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Saul O Sidore Memorial Lecture Series Features Modern Roles of Women and Religion

By *Tracy Manforte*
UNH News Bureau

DURHAM, N.H. -- Several departments and programs at the University of New Hampshire have joined to produce an interdisciplinary, multimedia series on women and religion this academic year. Among the theme-based events will be the 1999-2000 Sidore Lecture Series, featuring five guest speakers who will discuss both the changing roles of women in modern religions and the changing roles of religion for modern women.

According to David Frankfurter, associate professor of history and religious studies, the appeal of religious lives to many often well-educated women has required scholars to reconsider their assumptions about the repressiveness of religious lives, and to ask how, often within patriarchal traditions, women construct their identities. Do women submit to patriarchal systems or do they carve out a separate piety that enriches them as women?

The past century has also seen the rise of women religious leaders, from the hybrid Elizabeth Clare Prophet to numerous ordained women rabbis and ministers in both liberal and conservative congregations across the country. Have these leaders brought a distinctive feminine voice or spirituality to the organizations and congregations they serve?

Folklorist Elaine Lawless, of the University of Missouri, Columbia, will begin to address these and other themes in her talk, "Transforming the Master Narrative: How Women Shift the Religious Subject." The lecture will take place Thursday, Sept. 30, in the Memorial Union Building theater, from 12:40 - 2 p.m.

Lawless is the author of four ethnographic studies examining the lives and vocations of women in Pentecostal and mainstream American churches, including "Preaching Revolution: Calling for Connection in a Disconnected Time" (1996) and "Holy Women, Wholly Women" (1993).

The Sidore Lecture Series continues in October with Emilie Townes, of the Union Theological Society,

speaking about African American feminist identity-building in contemporary American Christianity. Her talk, titled "Growing like Topsy: Womanist Religious Reflections on Difference and Solidarity," will take place Thursday, Oct. 28, 12:40 - 2 p.m., in the MUB theater.

The series continues next semester with the following lectures:

- Robert Orsi, Indiana University, "Women's Prayer in Popular Catholicism."
- Barbara Stowasser, Georgetown University, "Scripture and Gender in Islam: A Changing Religious Discourse."
- Catherine Wessinger, Loyola University, "Charisma and Credentials: Women's Religious Leadership in America."

All lectures are free and open to the public and take place in the MUB theater from 12:40 to 2 p.m.

The Sidore Lecture Series was established in 1965 in memory of Saul O Sidore, of Manchester. The purpose of the series is to offer programs that raise critical and sometimes controversial issues facing society. The series is sponsored by the Sidore Foundation, the UNH Center for the Humanities, and the UNH Foundation.

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