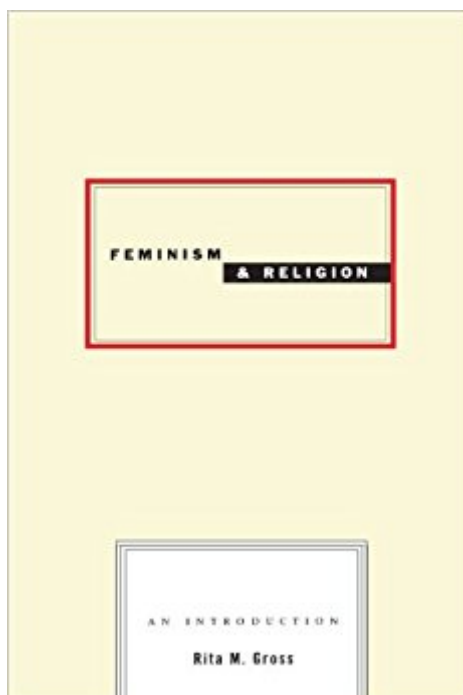


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# Feminism And Religion



## Synopsis

Rita M. Gross offers an engaging survey of the changes feminism has wrought in religious ideas, beliefs, and practices around the world, as well as in the study and understanding of religion itself.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this illuminating work, Gross (professor of philosophy and religion at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire) traces the historical role of women in religion, including the impact of feminist scholarship on the study of religion and theology. Gross does not limit her explorations to the roles of women in Judaism and Christianity but ranges over the roles of women in Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. She also examines feminist spirituality, which has developed the contours of an organized religion. The author points out that all religions, including Christianity and Judaism, have not always been patriarchal, and she notes some groundbreaking work done by American Christian feminists in the 1800s that had been mostly forgotten by the 1950s. Historians of religion and theologians are in Gross's debt for casting a bright light on the relationship between women and religion. Copyright 1996 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Gross (Buddhism After Patriarchy, SUNY, 1992), who teaches philosophy and religious studies at the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire, provides a splendid feminist critique and social vision of the radical changes that have been wrought in religious ideas, institutions, and rituals as a result of

feminism. She reevaluates the past and forthrightly considers how great but sexist religious traditions can meet the needs of postpatriarchal people. Her analysis is strengthened by her inclusion of non-Western religions as well as a freedom from androcentrism. Gross not only evaluates past and present but also explores possibilities for future development in the areas of Woman-Church, ecological awareness, affirmation of embodiment and finitude, and affirmation of relationship and community. An outstanding book; highly recommended for all libraries. Carolyn M. Craft, Longwood Coll., Farmville, Va. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Rita Gross was born in Wisconsin, grew up Protestant, studied the role of Australian Aborigine women for her doctorate, practiced Judaism for a decade, and then became a Buddhist scholar and practitioner, pioneering in issues concerning Buddhism and gender. She taught comparative religion at the University of Wisconsin. Her teaching creds serve her well in this book, in which she defines feminism, religion, and religious studies and briefly tells the history of the interaction between feminism and religion. Then she addresses four central issues, probably the major one being: are the world's major religions reformable or are they inherently sexist? To me the key chapters are the last two. In Chapter 5, "Has It Always Been That Way?," she looks at the scholarship regarding the ancient past. In Chapter 6, "What Next? - Post-Patriarchal Religion," she surveys feminist visions for the future. Gross sometimes wears a T-shirt that proclaims: "Feminism is the radical proposition that women are human beings." She finds this necessary because "neither conventional scholarship nor lifestyles really take the humanity of women seriously." By feminism, she means "a critical and reconstructive stance vis-à-vis the institutions and values of one's own culture, religion, and academic environment." After laying out the data on the depth of patriarchy and sexism in traditional religions, Gross says the question for a religious feminist is what to do next. She tells what some feminists have done to reform their religion and what others have done to create or recapture the Goddess traditions. In her look at prehistoric times she examines the scholarship about the long period before male dominance and the possible causes for the emergence of patriarchy. She tries to give a balanced view on varied hypotheses. When she moves to What Next? she critiques varied feminist visions of the future, giving a good bit of space to Mary Daly (reviewed above). Starhawk is the best-known woman who has experimented with the feminist spirituality movement. Gross quotes Starhawk as saying, "We do not believe in the Goddess - we connect with Her; through the moon, the stars, the ocean, the earth, through trees, animals, through other human beings, through ourselves." Charlene Spretnak, also quoted, emphasizes the importance of connection in religious practice: "If a person is born with a mind that does not readily perceive connectedness with other

people and is raised in a culture that does not encourage such perceptions, he will probably go through life seeing only separations, struggling with the frustrations of this worldview and accepting its corollaries as truth."This book is a very good place to start in rethinking your religion at this time. It objectively lays out the situation we are in and what others are doing. Then it leaves you with your decision.

Excellent book! I highly recommend this to anyone interested in feminism, religion, or simply shifting the focus of scholarship to include more voices.

Rita Gross is one of the pioneers in the movement of feminist study in religion. She, along with colleagues such as Carol P. Christ and Mary Daly, have had the challenging duty of representing feminist scholars in this field of past androcentric focus-- this book reads like a Who's Who of feminist scholars and works as a good jumping-off place for further study. By itself, it provides a good overview for evaluating the difference between furthering the feminist interest and seeking an androgynous balance in scholarship. She explores the two basic models of reaction which feminists have had to traditional belief structures, reformist and revolutionary, and traces the paths each have taken. Gross also has the distinct advantage of being a feminist scholar with background in the study of eastern religions, specifically Buddhism. She encourages others to branch out and examine how androcentrism has affected other worldviews as well as the western, primarily Abrahamic one. So this book presents a feminist analysis on two levels: that of the historical religions, as well as the study of religion itself. It is definitely an awakening for anyone who is unfamiliar with how dramatic an effect a paradigm shift can have in scholarship.

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