

## REL/QSX 300: Christianity and Sexuality

Syracuse University, Fall 2016

Mon/Wed 12:45-2:05, Life Science Building 100  
Instructor: Virginia Burrus (mvburrus@syr.edu)  
Office hours: Mon 2:15-3:15 or by appointment, 520 Hall of Languages

This course explores how Christian texts and traditions have, in different historical moments and contexts, constructed—and contested—sexuality, desire, and erotic pleasure. Our approach will be not dogmatic but critical and inquisitive. Our questions will include: What is sexuality? What, for that matter, is Christianity, and who gets to say? Does Christianity have a distinctive understanding of sexuality? Is it coherent? Are virginity and asceticism erotic practices and/or sexual identities? How have figures of vice--“soft” men, prostitutes, sodomites, masturbators, witches, homosexuals, etc.—haunted Christian sexual imaginations, and to what effects? What roles do marriage and family play? Is there space for pleasure and joy in Christian understandings of sex?

*The goal of the course is to enable students to think more deeply and critically about Christian views of sexuality, as these have developed historically and in their continuing impact on the present, while also developing skills in writing and textual interpretation.*

### READINGS

You are required to purchase three books for this course: Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006); Mark D. Jordan, *The Ethics of Sex* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); and *Queer Christianities: Lived Religion in Transgressive Forms*, ed. K.T. Talvachia, M.F. Pettinger, and M. Larrimore (NY: NYU Press, 2015). All are available in the SU bookstore. All other readings will be available on-line or posted on Blackboard; please print them out and bring them to class on the day we are discussing them. Biblical texts are available at <https://www.biblegateway.com/>; please use the New Revised Standard Version (though it can be very interesting to look at other translations as well!).

### REQUIREMENTS

1. **Faithful attendance and active participation in class discussions.** Attend class regularly and read all assignments carefully. Come to each class ready to offer a question or comment about an aspect of the readings that you found particularly intriguing; be sure also to bring the texts that we are discussing to class. Participation will count for 10% of the semester grade. You are allowed two absences without penalty (save them for when you really need them!); beyond that, barring truly exceptional circumstances, each absence will subtract one percentage point from your semester grade (separate from the participation grade).

2. **A series of ten one-page papers** (roughly 300 words each), engaging the assigned readings critically. Prompts will be provided on Blackboard. The papers must be typed (double-spaced) and handed in at the beginning of class *on the day that the readings are due; no late papers will be accepted*. There are over 20 opportunities for you to write reflection papers, marked by an asterisk next to the date; you must choose ten of these (but no more than one in a given week); if you write more than ten, I will count the ten with the best grades. Reflection papers will count for 20% of the semester grade.

3. **Two five-page take-home exams** (roughly 1250-1500 words). Instructions will be provided on Blackboard. The first exam will cover material from the “Bible and Its Interpreters” part of the course; it will count for 25% of the semester grade. The second exam will cover material from the “Classical Topics” part of the course; it too will count for 25% of the semester grade. Exams must be typed (double-spaced) and emailed as a Word doc file before midnight on the day they are due (October 7, November 18); hard-copies must also be provided (handed to the instructor in class or delivered to her office) by that deadline.

4. **Final portfolio** (short papers plus one three- to four-page essay of roughly 900-1000 words). Revisit the ten one-page papers that you wrote for the course, along with any comments you might have received from the instructor. Look for themes that have drawn your attention repeatedly, and select one that continues to interest you. Next, underline or highlight the passages in your short papers that are relevant to that theme; add marginal comments if you like (perhaps you have changed your mind about certain points or find that you now have additional thoughts). From this starting point, compose a culminating essay following your chosen theme across the course and its readings; further guidelines for the essay will be provided on Blackboard. Finally, gather the short papers (with highlighting and comments) and the essay together in a folder, delivered to the instructor’s office before midnight on December 12. This portfolio will count for 20% of the final grade.

## ACADEMIC COURTESY

All students are expected to follow simple rules of academic courtesy to fellow students and instructors. This includes being prepared for class, attending class from beginning to end without leaving (barring urgent need), listening when another speaks, respecting personal and intellectual differences, and generally abstaining from any actions not productively related to this course; *electronic devices such as computers, tablets, and cell phones must be turned off and stowed away*. Anyone who fails to follow these guidelines may, at the discretion of the instructor, be asked to leave class for the day and will be counted absent.

## TOPICS AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

### I. Introduction

M, 8/29      What is *sexuality*?

W, 8/31\*      What does *Christianity* have to do with *sexuality*?  
                   --Jordan, “The Vices of Christian Ethics,” ES, 4-19

## II. The Bible and Its Interpreters

- W, 9/7\*      What do we do when we read the Bible?  
                  --Martin, "The Myth of Textual Agency," SSS, 1-16, and "The Rhetoric of  
                  Biblical Scholarship," SSS, **17-25**  
                  --Jordan, "Scriptural Authorities," ES, 20-46 (optional)
- M, 9/12\*      Jesus' sexuality, take 1: The single savior?  
                  --Martin, "Sex and the Single Savior," SSS, 91-102  
                  --Gospel of John (NRSV translation preferred)
- W, 9/14\*      Jesus' sexuality, take 2: The married savior?  
                  --Gospel of Mary  
                  [http://www.maryofmagdala.com/GMary\\_Text/gmary\\_text.html](http://www.maryofmagdala.com/GMary_Text/gmary_text.html)  
                  --Gospel of Philip (brief selection tba)  
                  <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/gop.html>  
                  --Watch video of panel discussion in which scholars Karen King, Bart  
                  Ehrman, and Mark Jordan discuss the question of whether Jesus was  
                  married and why it might matter:  
                  [http://blackmountaininstitute.org/news-and-events/events-archive/2013-14/  
                  /does-it-matter-if-jesus-was-married/](http://blackmountaininstitute.org/news-and-events/events-archive/2013-14/does-it-matter-if-jesus-was-married/). (The video is approximately 70  
                  minutes long; you may skip the first 8 minutes of introductions.) To learn  
                  more about the papyrus fragment that prompted the conversation, you may  
                  want to browse this website <http://gospelofjesuswife.hds.harvard.edu/>  
                  and/or read this article  
                  [http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/update-the-reaction-to-karen-kin  
                  gs-gospel-discovery-84250942/?sessionGUID=8d648735-4372-0c49-32ea-  
                  9a7521aa9062&no-ist=&page=1](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/update-the-reaction-to-karen-king-gospel-discovery-84250942/?sessionGUID=8d648735-4372-0c49-32ea-9a7521aa9062&no-ist=&page=1).
- M, 9/19\*      Jesus' sexuality, take 3: The gay savior?  
                  --Anthony Grafton, "Gospel Secrets: The Biblical Controversies of Morton  
                  Smith," *The Nation*, January 26, 2009  
                  [http://www.thenation.com/article/gospel-secrets-biblical-controversies-mo  
                  rton-smith?page=0,0](http://www.thenation.com/article/gospel-secrets-biblical-controversies-morton-smith?page=0,0)  
                  --Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *The Man Jesus Loved* (Cleveland: Pilgrim  
                  Press, 2003), 13-35 (B)  
                  --see film: *Corpus Christi: Playing with Redemption*]
- W, 9/21\*      New Testament vice lists, and matters of translation  
                  --Martin, "*Arsenokoitēs* and *Malakos*: Meanings and Consequences," SSS,  
                  37-50  
                  --Jordan, "Scriptural Authorities," ES, **24-31**  
                  --Leviticus 18:22, 20:13  
                  --1 Corinthians 6:7-20; Galatians 5:13-26; Ephesians 5:1-20; Colossians  
                  3:1-15; 1 Timothy 1:3-11; 1 Peter 4:1-11; Revelation 21:8, 22:14-15

M, 9/26\* Did Paul condemn homosexuality?  
 --Martin, "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32," SS, 51-64  
 --Jordan, "Scriptural Authorities," ES, **31-36**  
 --Romans 1:18-32

W, 9/28\* Paul on desire: The single apostle  
 --Martin, "Paul without Passion," SSS, 65-76  
 --1 Corinthians 7

***Take-home exam questions posted on Blackboard***

M, 10/3\* Jesus and Paul on marriage and divorce  
 --Martin, "Familiar Idolatry and the Christian Case against Marriage," SSS, **103-116**; Martin, "The Hermeneutics of Divorce," SSS, 125-147  
 --Genesis 2:18-25  
 --Luke 14:26; 20:35-36; Ephesians 5:21-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1; 1 Timothy 2:8-15  
 --Matthew 5:32/ Luke 16:18; Mark 10:11-12/ Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11

W, 10/5 Concluding discussion of biblical materials

**F, 10/7 TAKE-HOME EXAM #1 DUE (emailed file + hardcopy)**

III. Three Classical Topics in the Christian Discourse of Sexuality: Virginit

1. Virginit

M, 10/10\* --Jordan, "A New Life beyond Sex," ES, 47-75  
 --*Acts of Thecla* (B)

W, 10/12\* --Jerome, *Life of Saint Paul of Thebes* (B)  
 --Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina* (B)

M, 10/17\* --Jacob the Deacon, *Life of Pelagia* (B)  
 --Sophronius, *Life of Mary of Egypt* (B)

W, 10/19\* --Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, Book I (B)

## 2. Vice

- M, 10/24\* --Jordan, "Crimes against Nature," ES, 76-106
- W, 10/26\* NO CLASS  
--Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 8 (pp 96-109) (B)
- M, 10/31\* --Peter Damian, *Letter* 31 ("Book of Gomorrah") (B)
- W, 11/2\* --Heinrich Kramer, *Malleus Maleficarum*, Part 1, Question 6  
<http://www.malleusmaleficarum.org/part-i-question-vi/>

## 3. Marriage

- M, 11/7\* --Jordan, "Marriage Acts," ES, 107-30  
--Martin, "Familiar Idolatry," SSS, **116-24**
- W, 11/9\* --Augustine, *On the Good of Marriage*  
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1309.htm>
- Take-home exam questions posted on Blackboard***
- M, 11/14\* --John Boswell, "'What God Has Joined Together': The Development of Nuptial Offices," *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 162-98 (B)
- W, 11/16\* --Pope John Paul II, "The Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the Book of Genesis" (selections)  
-- Paul Evdokimov, "The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition" (selections)  
-- Robert W. Jenson, "Faithfulness" (all from Eugene F. Rogers, ed. *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2002], 170-99) (B)
- F, 11/18 **TAKE-HOME EXAM #2 DUE (emailed file + hardcopy)**

## III. Where next?

- M, 11/28\* The secularization of sex, and Christian responses  
--Jordan, ES, "Attack upon Christendom," 131-54

- W, 11/30\*      Queer theologies, queer Christianities  
                     --Gerald Loughlin, "Introduction," *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body* (2007), pp. 4-10  
                     --*Queer Christianities: Lived religion in transgressive forms* (2015), selected essays: Mark Larrimore, "Introduction"; Teresa Delgado, "Beyond Procreativity: Heterosexuals Queering Marriage"; Mary E. Hunt, "Love Your Friends: Learning from the Ethics of Relationships"; Elijah C. Nealy, "Who Do You Say That I Am? Transforming Promiscuity and Privilege"
- M, 12/5\*        The churches on homosexuality and transgender—current positions  
                     --Research websites and blogs to discover the current state of the conversation on sexuality in one or more denominations; for trans issues, one good place to begin might be <http://blog.transepiscopal.com/>
- W, 12/7\*        Finding place for pleasure  
                     --Jordon, ES, "Redeeming Pleasures" and "Epilogue: Sex and Schism," 155-75
- M, 12/12        *FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE (emailed file of culminating essay + hardcopy)***

#### ABSENCE DUE TO OBSERVANCE OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Syracuse University does not have non-instructional days for the observance of any religious holiday. However, we will provide an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirement that is missed because of an absence due to a religious observance, provided the instructor has been notified no later than the end of the second week of classes.

#### DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), located at 804 University Avenue, Room 309; call 315-443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters. Students should submit a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, it is crucial to contact ODS and plan for accommodations as early as possible. For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as university policy. The university policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.

For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

In this course, the minimal penalty for any student found to cheat on an assignment is an F for that assignment; major violations will result in course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of Academic Integrity Policy; repeat offenses can result in even more serious sanctions.