



Theo 278: Religion and Gender
John Felice Rome Center
Spring 2025

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Office Hours: Thursdays 2.00-3.00 pm or by appointment

Course Description

In current political debates gender and identity have been propelled center stage. These concepts focus attitudes and put down markers for stances on the right and left of political discourses. Religious groups are also divided on these issues, split between those upholding tradition beliefs and those calling for reform. Study and discussion of gender and identity are perhaps more relevant today than at any other time in history.

In Theo 278 you will be introduced to contemporary gender theories, and discuss how they 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.

Next 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 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 Exam. Your activity in discussions 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

20% 2. Final Exam

30% 3. Written Project Paper

Grading

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 applied to assignments without prior discussion with me will be 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 Lessons pages and Resources***

Week One 1/22 Introduction to the course and the subject: gender studies and religion

Reading: 1. Syllabus

2. Review by Jennifer Szalai, Judith Butler, Who's Afraid of Gender?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/03/books/review/a-gender-theorist-who-just-wants-everyone-to-get-along.html?searchResultPosition=2>

Week Two 1/29 The Creation of Humanity

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 2/7 (FRIDAY CLASS) The legacy of the Garden of Eden for the Christian gender debate

Reading: 'Vatican Views', in Butler, Judith, Who's Afraid of Gender, pp.72-92

Vatican Document, DECLARATION "DIGNITAS INFINITA" ON HUMAN DIGNITY

Stone, K. (2021). 'Food, Sex, and the Garden of Eden: Or, What Is the Bible "About"?' in R. Graybill & L.R. Huber (Ed.). The Bible, Gender, and Sexuality: Critical Readings (pp. 143–166). London: T&T Clark.

Week Four 2/12 Introduction to Islam and Gender

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 2/19 Women and Islam in Context

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

Week Six 2/26 Judaism and Gender

Reading: "Was I afraid to get up and speak my mind? No, I wasn't": The Feminism and Art of Jewish Orthodox and Haredi Women. Harris, Rachel S.;Skinazi, Karen E. H., 2020

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

Week Seven 3/5 Midterm Exam

-----**Fall Break**-----

Week Eight 3/19 a. Introduction to Hinduism

b. Project Workshop – Creating a Project Plan

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

Week Nine 3/26 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 Ten 4/2 Buddhism and Gender

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

Week Eleven 4/9 Examples of Gendered Roles in Indigenous Spiritual Traditions

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

Week Twelve 4/16 Part 1: Ecofeminism

Part 2: Project Presentation Workshop

Gaard, Greta. "Ecofeminism and Native American Cultures: Pushing the Limits of Cultural Imperialism?" Ecofeminism, edited by Greta Gaard, Temple University Press, 1993, pp. 295–314. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bt5pf.15>. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024.

Week Thirteen 4/23 Project Presentations

Week Fourteen 4/28 – 5/1 Final Exams