

T2411 EROS, SEXUALITY, AND THE SPIRIT

Episcopal Divinity School, January, 2009

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I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

What has sexuality to do with spirituality? Why are Christians afraid of Eros? Why is it difficult to talk about Eros and sexuality in the church? Why are mainline denominations preoccupied with issue of human sexuality? What has the erotic to do with our spiritual practice? This course introduces recent writings on these issues, including novels, autobiographies, theological and spiritual writings.

II. SPECIFIC GOALS

This course is designed to:

1. explore the meaning of Eros from a cross-cultural perspective, and discuss the relationship between human desire and the desire for God. We will explore the shape of erotic imagination and its relation to our deepest longing for God through poetry, literature, music, and other art forms.
2. analyze discussions of human sexuality in the mainline churches and envision a faith community that celebrates diverse sexual expressions.
3. discuss cultural and societal changes that would challenge the fear of Eros and affirm human desire.
4. practice leading discussions on sexuality and spiritual life.

The erotic celebrates the memory, wisdom, and poignancy of difference and otherness. This course will be taught with a commitment to anti-racism, diversity, and multiculturalism.

III. METHODOLOGY

This course emphasizes learning as a collective dialogical process and invites students to contribute to the class through sharing spiritual experience, reading poetry, and/or leading rituals.

The course will include poetry, music, and self-reflection. Students are encouraged to bring artwork and other artifacts to enhance the learning experience. Different kinds of writing will be encouraged: journaling, poetry, and reflective papers. The goal is to invite participants to try diverse ways of exploring Eros and spirituality.

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Complete assigned readings and participate in class discussion.
2. Journaling during the two week period, noting down important insights. The first half to be handed in on Jan 9.
3. A short paper of 8-10 pages on “Eros, Sexuality and the Spirit,” including reflections on poetry, music, lecture, readings, and discussions in class and other spiritual experiences. Due: Jan 16.
4. A research paper of 12-15 pages for Master’s students, 20-25 pages for D. Min students. Due: Feb 17, 2009.

Participants are strongly encouraged to take this course for Pass/Fail. Students taking this as a mini-course have the Pass/Fail option only. D. Min. students need to have grade to fulfill their requirements. If you need a grade, a written contract must be submitted and instructions will be given in class.

Mini-course Requirement

EDS students who are taking this as a mini-course do not need to write the final paper. Students can upgrade a mini-course to a full course, but can’t change a full course to a mini or audit if they can’t finish the paper (after extension) after the class is finished. They will get a permanent incomplete.

Pass/Fail Option

The Pass/Fail grading system is now:

Pass (B or better)

Marginal Pass (B-)

Fail (lower than B-)

D. Min Students

Course work for all Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) students must demonstrate an advanced understanding of the nature and purposes of ministry, enhanced competencies in pastoral analysis and ministerial skills, and the integration of these dimensions into the theologically reflective practice of ministry. D.Min. students are encouraged to focus their course work on a particular subject germane to their anticipated thesis project.

Extension

Students who cannot finish their final paper on time must send a petition for an extension to the registrar Penny Kohn (PKohn@eds.edu)

V. COURSE SCHEDULE

Jan 5 Introduction: Eros

- Introduction to the content and process
- Cultural introductions: our differences as our strength

- What has Eros to do with Spiritus?
- Poetry and ritual in learning

Jan 6 Sexuality and Spirituality

- Connections between sexuality and spirituality
- Social construction of sexuality
- Embodiment, human desire, and experience of the holy
- Practicing self-love and living mindfully

Jan 7 Eros, Sexuality, and the Bible

- Erotic imagination in the Bible
- The Song of Songs
- The Book of Ruth

Jan 8 Eros and the Love of God

- Historical trajectory
- Language of the mystics
- Eros breaking free

Jan 9 Eros and Jesus

- What do we mean by “loving Jesus”?
- Eros, Jesus, and community
- Reimagining sexual theology and ministry

Jan 12 Embodied Love

- Eros and literary imagination
- Contemporary stories

Jan 13 Eros in Cross-Cultural Perspectives

- Constructions of body, sexuality, and society in colonial settings
- Conceptions of desire
- Other religious perspectives

Jan 14 Eros, Wounding, and Spiritual Health

- Boundaries
- Violence and abuse
- The challenge of HIV/AIDS

Jan 15 Eros and the Churches

- Phobia about Eros in the churches
- God, sex, and power: historical memory and contemporary issues
- Multiple expressions of Eros

Jan 16 Sustaining Eros through Spiritual Practice

- Eros as justice-work

- Lessons from other cultures
- Blessing each other

VI. READINGS

Required Texts (On reserve):

Ellison, Marvin M., and Sylvia Thorson-Smith, eds. *Body and Soul: Rethinking Sexuality as Justice-Love* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2003).

Articles in the course web site on Blackboard (<http://fishersnet.blackboard.com>).

Tapes on reserve: Robert Goss: "Can Queer Theology Contribute to a Christian Reformation?" Part 1 and 2.

Readings:

Read poetry throughout the two weeks. You may want to consult Mary Oliver's *A Poetry Handbook* (on reserve). Harvard's Lamont Library has a poetry section.

Further readings:

Oliver, Mary. *Rules for the Dance: A Handbook for Writing and Reading Metrical Verse* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

Pinsky, Robert. *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998).

Jan 5 Introduction: Eros

Lorde, Audre. "Uses of Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Freedom, Calif: The Crossing Press, 1984), 53-59.

Heyward, Carter. "Coming Out: Journey Without Maps," in *Our Passion for Justice* (New York: Pilgrim, 1984): 75-82.

Carr, David M. "The Bible and Eros," in *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3-14.

Costa, Mario, Catherine Keller, and Anna Mercedes. "Love in Times of Empire: Theopolitics Today," in *Evangelicals and Empire: Christian Alternatives to the Political Status Quo*, ed. Bruce Ellison Benson and Peter Goodwin Heltzel (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2008), 291-305.

Saliers, Don E. "Beauty and Terror," *Spiritus* 2 (2002): 181-91.

Jan 6 Sexuality and Spirituality

Jordan, Mark D. "A New Life beyond Sex," in *The Ethics of Sex* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2002), 47-75.

Ch. 4 Heyward

Frarjaje-Jones, Elias. "Breaking Silence: Toward an In-the-Life Theology," in *Black Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 139-59.

Ch.12 Goss

Baker-Fletcher, Karen. "The Erotic in Contemporary Black Women's Writings," in *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, ed. Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 199-213.

Jan 7 Eros, Sexuality, and the Bible

Carr, David M. "The Erotic and the Mystical," in *The Erotic Word*, 139-51.

Moore, Stephen D. "Allegory's Engine," in *God's Beauty Parlor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 54-66.

Backhouse, Halcyon, ed. *The Song of Songs: Selections from the Sermons of St. Bernard of Clairvaux* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), 34-38 (Sermon 3), 42-48 (Sermon 8).

Alpert, Rebecca. "Finding Our Past: A Lesbian Interpretation of the Book of Ruth," in *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story*, ed. Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 91-96.

Duncan, Celena M. "The Book of Ruth: On Boundaries, Love, and Truth," in *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible*, ed. Robert E. Goss and Mona West (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000), 92-102.

Recommended (On reserve):

Falk, Marcia. *The Song of Songs: A New Translation and Interpretation* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990).

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 185-203.

Jan 8 Eros and the Love of God

Coakley, Sarah. "The Trinity, Prayer and Sexuality," in *Feminism and Theology*, ed. Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton (London: Oxford University Press, 2003), 258-67.

Ahlgren, Gillian T. "Julian of Norwich's Theology of Eros," *Spiritus* 5 (2005): 37-53.

Burton-Christie, Douglas. "Into the Body of Another: Eros, Embodiment and Intimacy with the Natural World," *Anglican Theological Review* 81 (1999): 13-37.

Farley, Wendy. "The Divine Eros," in *The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2005), 95-113.

Althaus-Reid, Marcella. "Queer I Stand: Lifting the Skirts of God," in *The Sexual Theologian: Essays on Sex, God, and Politics* (New York: T and T Clark, 2004), 99-109.

Recommended (On reserve):

Heyward, Carter. *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989.

Jan 9 Eros and Jesus

Burrows, Mark S. "Foundations for an Erotic Christology: Bernard of Clairvaux on Jesus as 'Tender Lover,'" *Anglican Theological Review* 80 (1998): 477-93.

Rambuss, Richard. "Pleasure and Devotion: The Body of Jesus and Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric," in *Queering the Renaissance* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 253-79.

Brock, Rita Nakashima. *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 50-70.

Poling, James Newton. "Jesus as Religious Resister," in *Deliver Us from Evil: Resisting Racial and Gender Oppression* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 156-74.

Kwok, Pui-lan. "Untouchable Taboo: On the Sexuality of Jesus," forthcoming in *Feminist Companion on Jesus Movement*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine.

Jan 12 Embodied Love

Chernin, Kim. "An American in Paris," in *Erotic Interludes*, ed. Lonnie Barbach (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 66-77.

Walker, Alice. *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism* (New York: Random House, 1997), 79-85.

Leong, Russell. "Geography One," in *Charlie Chan Is Dead: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Fiction* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 215-29.

Christ, Carol P. *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 183-205.

Gao, Xingjian. *Soul Mountain*, trans. Mabel Lee (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2000), 113-16.

Jan 13 Eros in Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Bleys, Rudi C., "The Pre-Enlightenment Legacy," in *The Geography of Perversion: Male-to-male Sexual Behavior outside the West and the Ethnographic Imagination, 1750-1918* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 17-45.

Alpert, Rebecca T. "Guilty Pleasures: When Sex Is Good Because It's Bad," in *Good Sex: Feminist Perspectives from the World's Religions*, ed. Patricia Beattie Jung, Mary Hunt, and Radhika Balakrishnan (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 31-43.

Ahmed, Leila. "Arab Culture and Writing Women's Bodies," *Feminist Issues* 9, no. 1 (1989): 39-53.

Vanita, Ruth, "'Wedding of Two Souls': Same-Sex Marriage and Hindu Traditions," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 20, no. 2 (2004): 119-35.

Nhat Hanh, Thich. "Living Mindfully Together," in *Teachings on Love* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1998), 85-101.

Jan 14 Eros, Wounding, and Spiritual Health

Ch. 16 Burgonio-Watson, Ch. 17 Ellison, Ch. 15 Hunt

Farley, Margaret A. "Norms for Just Sex," in *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 215-32.

Dunlap, Susan J. "Relationship," in *Counseling Depressed Women* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997), 67-77 .

Anderson, Victor. "The Black Church and the Curious Body of the Black Homosexual," in *Loving the Body*, 297-312.

Sands, Kathleen. "Uses of the Thea(o)logian: Sex and Theodicy in Religious Feminism," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 8, no. 1 (1992): 7-33.

Jan 15 Eros and the Churches

Ch. 8 Haffner

Payne, Barbara P. "Sex and the Elderly: No Laughing Matter in Religion," in *Christian Perspectives on Sexuality and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher and Elizabeth Stuart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996): 367-76.

Brown Douglas, Kelly, "Heterosexism and the Black American Church Community: A Complicated Reality," in *Heterosexism in Contemporary World Religion: Problem and Prospect*, ed. Marvin M. Ellison and Judith Plaskow (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2007), 177-200.

Ch. 18 Underwood

Kwok, Pui-lan, "Gay Activism in Asian and Asian-American Churches," *The Witness*, 87, no. 20 (May 21, 2004). <http://www.thewitness.org/agw/kwok051904.html>. The webpage has links to various websites.

Jan 16 Sustaining Eros through Spiritual Practice

Ch. 2 Plaskow

Nhat Hanh, Thich. "Self-Love" in *Teachings on Love* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1998), 21-30.

Lim, You-Leng Leroy. "Webs of Betrayal, Webs of Blessings," in *Q & A: Queer in Asian America*, ed. David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 323-34.

Walton, Janet R. "Imagination and Improvisation: Holy Play," in *The Papers of the Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology*, vol. 4, ed. Mathew Zyniewicz (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2000), 175-89.

Monroe, Irene. "The Aché Sisters: Discovering the Power of the Erotic in Ritual," in *Women at Worship: Interpretations of North American Diversity*, ed. Marjorie Proctor-Smith and Janet Walton (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 127-35.

Recommended Readings

Gay and Queer Theology, Religion, and Philosophy

Clark, J. Michael. *A Place to Start: Toward an Unapologetic Gay Liberation Theology*. Dallas: Monument Press, 1989.

_____. *Defying the Darkness: Gay Theology in the Shadows*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1997.

Cleaver, Richard. *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995.

Comstock, Gary David. *Gay Theology without Apology*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1993.

_____, and Susan E. Henking, eds. *Que(e)ring Religion: A Critical Anthology*. New York: Continuum, 1997.

Goss, Robert. *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994.

_____, *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2003.

Lesbian and Queer Theology, Religion, and Philosophy

Althaus-Reid, Marcella María. *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender, and Politics*. London: Routledge, 2000.

_____, *The Queer God*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Daly, Mary. *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*. Boston: Beacon, 1984.

Gilson, Anne Bathurst. *Eros Breaking Free: Interpreting Sexual Theo-Ethics*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1995.

Heyward, Carter. *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989.

Hunt, Mary E. *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship*. New York: Crossroad, 1991.

Mollenkott, Virginia Ramsey. *Sensuous Spirituality: Out from Fundamentalism*. New York: Crossroad, 1992.

Raymond, Janice G. *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*. Boston: Beacon, 1986.

Stuart, Elizabeth. *Just Good Friends: Towards a Lesbian and Gay Theology of Relationships*. New York: Mowbray, 1995.

_____, et al. *Religion is a Queer Thing: A Guide to Christian Faith for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered People*. London: Cassell, 1997.

Tessier, L. J. *Dancing after the Whirlwind: Feminist Reflections on Sex, denial, and Spiritual Transformation*. Boston: beacon, 1997.

Bible and Early Christianity

Brooten, Bernadette J. *Love between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Brown, Peter. *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. London: Farber & Faber, 1989.

Carr, David M. *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Countryman, L. William. *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and their Implications for Today*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.

Goss, Robert E. and Mona West, eds. *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000.

Martin, Dale B. *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation*. Louisville, K.Y.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

Quest, Deryn, et al. eds. *The Queer Bible Commentary*. London: SCM, 2006.

Stone, Ken. *Practicing Safe Texts: Food, Sex, and Bible in Queer Perspective*. New York: T and T Clark, 2005.

Sexuality: History, Theology, and Ethics

Althaus-Reid, Marcella, and Lisa Isherwood, eds. *The Sexual Theologian: Essays on God, Sex, and Politics*. New York: T and T Clark, 2005.

Boswell, John. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Brown Douglas, Kelly, *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

Gudorf, Christine E. *Body, Sex, and Pleasure: Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1994.

Isherwood, Lisa, and Elizabeth Stuart. *Introducing Body Theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.

Jordan, Mark D. *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

_____. *Blessing Same-Sex Unions: The Perils of Queer Romance and the Confusions of Christian Marriage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Lebacqz, Karen, and R. Barton. *Sex in the Parish*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991.

Nelson, James B. *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979.

Spong, John Shelby. *Living in Sin? A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality: A Study Guide for Individuals and Small Groups*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995.

Liturgy

Kittredge, Cherry, and Zalmon Sherwood, eds. *Equal Rites: Lesbian and Gay Worship, Ceremonies, and Celebrations*. Louisville: Westminster, 1995.

Stuart, Elizabeth, ed. *Daring to Speak Love's Name: A Gay and Lesbian Prayer Book*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992.

World Religions

Balka, Christie, and Andy Rose, eds. *Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian or Gay and Jewish*. Boston: Beacon, 1989.

Coakley, Sarah, ed. *Religion and the Body*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Downing, Christine. *Myths and Mysteries of Same-Sex Love*. New York: Continuum, 1991.

Ellison, Marvin M, and Judith Plaskow, eds. *Heterosexism in Contemporary World Religion: Problem and Prospect*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2007.

Jung, Patricia Beattie, et al. eds. *Good Sex: Feminist Perspectives from the World's Religions*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Plaskow, Judith. *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972-2003*. Boston: Beacon, 2005.

Swidler, Arlene, ed. *Homosexuality and World Religions*. Valley Forge, P.A.: Trinity Press International, 1993.

Cross-Cultural and Racial Minority Perspectives

Boykin, Keith. *One More River to Cross: Black and Gay in America*. New York: Anchor Books, 1996.

Chan, Connie S. "Issues of Sexual Identity in an Ethnic Minority: The Case of Chinese American Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexual People," in *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identities over the Lifespan: Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Anthony R. D'Augelli and Charlotte J. Patterson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, 87-101.

Chou, Wah-san. *Tonzi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies*. New York: Haworth Press, 2000.

Eng, David L. *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001.

Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Leong, Russell, ed. *Asian American Sexualities: Dimensions of Gay and Lesbian Experience*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Murray, Stephen O., and Will Roscoe, eds. *Boy-Wives and Female-Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.

_____. *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.

_____, et al. *Latin American Male Homosexualities*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995.

Sang, Tze-Lan D. *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Vanita, Ruth. *Love's Rite: Same-Sex Marriage in India and the West*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Williams, Walter L. *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture*. Boston: Beacon, 1986.

Postcolonial Perspectives

Bleys, Rudi C. *The Geography of Perversion: Male-to-male Sexual Behavior outside the West and the Ethnographic Imagination, 1750-1918*. New York: New York University Press, 1995.

McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Stoler, Ann Laura. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Yong, Robert J. C. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*. London: Routledge, 1995.