Course Description:
Over the centuries, holy women have inspired the faithful and they continue to fascinate: The 2007 publication of a posthumous edition of Mother Theresa’s *Be My Light*, for instance, challenged popular images of the conservative saint of the slums and was widely discussed in secular media. The ideal of holiness has taken many forms, inspiring increased piety, martyrdom, monasticism, mysticism, and social activism. An examination of holy women from various traditions will disclose the diverse ways in which particular communities have understood and practiced essential elements of holiness.

Readings will focus on primary sources talking of holy women such as Sara or Hannah, the mother of the Prophet Samuel, the Marys of the New Testament, Perpetua, the Prophet Muhamma’ds wives Khadidja and Aisha, as well as later manifestations of holiness such as Hildegard of Bingen, Dolce of Worms and Rabi’a, among others. We will explore parts of the Bible, hagiographies (lives of the saints), treatises on holiness, and accounts of modern heroes. Each class will consist of background lecture and the discussion of texts, often led by students with short written assignments prepared for class.

Required Texts:

You will also need access to copies of the Bible (incl. Apocrypha) and the Qur’an. If you don’t have a Bible, I recommend the *New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, Augmented Third Edition*, New Revised Standard Version. OUP, 2007.

Course Requirements:
Your grade consists of the following:
Participation, incl. one in-class presentation: 20%
2 short papers: 30%
Final paper: 50%

Syllabus

*Introduction: What marks a woman as holy?*

*Peter Brown, Cult of the Saints*
1. Classical Holy Women
   .... in Jewish Writings

The matriarchs Sara, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah

- **Sara**
  
  Genesis 12-23 (at least 12, 16-18, 20-23)

- **Rebecca**
  
  Genesis 24-25, 27; bT Berachot 26b

- **Rachel and Leah**
  
  Genesis 29-35

- **Miriam**
  
  Exodus 2:1-10; Exodus 15:1-21, Numbers 12, Micah 6:4

- **Hannah**
  
  1 Samuel 18-19; 25:44; 2 Samuel 3;6.*

   .... in Christian Writings

The Marys: Mary the Mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalen, Mary & Martha

- **Mary, the mother of Jesus**
  

- **Mary Magdalene**
  

- **Mary & Martha**
  
• **Perpetua & Felicitas**

[http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/perpetua.html](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/perpetua.html)


... in Muslim Writings

• **Khadija**

Islam and the Example of the Prophet; Denny, Ch. 3 in K&B, "Prophet and Wali."*

• **Aisha**

Hadith

• **Fatima**

Hadith

2. Holy women in the Middle Ages

• **Dolce of Worms**


• **Hildegard of Bingen**


• **Rabi’a**


3. Women who are holy to more than one tradition
• **Hagar**

  Genesis 16: 21
  Gordon, Cynthia. "Hagar: a throw-away character among the matriarchs?"

• **Maccabean Martyrs**

  2 Maccabees 7; 4 Maccabees 8-18
  Young, Robin Darling. "The "woman with the soul of Abraham": traditions about the mother of the Maccabean martyrs. Women like this", p 67-81.
  Atlanta: Scholars Press.:*

• **Mary & Maryam**

  Mark 15:40; Luke 1:26-56, 2; Matthew 1:18-25, 2, 27:55-56; John 2:1-11,
  19:25-27; Acts 1:12-26; Revelations 12:1.
  Qur'an 3:38-40; 19
  Smith, J. I. "The Virgin Mary in Islamic tradition and commentary".

  4. Holy women in our days

• **Edith Stein**


• **Mother Theresa**

  Cahill, Lisa Sowle. "Mother Teresa: postmodern saint or Christian classic?"

• **Fatima Yashrutiyyah**


  5. Conclusion