Theo 278: Religion and Gender
John Felice Rome Center
Fall 2023
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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 believers. 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 consideration of 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 orally
- 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**

Work on the projects begins in earnest midway through the course, after consultations to select viable topics. In the class workshops we discuss developing project plans and schedules for completion. The workshops and consultations aim to ensure projects are underway and progressing.

**Reading Responses**

Each week you will be given questions based on the reading/s for that week posted on SAKAI Resources. Your responses to these questions in groups, and in some instances (see below) for individual assessment, create your ‘reading log’ for this course. The aim is to ensure that you are building - and being tested on - your knowledge base in the subject.

**Assessment Components**

**Midterm**

15% Midterm Assignment 1 Reading Responses:

- a. Garden of Eden
- b. The Legacy of the Garden of Eden

20% Midterm Assignment 2 Article/Book Chapter Review

**Finals**

10% Finals Assignment 1 Annotated Project Plan

10% Finals Assignment 2 Reading Responses:

- Hinduism and Gender

35% Finals Assignment 3 Written Project Paper

10% Project Presentation and overall participation in the course

**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. You are responsible to comply with the LUC Student Handbook.

**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 unexcused absence. Unexcused 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.**

**Accessibility Accommodations**
Students registered with the Student Accessibility Center requiring academic accommodations should contact the Office of the Dean at the John Felice Rome Center, the first week of classes.

**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 and group and 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 9/6**  **Introduction to the course and the subject: gender studies and religion**
**Reading:** Posey, Lauren, ‘Gender’, pp.94-96

**Week Two 9/13**  **Introduction to the biblical account**
**Reading:** Text: 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 9/22 (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

*Midterm Assignment 1: Responses to readings 2 and 3 - submission due*
### Week Four 9/27  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

### Week Five 10/4  Women and Islam

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

### Week Six 10/11  Midterm – completion and submission of Midterm Assignment 2: Chapter Review

*Midterm Assignment 2: Chapter Review – submission due*

### Fall Break

### Week Seven 10/25  Judaism – History and Contexts

**Discussion:** Religious Persecution – gendered perspectives

### Week Eight 11/1  Judaism and Gender

**Reading:** Goldstein, Elyse, ‘Jewish feminism and "new" Jewish rituals’, Canadian Woman Studies; *Downsview* Vol. 16, Iss. 4, (Fall 1996): 50-52.
*Finals Assignment 1 Project Plan - submission due*

### Week Nine 11/8  Introduction to Hinduism

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

### Week Ten 11/15  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 11/22  Buddhism and Gender

**Reading:** Neumaier, Eva K., ‘Women in the Buddhist Traditions’, pp.93-112 *WRT*
*Finals Assignment 2 Responses to reading 10 – submission due*

### Week Twelve 11/29  Examples of Gendered Roles in Indigenous Spiritual Traditions

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

### Week Thirteen 12/6  Project Presentations

### Week Fourteen  *Finals Assignment 3 Written Project Paper – Submission due*