

Catholic Theology

Also relevant for: Religious Education, Protestant Theology

Course: Theology (Catholic)

Group of courses: Humanities

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Course objectives:

Students of Catholic theology should be enabled to analyze the ways in which the category of gender has been inscribed into individuals' religious realities, into scholarly reflections on faith in theology, and into ecclesiastic structures.

The aim is to make students aware of the relevance of 'gender' in all areas and subjects of theology. They should be capable of recognizing the significance of the category of gender (along with other social categorizations) with regard to biblical, historical, systematic, and practical questions of theology. Students should be made familiar with central issues and concepts of women's and gender studies in these areas, learn to connect them to one another and be enabled to use gender as an analytical category. To adequately cover and locate the different approaches of women's and gender studies that have emerged in theology, students should also be introduced to basic feminist and gender theories. By engaging in gender issues, students are exposed to subjects and perspectives that extend and enrich the issues and hermeneutic perspectives addressed by theology and thus put prevailing methodological paradigms into question. Students become capable of making judgements in controversial discourses on gender issues and – as a result of the scientific reflection of their own gender-specific experiences – will be sensitized to working with people in occupational fields such as schools, parishes or in the media.

Teaching content/subject-specific gender studies content:

Women's and gender studies are relevant for all theological disciplines. They raise issues of gender in the various classical subject areas of theology (biblical, historical, systematic, and practical theology) with the aim of developing a gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive theology. The sheer multiplicity of issues and methods in the theological disciplines offers a broad range of issues and methods in theological women's and gender studies, complemented by specific concepts. In addition, women's and gender studies in theology – because of their history, but also because of analogous or similar problems in the various Christian denominations as well as in other world religions – are characterized by ecumenical openness and an interest in interreligious questions. Further diversification results from the various approaches of feminist and gender-related theories with their respective scientific theoretical premises and the resulting interests that form the basis of women's and gender studies in theology.

Various feminist theories were developed in the 1970s. These include 'difference feminism', which does not distinguish between biological and social sex/gender, but rather concentrates on women, seeking to raise the value of femininity and women's freedom. 'Equality feminism', by contrast, analyses the relational nature of gender, argues that the differences between men and women have purely social and cultural roots, demanding equal rights for women. Since the 1980s, critical men's studies have been developed and have gained increasing visibility.

Since the 1990s, the category of gender has been established – in various variants – as a widely accepted analytical tool in theological women's and gender studies. Among these variants are the deconstructivist approaches that assume that humans participate in discourses that sanction them for (non-)conforming behavior by which they keep reproducing these constructs. In this context, gender and above all strict binary gender structures are both perceived as a construct of discourse, the mechanisms and contingencies of which are to be uncovered in the face of possible change. Elements of queer theory have also been taken into account in theological women's and gender studies. In the 21st century, perspectives of intersectionality (of gender, ethnicity, class, gender preferences, religious

belief and other constituents) and of postcolonialism have initiated new differentiations or sensitizations, which have particularly sharpened an awareness for the contextuality of all research and thus also of approaches to theological women's and gender studies. The theories and perspectives mentioned above are adapted in different ways by theological women's and gender studies – in terms of content and methodology – and are brought to bear in theological subjects. The following section outlines the most important issues in theological women's and gender studies in the four classical areas of theology.

Biblical exegesis and theology

Biblical studies courses in theology are designed to enable students to take an academic approach to the Bible as a historical source, as a literary work produced by certain ancient cultures, as Holy Scripture for Christianity (and in the case of the Old Testament, as a common scripture for Judaism and Christianity), and as a relevant source for personal beliefs. Women's and gender studies in biblical theology cover all of the areas, subjects, and methods in this discipline. Each of the established subdisciplines (especially introductory biblical exegesis, history of religions, exegesis of the various biblical books, Old/New Testament theology and biblical theology, hermeneutics as well as history of reception as a newly developing sub-discipline) can include gender-specific or gender-inclusive perspectives:

- In introductory biblical exegesis (Old and New Testament), students could, e.g. adopt a gender-specific point of view when studying the historical contexts in which biblical texts were produced and received. They could extend the concept of 'authorship', or address the problem of creating inclusive translations which would not only make women visible, but also take into account biblical images or forms of speech which challenge strict gender binaries.
- In the field of history of religions, the focus could be on woman- or gender-specific historical aspects, including 'classical' questions on women/men in social, political, economic, and cultic contexts such as kings/queens; prophets/prophetesses; cults for/of women/men; gods/goddesses associated with the Bible; women/men in the Jesus movement and in the early post-Easter communities. These questions have to be readdressed with regard to intersectionality. But also the topic of eunuchs in ancient societies as well as biblical statements on different forms of sexuality and their evaluation should be considered. Furthermore, approaches to the history of time and religion would have to be examined for 'orientalizing' clichés or structures of 'othering' taking a critical postcolonial perspective.
- In Old and New Testament exegesis, students can make use of the many interpretative strategies of gender-sensitive text analysis. In biblical narrative literature, for example, female and male characters may be profiled against each other and in their relation to one another, or the rhetoric of gender-specific power distribution may be analyzed. Prophetic literature offers a rich source of gender-specific metaphors; wisdom literature reflects and produces structures of a political/social and cosmic order, including the female character of wisdom. Reader-oriented approaches that look at gaps or textual ambiguities may also be applied – they would eventually lead to queer perspectives on the biblical texts. Here, too, postcolonial perspectives can be fruitful (e.g. with regard to figures such as Rahab or Rut).
- In Old Testament theology, students can pay particular attention to the drama and rhetoric of the relationship between the God of Israel and his female partners (Jerusalem/Israel as a 'woman'). In New Testament theology, they could address the relationship between Christ and the church in a similar manner. Additionally, teaching could deal with the structures and contours of gender-inclusive biblical theology in critical-constructive conjunction with inner-biblical structures (e.g. God's 'people' as a community of men and women). In all this, power structures as structures of violence would have to be particularly taken into account.
- Biblical hermeneutics could explicitly reflect on the interference of gender-sensitive perspectives

with other important sensibilities, particularly towards Judaism, but also by integrating postcolonial approaches. Doing so also forces us to reflect on the importance of context in every kind of exegesis. Moreover, the use of the Bible in the Church could be considered with regard to gender-inclusiveness in the community of believers. In particular, biblical evaluations of non-heterosexual relationships should be critically reflected upon.

- In the history of the reception of the Bible a broad field of interdisciplinary cooperation within and outside theology opens up. In particular, two fields are referred to here, Jewish Studies and Islamic Theology. In Jewish Studies a feminist or gender-sensitive interpretation of the Talmud and its reference to the Tenach is a field that encourages comparisons with the New Testament and early Christian writings from a gender perspective. In Islamic theology gender-related questions are increasingly gaining relevance. In a comparison of Bible and Koran, their respective text worlds, but also the stories of their origin, many of the exegetical questions mentioned above can be discussed and made productive for a gender-sensitive interreligious discussion.

Historical Theology (History of the Ancient Churches and Patrology/Medieval and Modern Church History)

The historical disciplines within theology deal with the history of Christian lives, activities, and thought, from their beginnings in early Christianity up to the present day. This includes research into specific ecclesiastical and denominational structures. The historical disciplines discuss the lives of Christians and the settings of the church/churches in the context of their respective societies, enquiring into religious mentalities and their embodiment in the form of outstanding individual Christians and religious groups and in the everyday practice of Christianity. They aim to use the same basic methods and hermeneutics as general historical disciplines. Contemporary perspectives and ethical/political issues are part of these investigations, just as they are in other areas of historical study, because responsible historiography calls for reflecting on one's own position. Gender is extremely relevant for history: gender is a basic historical category. Women's and gender-specific perspectives can be found in all historical areas, subjects, and methods:

- For the period of the Ancient Church, for example, the roles and functions of women in the Christian communities and within their own families are very revealing. Living ascetically, as an alternative to starting a family, with a larger sphere of influence, was attractive for educated women interested in theology. Current studies analyze various images of men and women in patristic literature and discuss the history of their reception. It is worth noting that very few texts were written by women, and the sources as a whole contain information mainly on women from the upper echelons of society. In order to place the findings in context, it is also essential to look at women's situation in Judaism and in Roman pagan society.
- For the medieval period, the various stages of women's religious movements and steps to liberation are an important issue. In the Middle Ages, ascetic forms of life were among the explicit female life options whose relevance for social constructions was of enormous importance. Religious forms of life or allegedly female and male approaches to mystic theology can be studied from a gender perspective. The female tradition of writing and owning books is also a new research field.
- For the early modern period, the now very detailed research in history and Church history regarding the persecution of 'witches' is of great gender-specific interest. Courses/classes can also address the question of women's education, which went beyond the walls of the convents to a far greater extent than in the Middle Ages. Additionally, question of confessionalization or confessional identity and gender is one of the research fields that have currently raised attention.
- For the 19th and 20th century, the range of subjects is much broader. Possible subjects include

the specific social, political, and religious positions of women and men within the development of society, Christian women's activism in the first and second women's movements, the development of a specific Catholic literature influenced by female writers, the discussion on an alleged or actual 'feminization of Christianity' in the 19th century – a discussion of high relevance for recent developments in Germany –, and the history of Catholic and Christian women in the period of fascism. Likewise, the roles of women in view of changes in the Catholic church since World War II have become a topic of historical research (Vatican II, Synods, church movements). The history of feminist theologies and their protagonists has in itself become a suitable topic of historical research.

- Historical hermeneutics can start to build up a gender-differentiated history of Christianity in a search for forgotten or repressed structures, characters, and groups in history. This search, however, must not be guided by a one-dimensional perspective of victimization.

Systematic theology

The central issue of systematic theology is to justify faith as a form of thought, life and structure of the church(es). Studies in systematic theology reflect preconditions of the Christian faith, its central issues as well as the consequences for ethical behavior of individuals and communities as well as for the organization of institutions. Women's and gender studies in theology regard gender issues as a necessary factor to be taken into account when providing justifications of faith in all of these fields. Students should recognize the relevance of gender issues for theological concepts of God and humans and the associated topics. They should learn to analyze how gender images and gender norms have been inscribed in traditions and theological reflections and what effects they have. Additionally, they should be enabled to formulate gender-neutral approaches to faith. Therefore, it is necessary to understand gender as an analytical category which students must learn to apply. The following issues and subjects appear central in this context:

- Philosophy, among other things, is able to convey basic gender theories and to give an introduction to gender studies and their underlying concepts. In addition, it seems appropriate to address female philosophical traditions, to explore 'forgotten' female philosophers and their philosophies and to discuss the androcentrisms of philosophical mainstream.
- In theological hermeneutics, e.g. ways of gender-sensitive reading of texts and images should be conveyed. In addition, it is important for students to be enabled to critically analyze theological traditions for gender blindness. Furthermore, students can discuss how feminist theology uses liberation theology to formulate its principles, explore the question of a feminist theology after the Shoa and address postcolonial theories and their implications for gender issues.
- In anthropology gender-sensitive reflections of the traditions (and interpretations) of theological images of women and men (the latter often only implicitly) are carried out. At the same time, gender-conscious and gender-inclusive approaches to theological speeches are introduced and discussed. In addition, questions about subject thinking and its reformulations in the horizon of (post-)modern gender theories belong in this context. It also makes sense to address questions of corporeality, bodiliness and gender and to include questions of vulnerability in discourses on God and Christology.
- As to 'discourse on God', the question of an appropriate God-talk (i.e. one that does justice to all genders) should be addressed, including traditionally male images of God and new feminist concepts of God. Further issues in the horizon of the doctrine of the Trinity and pneumatology could be reflections on female or meta-gender connotations of the Spirit of God as well as non-personal images of God, e.g. in process theology and panentheistic approaches.
- In Christology and soteriology, the theologumenon of incarnation in the light of body and gender

must be reflected upon theologically. The question of the masculinity of the Savior must be rethought. Also accusations of Anti-Judaism against Christian feminist theology should be addressed here. Furthermore, Sophia Christology (Jesus Christ as a teacher and personification of wisdom) and feminist perspectives on theologies of the Cross can further broaden the traditional curriculum.

- Regarding the context of sin, guilt, and mercy, students could consider the androcentric nature of traditional theological teachings. Further subjects could be: women's sin as a new definition of sin, 'Eve' as a personification of the power of sin, sexism as a structural sin and co-perpetration as a form of women supporting patriarchal societies.
- Eco-feminist approaches (connecting creation, liberation and justice) can be applied in creation theology. Patriarchal/androcentric inscriptions into the traditional doctrine of creation and its normative claims must be uncovered.
- In ecclesiology, students should discuss the structures and questions of holding office in the Christian churches. Students may also be taught concepts of feminist ecclesiology (e.g. the concept of a 'women's church').
- In Mariology, students should look at 'Mary' from various perspectives (New Testament, history of dogmas, pastoral practice, popular religion, art) to analyze how her figure, oscillating between the 'woman of Nazareth' and the 'queen of heaven', influences factual reality, how that figure is viewed by believers, how it is used as a benchmark of ecclesiastical openness towards women, and how it is reconfigured in critically constructive feminist ideas on Mariology.
- Eschatology is a discipline in which theological and anthropological questions converge. Especially the question of the 'bodily' dimensions of hope could be addressed here. Thus, e.g. already in the Bible and in the Christian tradition the body of the Risen One is by no means conceived as gender-specific throughout, i.e. queer perspectives can also be explored.
- In moral theology, students should be taught to practice a gender-sensitive perspective in discussions of the body and sexuality. This includes the diversity of gender and the analysis of ecclesial positions on non-heteronormative sexuality and gender identity. Phenomena and backgrounds of gender-related violence in social contexts, especially in the church context, should also be dealt with here. Another central area is bio-ethics with its numerous gender-specific issues ranging from prenatal diagnostics and 'designer babies' to discussions of dignified living in old age and self-determined dying.
- In the field of Christian social sciences/social ethics, the system of justice must be extended by the dimension of gender justice. Questions of gender and participation are to be dealt with in this context as well as gender-specific aspects of poverty, work, family, political participation and representations of gender and power. Debates on 'equality' versus 'recognition' as well as on care and/or justice can also be introduced and reflected upon here.

Practical theology

Theology as a whole is a practical science, since it necessarily refers to a (faith) practice preceding it to which it reflects. Practical theology, as a theory of practice, is meant to direct theology towards the (critical) reflection of human believing in changing contexts. For this purpose, it analyzes religious human practice on the basis of the social and cultural processes of change taking place historically and reflects it in the horizon of a religious, Christian self- and world interpretation, in order to align the actions of Christians who form the congregation of Jesus Christ in their confession to the Gospel with it. In this respect it reminds theology of its contextuality, criticizes ideology and emphasizes the value of faithful practice, which as a source of knowledge of theological theory formation has its own theological dignity. These contexts include the question of gender. In an interdisciplinary discourse, gender-sensitive practical theology includes contributions from sociology, philosophy, psychology, etc., as well as empirical, phenomenological, and other findings. Thus, suggestions for the critical reflection and

monitoring of church practice as well as other fields of religious-believing human practice are to be gained. The following list outlines the central issues of women's and gender studies in practical theology according to its subdisciplines:

- Pastoral theology deals first and foremost with the inscription of the gender category into the instruments of reflection of the scientific discipline. On the level of the concrete objects, it is necessary to introduce the category of gender as a continuous category of reflection of the different fields of action, be it parish work or categorial pastoral care, areas of catechesis or child and youth work. This means, for example, to explore parish work with regard to gender sensitivity and equality and to reflect upon the role and significance of women in parish work and church ministry (i.e. the question of paid and voluntary work, and women's structural subordination to the priest or the debate on the 'feminization' of the church). Sensitivity to the gender-specific nature of faith and religious experience as well as to the development of faith in the context of gender-specific biographies is central to pastoral theology. Therefore, findings from the humanities as well as gender perspectives have to be taken into account. Theological men's studies and approaches in the pastoral care of men should also be included here. In addition, gender-sensitive pastoral concepts and poimenics should also be considered.
- In religious education, it is important, in addition to reflecting upon the question of gender in the educational system, to perceive the gender-specific nature of religious socialization and to establish the examination of approaches to gender-inclusive religious education – including intersectional aspects such as ethnicity, class, etc. – as a self-evident subject for teaching and learning. Here students should be taught to work with relevant empirical methods and material. Feminist concepts and models for designing religious education lessons and gender-sensitive educational concepts should be addressed, along with theories and practical guides for (educational) social work with girls and boys, women and men in the church.
- In homiletics, discussions about gender-sensitive preaching and feminist preaching approaches can be dealt with. The question of using inclusive language in church services can also be addressed. In practical training, unconscious gender performances of the participants can be identified, be reflected upon and, if necessary, be expanded or corrected.
- In liturgical science, students should study the language of liturgical texts, hymns, and prayers. In addition, feminist liturgies and models for religious services should be introduced and students should be made aware of gender-specific interpretations of symbols and art in liturgy. The liturgy of the sacraments and benedictions can also be discussed with regard to gender issues in this context. Classes should also cover gender-specific approaches to spirituality, in particular women's mysticism. Ecumenical and interreligious comparisons, e.g. with Jewish liturgies, can also be of relevance.
- In canon law, students should look at the history of canonical laws from a gender-sensitive perspective, addressing the position of women and men in the Codex Iuris Canonici and other ecclesiastical laws. Also questions of holding office and the participation of women in leading positions as well as the church's way of dealing with transsexuality and intersexuality in matrimonial law can be included. Feminist jurisprudence would also have its place here.

Integration of gender studies content into the curriculum:

According to the aforementioned teaching and course objectives, gender issues should be integrated into all theological disciplines at the Bachelor's level. Lecturers teaching first and second semester introductory modules in theology may either voluntarily cover the relevance of gender issues for the subject in question in at least one teaching session, or they may be required to do so. Alternatively, a seminar on "Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies in Theology" could be offered approximately

every second semester (depending on what is feasible for the lecturers responsible for gender issues), possibly with a different focus each time. Depending on feasibility, a required elective module on gender in theology may also be offered in the further course of undergraduate study. In this case, the gender experts need to cooperate with scholars in the other theological subject areas.

Women's and gender studies in theology can be integrated into modules throughout the Bachelor's phase. When planning individual modules, lecturers should keep in mind that gender issues are cross-cutting themes that imply a diversification of perspectives, issues, and methods. We strongly recommend that gender researchers in theology collaborate with researchers in other relevant disciplines, for example in an interdisciplinary module within the "General Studies" field. This module should introduce students to the relevant basic gender theories in all disciplines, combined with specific issues from each individual discipline. Students would thus come to understand the relevance and implications of a gender-sensitive perspective for a wide range of subjects, interests, and focuses.

At the Master's level, we recommend dealing with individual topics of women's and gender studies in theology in greater depth within the modules. As at the Bachelor's level, it is recommended that gender studies researchers and researchers from other areas of theology teach gender-related courses collaboratively.

Degree Stage:

The basics of women's and gender studies in theology (i.e. theories on gender and gender relations, and the relevance of gender to all areas of theology) should be taught at the Bachelor's level. Master's programs can go into greater depth and provide specializations in selected areas.

Basic Literature/Recommended Reading:

Bitel, Lisa M./Lifshitz, Felice (eds.) (2008): Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe. New Perspectives. Philadelphia.

Dube, Musa W. (2000): Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible. St. Louis.

Eckholt, Margit (eds.) (2017): Gender studieren. Lernprozess für Theologie und Kirche. Gütersloh.

Fischer, Irmtraud u. a. (eds.): Die Bibel und die Frauen. Eine exegetisch-kulturgeschichtliche Enzyklopädie. Stuttgart. [Enzyklopädie in 20 Bänden]

Gause, Ute (2006): Kirchengeschichte und Genderforschung. Eine Einführung in protestantischer Perspektive. Tübingen.

Heimbach-Steins, Marianne (2009): „...nicht mehr Mann und Frau“. Sozialethische Studien zu Geschlechterverhältnis und Geschlechtergerechtigkeit. Regensburg.

Kwok, Pui-lan (2005): Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology. Louisville.

McClintock Fulkerson, Mary/Briggs, Sheila (2013): The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology. Oxford u. a.

Pemsel-Maier, Sabine (eds.) (2013): Blickpunkt Gender. Anstöß(ig)e(s) aus Theologie und Religionspädagogik. Frankfurt.

Qualbrink, Andrea u.a. (2011): Geschlechter bilden. Perspektiven für einen genderbewussten Religionsunterricht. Gütersloh.

Reid, Barbara E. (eds.): Wisdom Commentary. Collegeville. [feminist commentary of the bible in 60 Volumes]

Schreiber, Gerhard (eds.) (2016): Transsexualität in Theologie und Neurowissenschaften. Ergebnisse, Kontroversen, Perspektiven. Berlin.

Swanson, Robert N. (eds.) (1998): Gender and Christian Religion (Studies in Church History 34). Woodbridge.

Walz, Heike /Plüss, David (eds.) (2008): Theologie und Geschlecht. Dialoge querbeet. Münster.

Weißer, Thomas (eds.) (2017): Gender – Theorie oder Ideologie? Streit um das christliche Menschenbild (Theologie kontrovers). Freiburg u.a.

Wendel, Saskia/Nutt, Aurica/Leidinger, Miriam (eds.) (2016): Reading the Body of Christ. Eine geschlechtertheologische Relecture. Paderborn.

Journals:

[FAMA. Die feministisch-theologische Zeitschrift der Schweiz](#)

[Feminist Theology. The Journal of Britain and Ireland School of Feminist Theology](#)

[In God's Image. Journal of Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology](#)

[Jahrbuch der Europäischen Gesellschaft für die Theologische Forschung von Frauen.](#)

[Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion](#)

[Lectio difficilior. Europäische Elektronische Zeitschrift für Feministische Exegese](#)

[Lilith. The Jewish Women's Magazine](#)

[L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft](#)

[Parvis. Chrétiens en liberté pour d'autres visages d'église](#)

Schlangenbrut. Zeitschrift für feministisch und religiös interessierte Frauen (1983-2014).

[Werkstatt Schwule Theologie](#)

Women-Church. An Australian Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion (1987-2007).