

ST 8200 – Theological Investigations in Human Identity: Gender

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You belong here. What you have to say is important and valuable. I'm here to help!

Course Description

What is gender? This is a question that is easy to ask, but quite difficult to answer. Some want to say what gender *ought* to be, usually in the form of context-free norms and prescriptions. Other want to say what gender *is*, usually in a descriptive mode. On their own, these tasks are limited, but taken together, and handled properly, they can generate a fruitful theology of gender.

Is gender a matter of social norms or embodied realities? What difference does a Christian analysis make? Can we find gender in the bible, or in the early church? And what we are to do with the ordinary gendered experiences all of us have?

Christians must have robustly theological answers to such questions, aware both of their descriptive tasks and of their normative commitments. This class will provide opportunity and guidance for working through these issues, equipping students to arrive at their own answers, hopefully in the guidance of the Holy Spirit and through Holy Scripture.

Learning Objectives

My mission for this course is to for you understand gender as one identity situated within your broader identity in Christ. Additionally, I hope that you will see gender not as a “floating reality” that bears no connection to ordinary life, but is instead anchored in our day-to-day experiences with social goods—and that is no less theological for being so.

From this course, students will be able to...

1. Identify the complexities surrounding an answer to the question, “What is gender?”
2. Conduct research and discussion that conforms to the academic virtues listed in the “Guidelines for Talking About Controversial Things.”
3. Exposit the key features regarding gender’s fundamental properties, and understand the history of the debate about those properties.
4. Gain an awareness of the state of the discussion within Systematic Theology as it relates to race.
5. Navigate the theological contours of living ordinary gendered lives.
6. Plot trajectories for the ways focused theological discussion about gender can benefit Christian thought, ecclesial practice, and the life of discipleship before the Triune God.

Course Requirements

(NB: All assignments will be submitted to Canvas. Please do not submit assignments to me via email; they will not count as submitted.)

1. **Reading, Attendance and Participation.** You must attend all courses, complete all of the readings and come ready to discuss. This will be measured by the submission of a one-page

reading report through Canvas for each meeting, due the midnight before. Your page should include:

- i. A sentence for each reading expressing what you take the “big idea” of the reading to be (i.e., what do you think the argument is? What do you think the author wants you to believe or how does she or he hope to have changed your mind by the end of the reading?) You will have as many sentences as readings.
- ii. A one-sentence question engaging what the author said at a more than superficial level. You will have as many questions as readings.

Compile your sentences and questions into one document (bullet points are fine here) and submit them to Canvas. These will serve as verification that you have read and engaged the material and should provide material for our discussion. If you are unable to make one of our course meetings, please notify me to the best of your ability. **30% of your grade.**

2. **The Descriptive Task Class Presentation:** As we will discuss at various points in the course, thinking theologically about gender requires at least two tasks, a descriptive task (saying what gender *is*, in the world as we know it) and a normative task (saying what gender *should be*, in the world as it will be). For this assignment and the next, you will be taking on each of these respective tasks in stages.

First, you will practice the descriptive task. At some point between our first and second meetings, head to a grocery store, to the mall, to Amazon, to Instagram, or to any place of cultural significance where gendered goods are being displayed. Take pictures or screenshots of some gendered good you find to be interesting and significant, and then prepare a presentation on it. You can make a PowerPoint, or you can present your findings in any way you’d like. However you choose to display the gendered good you found, your presentation must include the following elements:

- a) **Description:** A description of the topic you’ve chosen *and how it relates to gender*. Don’t just describe marketing, or politics, or whatever; tell us how the dynamics of your topic have shaped expectations about what it means to be a woman and a man.
- b) **Diagnosis:** Diagnose the situation for us. What is going well with it? What is just neutral? Perhaps most importantly, what is going wrong with it? What is of God, what is sinful?

This will serve as the basis for your next assignment, and our discussion after will hopefully set you up to do it well. You will present your gendered good throughout our second meeting in April. Your grade will be measured on what you bring, so you do not have to submit anything. **This will count for 30% of your grade.**

3. **The Normative Task.** After you’ve presented your topic for the descriptive task, you can move to the normative task. Here you pick up where you left off from your diagnosis and provide a *theological analysis* of the topic you’re considering. **You will write up your analysis in a 10 page paper (or about 2,500 words, Times New Roman, double-spaced, standard 1/2-inch indentations), and it will be due the final day of the quarter, April 29th.** Think of this as a mini-research paper. It must include the following elements:

- a) At least *five academic sources* that you engage with substantially (i.e., you don’t “proof cite” once and move on). These would exclude things like blogs and online articles, and *typically* they are journal articles and books from academic publishers. Please consult the “Paper Writing Guide” on Canvas or see the library website.

- b) Part of your paper should be a summary of the topic you covered in the “Descriptive Task” assignment, mentioning what you took to be the most important elements of your Description, Depiction, and Diagnosis.
- c) Another part of your paper will be an opportunity for you to recommend a remedy for your diagnosis. If these gendered goods are good and godly, why are they this way? If they are sinful and in need of correction, why and how?

Please consult the “Paper Writing Guide,” as it describes the broader criteria by which you will be graded. Note that the main point of this assignment is for you to tell me *what you think*, not to continue describing the way things are. So be sure to let your voice come through! This will constitute **40% of your grade**.

Required Books

1. Felipe do Vale, *Gender as Love: A Theological Account of Human Identity, Embodied Desire, and Our Social Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023).

Course Schedule

Readings refer either to books listed in the ‘Required Books’ or to scanned PDFs available on Canvas (indicated by ‘C’).

FIRST MEETING (March 7th–8th): Gender, Theology, and Theory: The Building Blocks

1. 3/7 (Evening Session): Course Introduction & What is Gender? Getting Our Bearings
 - a. Elaine Storkey, *Origins of Difference: The Gender Debate Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), Chpts. 2, 3, & 4 (C).
 - b. do Vale, *Gender as Love*, chpt. 1.
2. 3/8 (Morning Session): Gender—If Not Constructed, Then What? Descriptive and Normative Tasks
 - a. Abigail Favale, *The Genesis of Gender: A Christian Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2022), chpts. 5 & 6 (C).
 - b. do Vale, *Gender as Love*, (SKIP: chpts. 2 & 4)
3. 3/8 (Afternoon Session): Crucial Issues in Trans Identities
 - a. Paul Rhodes Eddy and James K. Beilby, “Understanding Transgender Experiences and Identities: An Introduction” in *Understanding Transgender Identities: Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 1–54 (C).

SECOND MEETING (April 25th–26th): Gender

4. 4/25 (Evening Session): Money, the Market, and Advertising
 - a. Peggy Orenstein, *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture*, chpt. 2 (C).
 - b. Andi Zeisler, *We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to CoverGirl, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), chpt. 9 (C).
 - c. Emily Beth Hill, *Marketing and Christian Proclamation in Theological Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2021), chpt. 4 (C).
5. 4/26 (Morning Session): Clothing
 - a. Jo B. Paoletti, *Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), chpt. 2, 5 (C).
 - b. Lauren F. Winner, *Wearing God: Clothing, Laughter, Fire, and Other Overlooked Ways of Meeting God* (New York: HarperOne, 2016), 31–62 (C).

6. 4/26 (Afternoon Session): Food, Weight, and Disordered Eating
 - a. Lynne Gerber, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in Evangelical America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), chpts. 2, 4 (C).
 - b. Mary Louise Bringle, *The God of Thinness: Gluttony and Other Weighty Matters* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), chpt. 3 (C).

Phone and Computer Policy

I ask that phones are put away during class (if you need to take a call, please do it outside). As for computers, I *request* (but do not require) that they remain put away too (unless, of course, they are necessary to facilitate your learning experience). There is no final exam for the course, which I hope means that your note-taking is oriented more toward conceptual analysis and not the citation of facts for memorization. [Studies](#) also show that hand-written notes are better suited for conceptual analysis, and I challenge you to give it a shot! (And, if you are concerned about keeping your notes for later years, you can always snap a picture of them.) Of course, I will ultimately leave it to your discretion.

Students with Disabilities

In compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), it is the policy of Trinity Evangelical Divinity school to provide appropriate and reasonable accommodations, or academic adjustments, and services to students with a documented disability to help ensure an equal educational opportunity. Students seeking these services should contact Mary Guthrie, Assistant Dean of Students, at the earliest possible time with supporting documentation. If you believe you might have a disability that negatively impacts your educational performance, but have never been diagnosed, you are encouraged to meet with Mary Guthrie to discuss your needs. You can contact her at mcguthrie@tiu.edu or 847-317-7114.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism in academic work is defined as using someone else's words (or your own prior work) without citing them. This happens when you take someone's words (or your own) from a book, article, website, previously submitted assignment, etc. and put them into an essay or any other assignment without quotation marks and proper citation, giving the impression that the words are your own. This might be intentional or unintentional. TEDS takes plagiarism very seriously; if an assignment is found to have plagiarized, it will receive a 0 (according to the Academic Handbook). Fortunately, it is easily avoided. If you are alluding to or otherwise gesturing to someone's work, add a footnote and attribute it to them. If you are directly using someone's *words* in your work, put quotation marks around it and cite it appropriately. For instance: Dr. do Vale says, "Always cite your work appropriately."¹ You may not use prior written work (whether in part or in whole) for any assignments. Please let me know if you have any questions; see also the following [resources](#) from TEDS.

Course Extensions

Course extensions may not be granted by the professor past the final day of exam week, and are granted only for very exceptional reasons. Requests for course extensions must be made to the Dean of Students office. Grades of "incomplete" are not granted at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

¹ Felipe do Vale, "Syllabus for ST5201," *Journal of TEDS Syllabi* 1, no. 1 (2021): 4. (Obviously this is a made-up example.)