

HDS 2142 Women in World Christianity
Spring 2025, Monday 3pm–5:45pm
Room: TBD

Instructor: Gina A. Zurlo, Ph.D.

Email: gzurlo@hds.harvard.edu

Office: Divinity Hall #315

Office hours: Tuesday 11am–1pm, and by appointment via email. Any changes in office hours will be communicated via Canvas announcements.

Course Description

Historian Dana Robert famously described World Christianity as a “women’s movement,” citing the female majority in churches worldwide and gendered reasons for conversion to Christianity throughout history. Drawing from historical and social scientific perspectives, this course investigates the ways in which World Christianity can be considered a “woman’s movement.” This course introduces students to a global history of women’s involvement in churches and discusses the centrality of their contributions to World Christianity, both past and present. The course takes a historical approach in discussing Christian women’s roles and responsibilities from roughly the 19th–21st centuries; a geographical approach by focusing on women in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania; as well as a diverse ecclesial approach in discussing trends among Catholic, Orthodox, and Evangelical women. Topics covered include, but are not limited to, Christianity and gender-based violence, peacebuilding, theological education, and debates over women’s leadership. All course materials (assignments, announcements, readings, grades, etc.) can be found on Canvas, and students will have the opportunity to write a final research paper.

Course Goals

- Develop a historical framework for the impact of women in Christian history in the 19th and 20th centuries.
- Reflect on the contributions of women in the expansion of and changes within Christianity in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania in the 20th century.
- Articulate the gendered dynamics and tensions within World Christianity and describe the diversity of challenges and opportunities women encounter in Christian communities.
- Understand the differences among women’s church-based experiences in various geographic and ecclesial contexts.
- Engage in academic research and writing on women, in particular, women’s biography.
- Increase knowledge of major themes, debates, and conversations in World Christianity studies as they relate to gender.

Required Texts

- Elizabeth E. Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia* (University of Texas Press, 1995). Available digitally at HDS library.
- Ini Dorcas Dah, *Women Do More Work than Men: Birifor Women as Change Agents in the Mission and Expansion of the Church in West Africa (Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana)* (Wipf & Stock, 2017). PDF on Canvas.

- Eliza Kent, *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in South India* (Oxford University Press, 2004). Available digitally at HDS library.
- Selections from Jessie G. Lutz, ed. *Pioneer Christian Women: Gender, Christianity, and Social Mobility* (Lehigh University Press, 2010). PDFs on Canvas.
- Gina A. Zurlo, *Women in World Christianity: Building and Sustaining a Global Movement* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2023). PDF on Canvas.
- Articles or chapters as assigned per class session, available to view or download on Canvas.

Assignments

All assignments are due the day and time indicated below and should be submitted on Canvas. Assignments will be graded on Canvas. SAT/UNSAT: all assignments must be fulfilled at a passing grade (C or higher). Assignments will be docked half a letter grade each day they are late. If you need an extension, email Dr. Zurlo at least five days before the due date.

- **Class attendance and one-on-one meeting (10%)**
 - Weekly attendance is crucial to get the most out of this course. Students are expected to complete the weekly readings on time and come to class prepared for discussion.
 - Set up a time to meet with Dr. Zurlo for 30 minutes in **the first month of class**, preferably in person, but Zoom can be an option. This is an informal meeting to answer any questions about the course and get to know each other.
 - Meeting must be completed by **February 28**.
- **Weekly reading responses (20%)**
 - Summarize your thoughts, reflections, and responses to the weekly readings in a 3-page double spaced paper. You will receive feedback on each paper every week. Students are allowed one “skip” week during the semester.
 - Papers are **due at 9am** the day of class.
- **Mid-term paper: Biography in historical context #1 (25%)**
 - Choose a woman in Christian history from the global South (Asia, Africa, Latin America, Pacific Islands) and write a research paper that includes a biography of her life in historical context. More details on this assignment are available on Canvas. Students writing about an African woman can submit an edited version of their work to the Dictionary of African Christian Biography for publication.
 - Page length requirements are as follows:
 - Bachelors: 8–10pp
 - Masters: 10–12pp
 - PhD: 15–17pp
 - **Mid-term paper due Monday, March 24 at midnight on Canvas.**
- **Mid-term paper digital humanities project (20%)**
 - Students will produce digital content related to their mid-term paper subject. Examples of digital content include recording a podcast, series of TikToks, YouTube video, or animated slide deck to share information about your chosen woman for a general audience. Be creative! More details are available on Canvas.
 - **Digital project due Monday, April 7 at midnight on Canvas.**
- **Final paper: Biography in historical context #2 (25%)**

- Choose a woman in Christian history from the global South (Asia, Africa, Latin America, Pacific Islands) and write a research paper that includes a biography of her life in historical context. More details on this assignment are available on Canvas. Students writing about an African woman can submit an edited version of their work to the Dictionary of African Christian Biography for publication.
- Page length requirements are as follows:
 - Bachelors: 8–10pp
 - Masters: 10–12pp
 - PhD: 15–17pp
- **Final paper due Monday, May 12 at midnight on Canvas.**
- **Special instructions for doctoral students taking this course:**
 - You must **read one additional book** and sit for an oral exam with Dr. Zurlo during finals week. See the bibliography at the end of the syllabus for the list of potential books. The oral exam will include questions about the content and structure of the book and putting it into conversation with other course materials.

Schedule of Classes

This schedule is subject to change. Refer to the weekly pages on Canvas for the most up-to-date readings. Readings are due the day they are assigned. It is a good practice to take notes when you read so you are ready to discuss the material during class.

January 27: Course introduction

- Review syllabus, course expectations, introductions
- World Christianity overview

No reading this week.

February 3: Social science perspectives on women in World Christianity

- Women in the world today
- Demographic overview; women in church leadership

Readings

- Zurlo, introduction and chapter 1
- Dah, foreword, chapters 1–3
- Dana L. Robert, “World Christianity as a Woman’s Movement,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, 30, no 4 (October 2006).

February 10: Women in mission history

- American women in mission
- Women and theological education

Readings

- Zurlo, chapters 6, 10, and 16 (optional, chapter 4)
- Dah, chapters, 4–6
- Verena Schaefroth, “Women in Male Spaces: Female Faculty in Theological Education in Africa,” *InSights Journal* vol. 10, no. 1 (2024): 2–16.

No Class February 17: President's Day

February 24: Women in African Christianity

- Researching and writing women's biography
- Guest lecturer: Dr. Michèle Miller Sigg, Executive Director of the Dictionary of African Christian Biography project at Boston University School of Theology

Readings

- Zurlo, chapter 2
- Dah, chapters, 7–8
- **One** of the following:
 - Edith Blumhofer, "Introduction," in *Aimee Semple McPherson: Everybody's Sister* (Erdmans, 1993).
 - Christopher Evans, "Introduction," in *Do Everything: The Biography of Frances Willard* (Oxford University Press, 2022).
 - Galawdewos (Wendy Laura Belcher and Michael Kleiner, ed.), "Introduction to the Text," in *The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros: A Seventeenth-Century African* (Princeton University Press, 2015).
 - Gail King, "Introduction," in *A Model for All Christian Women: Candida Xu, a Chinese Christian Woman of the Seventeenth Century* (Routledge, 2020).
 - Michael King, "Introduction," in *Whina: A Biography of Whina Cooper* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1983).
 - John F. Sensbach, "Prologue," in *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Harvard University Press, 2005).
 - Theresa A. Yugar, "Introduction," in *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Feminist Reconstruction of Biography and Text* (Wipf & Stock, 2014).

One-on-one meeting must be completed by February 28.

March 3: Women in Oceanic Christianity

- Ecology and climate change
- Guest lecturer: Dr. Therese Lautua, College Fellow of Indigenous Religions, Harvard University

Readings

- Zurlo, chapters 7 and 15
- Brusco, chapters 1–3

March 10: Women in Catholicism

- Guest lecturer: Dr. Raúl Zagarra, Assistant Professor of Roman Catholic Theological Studies, Harvard Divinity School

Readings

- Zurlo, chapters 8 and 17
- Brusco, chapters 4–6

No class March 17: HDS Spring Break

March 24: Women in Latin American Christianity

- Liberation theology
- Rise of *evangélico* Christianity

Readings

- Zurlo, chapter 5
- Brusco, chapters 7 and 8
- María Pilar Aquino, “Introduction” and “The Irruption of History into Women’s Life and Consciousness,” from *Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America* (Orbis Books, 1993).

Mid-term paper due at midnight on Canvas.

March 31: Women in Evangelicalism

- Egalitarianism, complementarianism, local feminisms
- In-class documentary viewing: “For Our Daughters” (2024)

Readings

- Zurlo, chapter 13 (optional, chapters 11–12)
- Lutz, ed.
 - Jessie G. Lutz, “Introduction,” pp1–13
 - Jessie G. Lutz, “Women in Imperial China: Ideal, Stereotype, and Reality,” pp29–50
- Kent, introduction & chapter 1 (optional chapter 2)

April 7: Women in Orthodoxy

- The female diaconate
- Orthodox women in the ecumenical movement

Readings

- Zurlo, chapter 9
- Lutz, ed.
 - Claudia von Collani, “Lady Candida Xu: A Widow Between Chinese and Christian Ideals,” pp224–245
 - Ling Oi Ki, “Bible Women,” pp246–266
- Kent, chapters 3–4
- Leonie B. Liveris, “Women are Not Subordinate, But They Are Different,” in *Ancient Taboos and Gender Prejudice: Challenges for Orthodox Women and the Church* (Ashgate Pub., 2007).

Digital humanities project due at midnight on Canvas.

April 14: Women in Asian Christianity

- Bible women in China, India, Korea
- Women's Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians

Readings

- Zurlo, chapter 3
- Lutz, ed.
 - Jessie G. Lutz, "Women's Education and Social Mobility," pp393–420
 - Jessie G. Lutz, "Beyond Missions: Christianity as a Chinese Religion in a Changing China," pp423–437
- Kent, conclusion (optional chapters 5–6)

April 21: Christianity and gender-based violence

- Case study: Papua New Guinea

Readings

- Zurlo, chapter 14 and conclusion
- Fulata Lusungu Moyo, "Child Marriage, the Untold Story of My Mother, and the Church in Africa: A Feminist Ethics of *Ubuntu*," in *Alterity and the Evasion of Justice: Explorations of the "Other" in World Christianity*, edited by Deanna Ferree Womack and Raimundo C. Barreto (Fortress Press, 2023).

April 28: Course wrap up

- Christian women depicted in art with potential visit to the Harvard Art Museum
- Showcase of digital humanities projects

No reading this week.

Final paper due May 12 at midnight on Canvas.

Accessibility

Students requesting accommodations or with accessibility needs for this course should contact Drema Bowers, Assistant Director for Student Support, as soon as possible (dbowers@hds.harvard.edu, 617-496-3856). You will need to provide them with a request of the accommodations sought and documentation of the functional limitations due to medical circumstances or a disability that substantiates your request. Students who are registered in GSAS or FAS should contact the Accessible Education Office, AEO@fas.harvard.edu, 617-496-8707.

Policy on Collaboration

You are encouraged to consult with one another on papers, and you may also share library resources. You may find it useful to discuss your ideas with your peers, but you should ensure that the written papers you submit for evaluation are the result of your own research and reflect your own approach to the topic.

Religious Holy Days

Please speak with the instructor within the first two weeks of the semester if you must miss a class, examination, or course requirement due to a religious observance. Please know that Massachusetts state law specifies that all students who must miss a class, exam, or course requirement because of a religious observance shall be provided with an opportunity to make up the requirement on another day, so long as this does not create an unreasonable burden for the school.

Policy on Generative AI

HDS, and Harvard University as a whole, encourage responsible experimentation with generative AI (GAI) tools, but there are important considerations to keep in mind when using these tools, including (a) information security and data privacy, (b) copyright and intellectual property issues, (c) the trustworthiness of content they generate, (d) expectations of the specific instructors of courses for which you might use it, and (e) your own academic integrity. Using GAI can seriously undermine your ability to think and learn, but it can also be a helpful research tool and conversation partner. Any use of GAI in this course must be appropriately acknowledged and cited. It is each student's responsibility to assess the validity and applicability of any GAI output that is submitted; you bear the final responsibility for properly validating and citing the content of your work. Violations of this policy will be considered academic misconduct. I draw your attention to the fact that different classes at Harvard could implement different AI policies, and it is the student's responsibility to conform to expectations for each course.

Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium

This course has been pre-approved for the BTI Consortium International Mission and Ecumenism Certificate. If you would like to register for the certificate, or learn more, visit: <https://www.bostontheological.org/certificates>. Contact btioffice@bostontheological.org with any questions.

Bibliography for Doctoral Students

If there's another book you'd like to read, we can discuss it during your one-on-one meeting. Be strategic in your choice.

Dzubinski, Leanne M., and Anneke H. Stasson. *Women in the Mission of the Church: Their Opportunities and Obstacles Throughout Christian History* (Baker Academic, 2021).

Gnanadason, Aruna. *With Courage and Compassion: Women and the Ecumenical Movement* (Fortress Press, 2020).

Heywood, Linda M. *Njinga of Angola: Africa's Warrior Queen* (Harvard University Press, 2017).

Hodgson, Dorothy. *The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters Between Maasai and Missionaries* (Indiana University Press, 2005).

Hoehler-Fatton, Cynthia. *Women of Fire and Spirit: History, Faith, and Gender in Roho Religion in Western Kenya* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

Isasi-Díaz, Ada María. *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (John Knox, 1996).

Johnson, Mary, Mary L. Gautier, Patricia Wittberg, and Thu T. Do. *Migration for Mission: International Catholic Sisters in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

Katoppo, Marianne. *Compassionate and Free: An Asian Woman's Theology* (World Council of Churches, 1979).

Kwok, Pui-Lan. *Chinese Women and Christianity, 1860–1927* (Scholars Press, 1992).

Liveris, Leonie B. *Ancient Taboos and Gender Prejudice: Challenges for Orthodox Women and the Church* (Ashgate Pub, 2007).

Martin, Phyllis M. *Catholic Women of Congo-Brazzaville* (Indiana University Press, 2009).

Matis, Hannah W. *A History of Women in Christianity to 1600* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2023).

Muir, Elizabeth G. *A Women's History of the Christian Church: Two Thousand Years of Female Leadership* (University of Toronto Press, 2019).

Oduyoye, Mercy A. *Beads and Strands: Reflections on an African Woman on Christianity in Africa* (Orbis Books, 2004).

Oduyoye, Mercy A. *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Orbis Books, 1995).

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*, 2nd ed (Fortress Press, 2012).

Sensbach, Jon F. *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Harvard University Press, 2005).

Summers, Anne. *Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonisation of Women in Australia*. Revised edition (University of New South Wales Press, 2016).

Wojciechowski, Jennifer Hornyak. *Women and the Christian Story: A Global History* (Fortress Press, 2022).