

*Feminism, Law, and Religion*. Edited by Marie A. Failinger, Elizabeth R. Schiltz, and Susan J. Stabile.  
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In the field of feminism and religion, the intersection with law has been underrepresented—a gap that *Feminism, Law, and Religion* seeks to help fill. With an abundant seventeen chapters and four hundred pages, the volume makes a significant contribution to expanding the conversation. Ranging from Buddhism to Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and more, the editors, Marie A. Failinger, Elizabeth R. Schiltz, and Susan J. Stabile, have clearly sought to present a broad engagement in religion. Although each of the contributing authors demonstrates mastery of his or her tradition or field, their various contributions are accessible to readers who may not be familiar with a particular tradition because of the authors' ample use of definition of terms and explanation of traditions. Providing both breadth and accessibility, the volume is a resource tool as well as a substantive base for ongoing study and critical discussion.

The volume is structured in four parts. The chapters in part one, “Feminist Legal Theory—Religious and Secular Encounters,” generally engage themes of defining feminism or feminist terms through the lens of religious women. In this section, Schiltz, Stabile, Cheryl B. Preston, and Emily Albrink Hartigan question the limits as well as the porosity of the lines between religious worldviews and feminist commitments. In discussing this tension between feminism and religion, Preston writes, “If forced to choose, I, like many other women, would choose religion” (31). In part two, “Theological Insights Applied to Dilemmas of Woman’s Social Existence,” exploration of the same tension continues but is focused on more concrete situations. Ayelet Shachar, Asifa Quraishi-Landes, and Failinger discuss marriage and divorce from their respective religious traditions, whereas Deborah J. Cantrell and Juliane Hammer engage issues of domestic violence. Also in this section, M. Christian Green addresses how newer frameworks of feminism and human rights suggest possible directions for the emerging conversation. The section concludes with a chapter by Nimat Hafez Barazangi in which she delineates various approaches to the intersection of social issues and women’s interpretation of religious texts. This chapter serves as a good transition to part three, “Feminist Readings of Scriptural Texts on Women and Women’s Rights,” in which Frances Raday, Naomi Graetz, and Hina Azam contribute detailed essays tracing the contours of how scriptural interpretations shape women’s lives throughout history as well as in the current moment. Finally, in the book’s last three chapters, which constitute part four, “Women’s Leadership and Standing within Religious Communities,” Sara Butler, Rebecca Redwood French, and Mary Szto examine the possibilities, limits, and challenges to women’s religious leadership as deacons, nuns, and priests—Catholic, Buddhist, Confucious, and Dao.

In introducing this volume representing wide engagement, the editors state their intention that the text “model the kind of conversations that its authors want feminists to have with others both inside their religious traditions and across religious traditions” (xx). In this way, *Feminism, Law, and Religion* is framed as an extensive conversation that is also just beginning. At the same time, it is a conversation that is picking up a thread in a wider conversation on feminism and religion that has been ongoing for decades (or, as some might argue, centuries). Notably, the field of feminist studies in religion also included an early edited volume, *Womanspirit Rising*,

which remains a foundational text in theology and religious studies.<sup>1</sup> As the decades have passed and the publications increased, the conversation of feminism and religion has become more and more layered, complex, and nuanced. *Feminism, Law, and Religion* contributes to this richness by exploring the intersection of law with feminism and religion.

Given the many strands of feminism that appear in popular and academic discourses, unsurprisingly this volume reflects multiple approaches to the definition and framework of feminism. In their foreword, the editors offer a list of themes they recognize as emerging within feminist theory rather than attempt a definition. This framing allows space for a range of approaches to feminism to emerge in the subsequent chapters. While the volume's title might lead a reader to assume the essays will all be "feminist," some authors resist, ignore, or outright reject the label of feminist. For example, in the detailed historical recounting of legal traditions on violence against women, neither Azam nor Graetz use language of feminism. However, each essay shows a pro-woman stance that easily aligns with generally understood feminist standpoints denouncing violence against women. Barazangi rejects the term "Islamic feminism" as a co-opting of her work by some Western feminists while also carefully defining feminism and explaining her rejection (273). Preston acknowledges that "there are almost as many strains of feminism and feminist theories as there are lilies" before carefully defining what she means by feminism (27). I agree with Preston that it is vital to acknowledge that feminism is not monolithic. Indeed, some scholars now speak of "feminisms," using the plural to reflect this range and diversity. While some essays in the volume reflect this awareness, others present a feminism (to accept or reject) based on narrower or more dated understandings of feminism. In reading the essays, it would be helpful for the reader to attend to how the author does (or does not) define feminism and measure this against one's own understanding.

The range of viewpoints on feminism as well as the multiple religious traditions addressed is a strength of the volume. Listening for the points of tension, as well as places of convergence, indeed, generates a desire for continued conversation. As with any complex conversation, there is an inherent challenge in where to draw the lines that cluster some chapters together and place others elsewhere. For example, to further simplify the division of the book's four parts noted above, they can be understood as focusing on theory, application, texts, and religious leadership. Each section includes multiple religious traditions and various approaches to feminism and law. In effect, such an approach demonstrates how certain questions and issues cut across different religious traditions.

While this approach has the impact of bringing different traditions into a multi-faith context that reflects the pluralistic world in which we live, I imagine that alternate orders would also generate rich discussions. For example, grouping together the four chapters by Shachar, Quraishi-Landes, Hammer, and Barazangi would show the tensions *within* Islam. The varying definitions and approaches to the intersection of shari'a law and secular law demonstrate that the issues are neither monolithic within Islam nor simply addressed. Of course, grouping chapters along lines of religious traditions risks missing how certain questions carry across religious differences. And yet, by underscoring the differences *within* a tradition the reader is challenged to resist a simple narrative of how law in Islam "works." One way to show variation within a tradition is to show the shifts within a tradition over time, such as demonstrated in the chapters by Azam and Graetz, which present historical overviews. Likewise, reading chapters along a single religious tradition makes it clear that approaches to law in a tradition also vary *within* a given moment in time.

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1 Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising* (1979; repr. San Francisco: HarperOne, 1992).

When attempting a volume that engages multiple religious traditions, navigating how to frame these differences is significant. Notably, the individual chapters generally do not take a comparative religions approach. (Raday's chapter on modesty is an exception by addressing Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.) However, using a particular question or theme across a cluster of chapters allows interesting comparisons and conversations to emerge. Of course, the editors' organization of the four parts functions in this way in connection to the four themes noted above. Other interesting possibilities are also present. For example, the question of what it means to be religious in public can be traced across the chapters by Preston, Albrink Hartigan, Shachar, and Raday. These four chapters together lay an excellent foundation for a classroom discussion. Another possibility would be to explore questions of scripture and wife beating by reading essays by Hammer and Graetz together. These multiple possibilities for how to weave the chapters together testifies to the strength of the volume as a resource for teaching and discussion.

As a broad volume intended to spark thinking and conversation, the pages point beyond the text itself to future areas of exploration and discussion. In my estimation, the volume points towards three areas of future scholarship: expanded feminist frameworks, wider inclusion of issues, and opportunities for greater depth. In regards to expanded feminist frameworks, I have already noted that feminism resists singular definitions and frameworks. In addition to Preston's gesture towards the many strains of feminism, Green's chapter points towards the "waves" in feminist history that reflect how feminism shifts and changes. One key feminist concept that could be helpful in developing the conversation would be intersectionality. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality challenges feminists to recognize the ways in which social categories intersect to shape women's experiences differently.<sup>2</sup> Through the lens of intersectionality, feminism expands from a focus simply on issues of gender to include social dynamics of race, class, nationality, sexuality, marital status, religion, and more. In a way, the volume attempts a kind of intersectional analysis by examining the nexus of women, law, and religion. Yet, more remains to be explored by attending to these other dynamics of social life that so deeply shape women's experience. Another significant feminist framework to engage further would be the discourses of postcolonial feminism. Hammer's essay draws on the work of Saba Mahmood to present a nuanced understanding of feminism, religion, and the agency of women.<sup>3</sup> Widely read for its challenge to Western, white feminism, Mahmood's work breaks open feminism to a more diverse, global understanding. Barazangi also engages postcolonial discourse to help deepen her critique of both Western feminism and certain approaches to interpretations of the Qur'an. Whether through intersectionality, postcolonial discourses, or third-wave feminism, embracing expanded understandings of feminism will serve to further enrich the analysis of feminism, law, and religion.

In similar fashion, a wider inclusion of issues in the discussion of feminism, law, and religion would also add to the developing conversation. This volume does an excellent job of addressing a number of critical issues facing women today: domestic violence, opportunities for religious leadership, expression of religious identity, as well as marriage and divorce. Yet, as Green points out in her essay, some feminists are getting involved in a wider array of issues including those on a global scale (145). For example, in many parts of the world, women and girls remain the primary carriers of water—a physically taxing and time-consuming task essential for survival.<sup>4</sup> In an era of climate

2 Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99.

3 Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

4 "International Decade for Action 'Water for Life' 2005–2015," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, last modified October 23, 2014, <http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/gender.shtml>.

change, as access to clean drinking water is challenged by drought or flooding, what impact does this have on women and girls? Could the right to water be a *feminist* issue? How might feminist lawyers or legal theory contribute to alleviating the challenges women and girls face in securing reliable access to clean drinking water? In what ways do issues of religion intersect—who “owns” the water in a particular religious cosmology? Such questions reflect how the issues facing women include questions of environment, property, and human rights more broadly. This one example indicates the many areas of law to which a feminist legal perspective, shaped by religious commitments to social justice and human dignity, might turn.

Finally, I imagine that future directions will continue delving deeper into the particular questions and areas of concern already included in this volume. Engaging this volume through teaching and future scholarship will certainly help to develop the conversation as the editors intended. While I enter the conversation as a Unitarian Universalist minister rather than as a student of law, I found the essays engaging, accessible, and provocative of further questions. As someone formed by the field of feminist studies and religion, I found the volume deepened my appreciation for the role of law in shaping our lives. Given the significant power of law in our lives, I am grateful to those seeking to bring feminist analyses and sensibilities to legal discourse and practices. As someone now situated outside the academy as a religious leader, reading this volume underscored for me the importance of attending to the nuances of the intersections between religious commitments and public institutions such as law and government. Living as we do in a multi-faith, multicultural context, the conversation of feminism, law, and religion is not going away anytime soon. *Feminism, Law, and Religion* is an important volume for helping to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for this nexus.

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