



Theo 278: Religion and Gender
John Felice Rome Center
Fall 2024

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Office Hours: Thursdays 2.00-3.00 pm or by appointment

Course Description

In Theo 278 you will be introduced to contemporary gender theory, and discuss how it can be applied as a critical tool for examining religion past and present. Contemporary perspectives are woven consistently throughout the course with analysis and discussion on sexualities, gender identities and feminist critique.

In the first part of the course we focus initially on the Garden of Eden in biblical narrative, and study its history of interpretation in relation to constructed female and male gender roles. Further biblical texts that relate to this narrative will be analysed, as well as how its content has impacted on Christian beliefs down the centuries. This text is foundational, providing archetypes that both consciously and unconsciously inform gender identity in Western and Post-Colonial contexts. We will continue by exploring a selection of biblical texts that divulge how some biblical authors utilized gender in order to destabilize the given tropes of their times. You will be shown how these texts are interpreted in art and sculpture, and be encouraged to study examples in Rome and across Europe.

For the remainder of the course we move outside the biblical and Christian worlds to observe how gender has been constructed in a selection of the world's major religious traditions, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam and Indigenous traditions. These foci will provide a broad global perspective of religious beliefs and practices.

A central feature on Theo 278 is the project. Your project, selected with consultation and supervised during the second half of the course, will provide a unique opportunity to delve in depth into a particular aspect of religion and gender. These projects highlight the distinctive roles and expectations prescribed for gendered identities, illustrated, for example, by sacred texts, rites of passage, leadership, festivals, pilgrimages and other ritual practices. You will research your chosen subject's context in terms of its history, its concept of the divine and spirituality, its beliefs and practices, and its contemporary outlook and development – examined through the expectations and experiences of adherents. As well as exploring your subject's origins and belief system, your project can include archival material, images, interviews and other appropriate empirical data.

Important note: At the outset you need to be aware that, because this course examines religious beliefs and issues pertaining to gender roles and identities, discussions will include sexual and gender expressions, body anatomy, sexual attitudes and behaviors. Exploring and challenging our own assumptions and expectations about both religion and sexual identity may produce a certain level of discomfort. The classroom should be a safe space where respect and consideration for each student's individual expression is paramount for learning. Students' individual opinions and feelings are to be fostered, protected, and respected. Any personal opinion or experience shared within the class must and will remain within the class.

Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this course will have the ability to:

- Develop their academic skills to construct a well-informed argument in writing and oral presentation
- Demonstrate their critical skills to evaluate secondary sources in relation to primary texts
- Understand diversities and similarities in gender roles across major world religions
- Identify and explain key issues in gender studies and religion from an historical and global perspective
- Synthesize information from a variety of academic disciplines as it relates to the impact of religion on women and men's lives around the world

The Project

Selection of viable topics for your projects begins in earnest after the Fall Break. During class workshops we discuss your project plans, your research materials and schedules for completion. The workshops and consultations aim to ensure projects are underway and progressing in good time to meet the submission date.

Readings and Responses

For each class you will be given questions based on the reading/s for that week - posted on SAKAI Resources. Your responses to these questions discussed in your groups will prepare you for the Midterm Exam, and the Final quiz, overall they will be assessed towards your Participation grading.

The aim of these exercises is to ensure that you are consistently building on your knowledge base and developing your reflections in this subject, as well as honing your skills in critical reading and analysis.

Assessment Components

10% Participation in group/class discussions and group project presentations

35% Midterm Exam

Finals

5% 1. Annotated Project Plan

10% 2. Final Quiz

40% 2. Written Project Paper

Grading

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|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| 94-100: A | 90-93: A- | 87-89: B+ | 84-86: B | 80-83: B- | |
| 77-79: C+ | 74-76: C | 70-73: C- | 67-69: D+ | 60-66: D | 59 or lower: F |

Late or Missed Assignments

Late or missed assignments will not be accepted for grading except with authorization.

Attendance Policy In accordance with the JFRC mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, all courses adhere to the following absence policy. Prompt attendance, preparation and active participation in course discussions are expected from every student:

- For all classes meeting once a week, students cannot incur more than one absence. Absences beyond this will result in 1% lowering of the final course.
- The collective health of the JFRC is everyone's responsibility,

DO NOT ATTEND CLASS IF YOU ARE ILL.

SAC

If you are a student with Accommodations, please make contact with me at the beginning of the semester in order to discuss your requirements for this class.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. Academic integrity is a guiding principle for all academic activity at Loyola University Chicago, and all members of the University community are expected to act in accordance with this principle.

Failing to meet academic integrity standards is a serious violation of personal honesty and the academic ideals that bind the University into a learning community.

Students may not plagiarize the use of AI is considered plagiarism and treated as such.

Follow this link for more details about these standards, sanctions, and academic misconduct procedures:

(https://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml)

Email Communication I will do my best to reply to emails sent **during business hours (Monday to Friday, 9.00 – 18.00)**. Emails sent after 18.00 will be considered received the next day. The best way to communicate is directly, during my office hour or by making an appointment.

Computer, Phone & Internet Use in the Classroom Use of phones is always prohibited. Please turn your phones off when in class. Use of laptop computers during class time is permitted **only** for note taking, group work and class workshop research activity.

Course Schedule

*WRT refers to Anderson, Leona M. and Dickey Young, Pamela (eds) Women and Religious Traditions, Oxford: Oxford University Press. **The set readings may change during the course of the semester, all readings will be made available in good time on Sakai Resources***

Week One 9/4 **Introduction to the course and the subject: gender studies and religion**

Reading: 1. ‘Why Barbie and not Oppenheimer’ A Film Review of Barbie, directed by Greta Gerwig. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2023 Robert Luke Naylor www.elsevier.com/locate/endeavour
2. Posey, Lauren, ‘Gender’, pp.94-96

Week Two 9/11 **Introduction to the biblical account**

Reading: Genesis 1-3 Fewell, Danna Nolan and Gunn, David M. ‘Shifting the Blame’, Gender, Power and Promise: The Subject of the Bible’s First Story, pp.22-38.

Week Three 9/20 (FRIDAY CLASS) **The Biblical legacy of the Garden of Eden**

Reading: ‘The Bible and Sex’, David H. Jensen, in The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity, Editor, Margaret D. Kamitsuka, pp.15-31

Week Four 9/25 **Introduction to Islam**

Reading: McCloud et al Ed., ‘Ethics and Law, the Five Pillars’ from An Introduction to Islam in the 21st Century, pp.41-49
Riley, Alexander ‘9/11 Myths, Islam, and American Cultural Conflict’, Society (2018) 55:329–332

Week Five 10/2 **Women and Islam**

Reading: Abu-Lughod, Lila, ‘Do Muslim Women (Still) Need Saving?’ From Do Muslim Women Need Saving? pp.27-53

Week Six 10/9 Midterm Exam: Text and Interpretation

- Fall Break -

Week Seven 10/23 a. Judaism – History and Contexts

b. Project Workshop

Discussion: Religious Persecution – gendered perspectives

Week Eight 10/30 Judaism and Gender

Reading: Goldstein, Elyse, 'Jewish feminism and "new" Jewish rituals', Canadian Woman Studies; Downsview Vol. 16, Iss. 4, (Fall 1996): 50-52.)

Kuikman, Jakoba, 'Women in Judaism', in WRT, 2 pp. 51-73

Week Nine 11/6 Introduction to Hinduism

Reading: 'Historical Overview', 'Worship and Festivals' and 'Family and Society' from Tim Dowley ed. A Brief Introduction to Hinduism

Week Ten 11/11 Hinduism and Gender

Reading: Tomalin, Emma, 'Women, Religion and Social Inequality in India' in Caroline Starkey, Emma Tomalin, The Routledge Handbook of Religion, Gender and Society, Routledge, 2022

Goel, Ina. 'Hijra Communities of Delhi', Sexualities 19.5-6 (2016): 535-46

Week Eleven 11/20 Buddhism and Gender

Reading: Neumaier, Eva K., 'Women in the Buddhist Traditions', pp.93-112 WRT

Week Twelve 11/27 Examples of Gendered Roles in Indigenous Spiritual Traditions

Reading: Martin-Hill, Dawn, 'Women in Indigenous Traditions', pp.152-177 WRT

Week Thirteen 12/4 Project Presentations

Week Fourteen 12/13 Finals Quiz