

Panel One - Women Practicing Their Faith

Faculty Presider: Dr. Kirsi Stjerna, First Lutheran, Los Angeles/Southwest California Synod Professor of Lutheran History and Theology, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary; Core Doctoral Faculty, GTU

Lisa Calvez, VDMF, M.Div, Jesuit School of Theology, Santa Clara University

A Textual and Artistic Analysis of Mary in the Bible and the Qur'an

The genuine search for what unites rather than what divides continues to be a powerful motivation in relationships. This study aims to contribute to the pool of wisdom already present in theological circles and inter-religious dialogues through a comparative textual and artistic analysis of the figure of Mary in both the Bible and the Qur'an. It will argue based on the essential similarities identified in the scene of Mary and the Angel Gabriel, present in the Bible (Luke 1: 26-39) and the Qur'an (Q 3:42, 19:16-22) through a textual and artistic analytical lens. From there, it will explore the figure of Mary as a bridge towards communion through the impact of different Marian Shrines around the world to gather Catholics and Muslims in prayer. This study finally argues that as we focus on what is common in our Scriptural tradition while recognizing what is particular, the dialogue toward communion advances positively.

Raya M. Hazini, MA, Historical and Cultural Studies, GTU

A Female Martyr within the Bahá'í Faith

Who comes to mind when considering a person who has impacted history? Does one think of Albert Einstein or Madame Curie because they made historic contributions to our world that made vast scientific differences, or does a 19th-century religious Persian woman who, despite the odds against her in the patriarchal society of Persia, come to mind? My research will explore this 19th-century religious woman whose birth name was Fatimah Baraghání. She is from a very well-known family in the city of Qazvin, Iran. Fatimah's father, Mulla Salih, was a Mujtahid who ran a school with students as far away as India and all over Persia. This school even had a girl section because he believed in teaching his young daughters. Fatimah studied Persian literature, poetry, religious jurisprudence and principles, Islamic tradition, and Quranic commentary. Her father wished that Fatimah was a boy because she was very articulate and intelligent and could be a public prestige of the family and take over for him when the time came. But this could not happen because Fatimah was simply a girl. This paper will show the tremendous obstacles Fatimah faced as she grew older, what she had to overcome, and steadfastness to her Faith, which resulted in being martyred for not only going outside of societal norms but for believing in the progression of the revelation of God.

Yanan Lu, PhD, Theology and Ethics, GTU

Exploration and Prospect of Chinese Feminist Theology

In most Chinese Churches, women are the majority, but they are marginalized in the church's power structure and theological reflection. Theological education always takes the male experience as the norm. Few seminaries in China prioritize hiring more women and offering courses on feminist theology. Theological reflection from a female perspective is a passing fashion of western women rather than a serious theological course. Therefore, theological reflection from women's views is essential to the Chinese church. With the influence of western feminist theology and Asian feminist theology and the rising of Chinese women's conciseness, Chinese feminist theology began to sprout. In this paper, by exploring the development and character of western feminist theology and Asian feminist theology, I will explore several ways to develop Chinese feminist theology. Doing Chinese feminist theology requires Chinese Christians to inherit the traditions of Chinese female Christians, continue to interact with Chinese culture and Christian faith, integrate the practice and theories, unite man and woman, and keep the global vision.

Zeinab Vessal, PhD, Historical and Cultural Studies, Art and Religion, GTU

Fatima's Tsbīḥ (Chanting Beads) as a Case Study for Understanding Shi'a Material Religion

Muslims have used objects like tsbīḥ (chanting beads) to practice dhikr (chant) for centuries. Based on early Islamic data, Fatima transformed tsbīḥ from string-knotted wool to clay beads on string. She formed her famous chanting beads from her pilgrim's souvenir of turba(soil) from Hamza ibn Abd al-Muttalib's (568-625 CE) tomb, on which is an epithet by Prophet Muhammad: Sayyid al-Shuhada (master of martyrs). Fatima was taught to recite dhikr by the Prophet, and subsequently chanting with specific beads was adopted by Muslims as a practice that reflected Fatima's example. Shias like her, collect the turba of the master of martyrs of their belief (Husayn ibn Ali 626-680 CE son of Fatima) as a blessing, to improve their religious practice with a tactile. Hence, Fatima demonstrated the importance of these beads as a spiritual vessel, like tsbīḥ and turba for Shia.

Panel Two - Women Empowering Each Other

Faculty Presider: Dr. Diandra Erickson, Associate Dean for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, GTU

Amanda Kairys, Soto Zen Certificate, Institute of Buddhist Studies

Plum Blossoms in Snow: Changing the Narrative from Within

Offered in this paper is the example of Aichi Senmon Nisodo, a Buddhist women's monastery in Nagoya, Japan. It is an example in which women empower one another and affect change from within themselves and within an institutionally confining paradigm and through the strength of their practice together and their commitment to the way of the founder of Soto Zen in Japan, Dogen Zenji. Its sources hold Arai's Women Living Zen as central and includes scholarship in women's studies from a variety of significant sources. In this paper, it is argued that what Arai has offered in her study and writing analogized as "plum blossoms in snow," provides a living model that secures the possibility of a sustainable and ever growing access to the Dharma for those who enter its purview. It reveals an exemplar of the integration of tradition and modernity, access to training, and institutional quality, equality, and equity in Soto Zen Buddhism based in the effort, integrity, and devotion of Japanese women monastics. The structure of the paper follows its theme in sections beginning with snow, soil, seeds, and trunk and concluding with sections on blossoms and fruit.

Mina Yi, PhD, Historical and Cultural Studies, GTU

Imagining Feminist Ritualizing as Liberative Action: Drawing on the Midwife Story of Exodus

This article brings together feminist readings on the midwife story in Exodus and feminist ritual to argue that women need a safe space for communal and bodily experiences. Wilda C. Gafney interprets the midwife's story by imagining that there would have been a gathering for these women. Building upon Gafney's interpretation, this article demonstrates how this women's gathering, as a ritual, would be shaped and what women's rituals should entail, by engaging in dialogues with ritual theories. Women need a specific place to gather. Here, women encounter each other as well as God; they express their own emotions and lived experiences with their voices. Women's rituals concern not only the spirit but also the body. As a liberative action, feminist ritualizing will enable us to strive toward building alternative worlds.

Anne Kallin Zehren, Masters of Theological Studies, JST

He Said, She Said: The Case for Catholic Women Deacons

The Catholic Church has lagged behind other Christian denominations and religions in recognizing women as clerics, whether as deacons or priests. Such persistent sexism in the church has been extremely painful to women, who are excluded from fully participating in an all-male, celibate, and often clerical hierarchy. While many feminists argue for female priests, I will focus on the diaconate, which has fewer barriers of acceptance and revived positive momentum within the Church. With Pope Francis in the midst of an international synod (a formal process of listening to the church's hopes and fears), now is a crucial moment for the Catholic

Church to re-imagine the sacramental role of women. Women's exclusion has emerged as an urgent priority in the synodal feedback process. In 2020, Pope Francis announced a commission to study the potential of a women's diaconate, after a similar commission convened in 2016, but the report was not made public. This paper will focus on the arguments for and against a female diaconate and conclude that much of the theological antipathy is unsupportable and not aligned with church doctrine, teachings, and history.

Panel Three - Women Making Meaning

Faculty President: Dr. Deidre Green, Assistant Professor of Mormon Studies, GTU

Carey Averbook, MA, Center for Jewish Studies, GTU

Queer Niddah: Finding Holiness, Meaning, and Health

A person is considered niddah from the onset of menstruation until their immersion in a mikveh (ritual waters), usually lasting twelve to fourteen days. During this time, halakhah (Jewish law) forbids heterosexual married couples from having sex and couples may take on practices prescribed by the rabbis to ease sexual temptation. The time of being niddah is part of taharat mishpacha (family purity) laws and practice. While feminist scholarship has sought to positively reclaim and reinterpret tumah and taharah (ritual purity and impurity) about women, this paper will share work in progress analysis from the author's experience as a gay genderqueer woman and interviews with individuals who are coupled and not coupled and whom are curious and interested in practicing in niddah because of health, spiritual, and/or relational health benefits. What fresh meanings might niddah take on when practiced in a relationship between two people menstruating? What queer practices of niddah can be accessed and expanded for couples interested in Jewish ritual practices that support their relational health? What could queer niddah practices reveal about connection, intimacy, and the time of menstruation that could support the health of any relationship? How can a queer relationship to niddah support a re-relating with the time of menstruation as a sacred and personal one?

Katy Dickinson, DMin, Berkeley School of Theology

Women of Faith in Jail

This presents a jail chaplain's view on how women prisoners's experience, especially their faith experience, is different from that of men in the American justice system. In many ways, the lives of American women and men prisoners are similarly marginalized; however, the systemic social and economic disadvantages of women in our society are reflected in the lives of female inmates. For example, women are usually the primary caretakers for children from whom incarceration separates them, women often enter the carceral system having had more traumatic experiences, and all-too-often women undergo more trauma in jail and prison. As a result, working with women inmates as a chaplain or officer can be more complex and emotionally intense compared to working with male prisoners. While some avoid working with women, others find special satisfaction in supporting female prisoners. A groundbreaking report has just been published about women prisoners and their unique challenges and patterns.

William Klein, MA, Historical and Cultural Studies, GTU

Traumatic Motherhood: The Holocaust and Its Effects on Jewish Mothering

The Holocaust was unquestionably one of the most tragic and traumatic events of the 20th century. Much has been written about its causes and effects, but one area of scholarship has focused on the experiences of Jewish women survivors. Women suffered uniquely due to the intersectional nature of their trauma, and that trauma often expressed itself in how these survivors raised their children. Using aspects of Polyvagal Theory and Post-Traumatic Stress response research, this paper investigates the negative effects of the Holocaust on mothering amongst female survivors. The author concludes that creativity is crucial to healthy relationships between surviving mothers and their children.

Panel Four - Divine Female Power

Faculty Presider: Dr. Paula Arai, Eshinni & Kakushinni Professor of Women and Buddhist Studies, Institute of Buddhist Studies

Letesa Isler, PhD, Theology and Ethics, GTU

Arya Tara as a Model for Spiritual Care

Many metaphors have been used to describe Arya Tara. She has been called a guiding star, a seaworthy boat in turbulent waters, the wisdom of the moon, and the tear of the God of Compassion. She is both the mother of the Buddhas and the queen of the underworld. Because she is a Buddha, she is unaffected by the defects of cyclic existence (another term for Samsara which represents realms of existence as well as mental states). With imperturbable intention, she has vowed to remain ever-present until all sentient beings have been freed from pain and suffering. She is renowned for her swift, heroic, dynamic, and equanimous salvific response to all who seek her aid. Like the Medicine Buddha, she is a great healer with the power to invoke any resource required to offer care and comfort. Lastly, recognizing the lack of inherency of all things, including gender, Tara vowed to do all this in female form. Given all of Tara's qualities, she is an inspiring archetype for spiritual caregivers. This paper will explore Tara's legend, texts, and iconography as a foundation for developing a model that addresses fundamental spiritual care competencies.

Charissa Jaeger-Sanders, PhD, Theology and Ethics, GTU

Mother Earth: How the Wisdom of Hindu Śākta Theology of Divine Immanence Can Deepen Christian Theology and Impact Our Ecological Practices

Does it really matter how we image and understand the Divine? And are there any ethical impacts of our theology? Moreover, how might interreligious dialogue and the study of theologies outside of our home tradition impact and deepen the study of our own? If we have eyes to see and ears to listen, the Hindu Śākta theological understanding of who Mahādevī [The Great Goddess] is as both the material and efficient cause of creation has much wisdom to offer for the ecological crisis that plagues our world. That theological understanding in tandem with Scottish theologian Ruth Page's (1935-2015) Christian theological concept of pansyntheism, that points to God's profound relationship with materiality, offer us ways forward in addressing ecological crisis in which we find ourselves. The deep and intentional work of theology, especially eco-feminist theology, can lead to ethical practices that work for the flourishing and beneficence of all of creation.

Olivia Tabert, Master of Theological Studies, San Francisco Theological Seminary

Her Holy Darkness, the Divine Feminine in the Judeo-Christian Tradition

There is a long tradition of dualism in Judeo-Christian imagery of light versus dark ("In him there is no darkness at all...") But do the expositions of the scriptural actually reflect the imagery and metaphors of darkness that are in the entirety of scripture as a whole? The darkness of God, if ever mentioned in theological reflections, references a kind of hiddenness or an unfathomable transcendence. The darkness of God as an unknowable mystery has been explored by theologians such as Thomas Merton, Jean Hani, Eulio Baltazer, Catherine Keller, Meister Eckhart, Rabbi Rami Shapiro, Francis Clooney...and many others. While the concept of mystery (negative darkness) has been explored—what about the positive darkness (generative, intimate, creative, communicative, redemptive, salvific aspect)? This paper explores the Divine feminine in association with the concept and metaphors of positive (generative) darkness in the Judeo-Christian scriptures.