 29-54.

Collins, Patricia Hill. "Why Collective Identity Politics Matter: Feminism, Nationalism, and Black Women's Community Work." In *From Black Power to Hip Hop*, 123-160.

Machado, Daisy. "The Unnamed Woman: Justice, Feminism, and the Undocumented Woman," in Pilar Aquino, María, Daisy Machado, and Jeanette Roríguez, eds. *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, 161-176. [CAMS]

Guardiola-Saenz, Leticia A. "Reading from Ourselves: Identity and Hermeneutics among Mexican-American feminists" in Pilar Aquino, María, Daisy L. Machado, and Jeanette Rodríguez, eds., *A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology*, 80-97. [CAMS]

**Journal Question:** How are questions of "identity" in the United States portrayed differently by the womanist scholar Collins and the Latina scholars Machado and Guardiola-Saenz?

June 13

Douglas, Kelly Brown. "Heterosexism and the Black American Church Community: A Complicated Reality." In Marvin M. Ellison and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Heterosexism in Contemporary World Religion: Problem and Prospect*, 177-200. [CAMS]

Heyward, Carter. "Coming Out: Journey without Maps," *Christianity and Crisis*, June 11, 1979: 153-6. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=429>

Hunt, Mary E. "Eradicating the Sin of Heterosexism," In Marvin M. Ellison and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Heterosexism in Contemporary World Religion*, 155-176.

[http://www.pucsp.br/rever/rv2\\_2005/p\\_hunt.pdf](http://www.pucsp.br/rever/rv2_2005/p_hunt.pdf)

Sanders, Cheryl J. "Sexual Orientation and Human Rights Discourse in the African-American Churches." In Saul M. Olyan and Martha C. Nussbaum, eds., *Sexual Orientation and Human Rights in American Religious Discourse*, 178-184. [CAMS]

Anderson, Victor. "The Black Church and the Curious Body of the Black Homosexual," in Pinn and Hopkins, eds., *Loving the Body*, 297-312 (Anderson's article is a commentary on Sanders' article.) [CAMS]

**Journal Question:** How does race enter (or not enter) into understandings of sexual orientation for these writers?

June 14

Leola A. Johnson, "The Spirit Is Willing and So Is the Flesh: The Queen in Hip-Hop Culture" in *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music*. Anthony Pinn, ed. (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 154-70.

West, Traci C. "A Space for Faith, Sexual Desire, and Ethical Black Ministerial Practices," in Pinn and Hopkins, eds., *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, 31-50. [CAMS]

COPELAND, ch. 7

BROWN DOUGLAS, ch. 8

GILKES, ch. 13

**Journal Question:** What do these writers want to affirm about Black women's bodies and their public representations?

June 18

Martin, Clarice. "The *Haustafeln* (Household Codes in African American Biblical Interpretation: 'Free Slaves' and 'Subordinate Women'") in Cain Hope Felder, eds., *Stony the Road We Trod*, 206-231 [CAMS]

Williams, Delores. *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 15-33 [CAMS]

Monroe, Irene. "When and Where I Enter, Then the Whole Race Enters With Me: Que(e)rying Exodus" in Pinn and Hopkins, eds., *Loving the Body*, 121-131. [CAMS]

Grant, Jacquelyn. "The Sin of Servanthood and the Deliverance of Discipleship," in Emilie Townes, ed., *A Troubling in my Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, 199-218 [CAMS]

Recommended: Jacquelyn Grant, "Servanthood Revisited: Womanist Explorations of Servanthood Theology," in Dwight Hopkins ed., *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's Black Theology and Black Power*, 126-137 [CAMS]

**Journal Question:** How do womanist interpretations of Scripture both challenge and reinforce prominent ethical themes in black theology?

June 19

Townes, Emilie M. "Searching for Paradise in a World of Theme Parks," in Hopkins, ed., *Black Faith and Public Talk*, 105-125. [CAMS]

CANNON, ch. 14

RIGGS, ch. 15

Farley, Margaret A. "Feminism and Universal Morality," In Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, Jr., eds., *Prospects for a Common Morality*, 170-190. [CAMS]

**Journal Question:** What is the most important thing you will bring away from your readings in this course?

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Devotional Resource: Kristof, Nicholas and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010.

Andolsen, Barbara Hilkert. "Agape in Feminist Ethics." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 69-83.

Benhabib, Seyla and Drucilla Cornel, eds. *Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

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Copeland, M. Shawn. *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010.

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<http://womenshistory.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/after/>.

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