Theo 278: Gender and Religion
Syllabus

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Course Description
We will begin this course with a basic introduction to contemporary gender theory, and continue with initial discussions on how gender has been constructed in a selection of the world’s major religious traditions, namely Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. This will give a broad global perspective of beliefs and practices.

In the second part we will focus on the Garden of Eden in biblical narrative, and study its history of interpretation in Christian and Jewish traditions, namely in relation to female and male gender roles. This text is foundational, providing archetypes that both consciously and unconsciously inform gender identity in Western and Post-Colonial contexts. You will be shown how this text is interpreted in art and sculpture, and be encouraged to study examples in Rome.

For the third part, in order to provide contemporary perspectives, we will examine examples of biblical narratives which suggest alternative gender roles, contesting the given ones; and we will discuss contemporary debates within western and post-colonial cultures on sexuality, transgender and feminism and their impact on traditional religion.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this class, students should be able to:
- Understand diversities and similarities in gender roles in major world religions
- Apply their research skills to construct a well-informed argument in writing and orally
- Determine and evaluate secondary sources in relation to primary texts

Required Texts/Materials
All required readings will be posted on Sakai
A useful volume to use throughout the course is: Leona M. Anderson and Pamela Dickey Young (eds) Women and Religious Traditions, Third Edition, Oxford University Press.

Attendance Policy
In accordance with the JFRC mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, all courses adhere to the following absence policy:

- For all classes meeting once a week, students cannot incur more than one unexcused absence.
- For all classes meeting twice a week, students cannot incur more than two unexcused absences.
- For all classes meeting three times a week, students cannot incur more than two unexcused absences.

This course meets once a week, thus a total of one unexcused absence will be permitted. Unexcused absences beyond this will result in a lowering of your final grade.

Evaluation
- Participation and Presentation 33⅓%
- Midterm and Written Paper 33⅓%
- Final Exam 33⅓ %
**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

**Academic Honesty**

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are unacceptable at the JFRC and will be dealt with in accordance with Loyola University Chicago’s guidelines. Please familiarize yourself with Loyola’s standards here: [http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml). You are responsible for understanding what constitutes plagiarism according to the LUC Student Handbook.

**Disabilities**

Students with documented disabilities who wish to discuss academic accommodations should contact me the first week of class, as well as the Senior Academic Services Advisor.

**Written Assignments**

There will be one written paper, topics will be given out in class and posted on Sakai, to be submitted during Week 7. Late submission without permission will result in grade reduction.

**Seminar presentations**

- The presentation of a seminar paper should last 15 minutes and:
- Briefly summarise the set reading for the topic
- Include comment based on further reading if recommended
- Identify any material that needs clarification
- Provide questions for the class to discuss and facilitate the discussion
- Presentation summary (1 page) submitted

Students should come and see me to discuss their paper prior to the week they are presenting.

**Exams**

The midterm and the final exams will include essay writing and short questions.

**Proposed Schedule**

**Part 1 Introduction to Ideas and Traditions**

**Week 1: Introduction to gender studies and religion**

Is understanding gender as a spectrum a more or less realistic way of understanding the individual?

**Week 2: Hinduism**

Gods and Goddesses – might devotion to female as well as male deities encourage gender equality within a religious tradition?
Week 3: Buddhism
Is the key fact in changing traditions inclusive leadership?

Week 4: Islam
Discuss how wearing the veil could signify coercion and autonomy for women.

Part 2 A Walk in the Garden of Eden

Week 5: Introduction to the biblical account
Is the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden a good or bad thing for humanity?

Week 6: The legacy of the Garden of Eden
To what extent do the gender roles constructed in the Garden influence ideas on sexuality? Lev.18:22-23, 20:13; Deut.22:5; Judges 19

Week 7: Fall Break
Week 8: Midterm and Written Paper due

Week 9: The Old Eve and the New Eve
Discuss the impact of the doctrine of Original Sin on defining the essential and distinct natures of women and men in Christian teaching.
1 Cor. 11; Eph. 5:21-6:9; 1 Timothy 2

Week 10: The Garden of Eden and gender roles in Jewish Theology
Does male circumcision as a sign of Judaism’s covenant with God mean that it is essentially a religion for men?

Part 3 Alternative Constructions of Gender identity and Roles

Week 11: Female and divine alliances – biblical examples
Discuss characteristics of these Biblical heroines that might inspire women today Ruth and Judith 8-16; Magnificat Lk1:46-55

Week 12: Re-visiting the roles of women and men in traditional religions
By taking into account particular values in particular cultures, can a universal women’s movement have any relevance?

Week 13: Post – traditional and alternative spiritualities
Would traditional religions lose their identity if they accommodated the values and practices of feminism and LGBT groups?

Week 14: Review of class presentations and course revision