

*Sex and the Bible:
Gender, Sexuality, and Scripture in Western History*

(REL 324)

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Office Hours:

By appointment through course Slack

TAs:

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Meeting Times:

Course lectures will be from 2-3:20 pm Mon/Wed, with an extra hour of section each week. Lectures and sections will meet virtually via Zoom at the beginning of the semester until pandemic conditions allow in-person instruction to resume. Check your email for updates on changing conditions and modalities.

Zoom Login Info: Meeting ID: 992 4385 5934; Passcode: J9nEBj13JH

Course Description

This is a course about reading, religion and sex – more specifically, the dynamic interplay between how Christians have read and interpreted their Bibles on the one hand, and how they have understood sex and human sexuality on the other. (We will deal briefly with the Bible and sexuality in the Jewish interpretive tradition, but the lion’s share of the course focuses on Christianity.) Thus the questions that will drive our inquiry are fundamentally questions about interpretation. What does it mean to make the claim that a particular perspective on human sexual experience is ‘biblical’? How are we to understand the sheer variety of ways that a fixed set of canonical scriptural texts have been used as an authoritative resource for discussing and regulating sexual ethics, identity, and

practice? How do changing notions of what ‘sexuality’ is (and why sexuality matters) impact the way that biblical texts have been interpreted? We will explore these questions through the study of key texts in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament and an examination of how these texts have been interpreted from antiquity to the present. Topics to be covered include marriage, gender identity, desire, same-sex relationships and sexual renunciation. This course fulfills the General Education requirements for Traditions and Historical Foundations (GE-H) and Humanistic Inquiry (GE-B).

No previous study in religion or biblical studies is assumed, and there are no prerequisites for enrolling in the course.

Goals of the Course:

- 1) To carefully read primary scriptural and theological texts from Christian and Jewish authors stretching from antiquity to the present.
- 2) To explore how a foundational document, the Bible, has shaped the many ways in which Western societies have defined and structured gender, sexuality, and religion.
- 3) To become familiar with the many ways in which Western societies have argued about sexuality and gender, and thus be able to discern how to engage with similar arguments that are being worked out in our contemporary context.
- 4) To develop an appreciation for how interpretations of the Bible in the history of the West relate to enduring questions around human sexual activity and identity.
- 5) To learn how to discern and evaluate the arguments of the primary texts that we read and how to make arguments related to sexuality and gender for ourselves.
- 6) To make, sustain, and respond to arguments related to the intersections of religion and sexuality.

Requirements

- Attendance and participation in section are essential to achieving the goals of this course; however, attendance should not put the health of you or your fellow students at risk. If you are feeling sick, please stay home.

- This course will be discussing issues that are personally, theologically, and politically important to many of your classmates. Thus I expect that everyone will be respectful of, and sensitive to, the opinions that are expressed in class.
- Careful reading of all assigned texts prior to each class meeting. In addition, if we have to switch to an online modality due to Covid-19 spread, students should have listened to any pre-recorded lectures prior to the relevant lecture and section.

Grading

This course will assess your grade using a *contract grading system*. This system allows you to determine what grade you will earn for the semester based upon the amount of work you choose to do. Studies have shown that contract grading removes anxiety about writing and thinking, two things that I want you to do a lot of in this course. It also mirrors some of the ways in which you will work and be evaluated in your future careers. Below you will see the contracts for each grade level. For each of the requirements, you will be given a prompt on the course website that outlines the expectations for the paper. Your work will be assessed as complete (if it meets the standards outlined in the prompt), incomplete (if it does not meet those standards), or missing. If your work is assessed to be incomplete you will be given one chance to revise and resubmit. Missing assignments cannot be made up later in the semester without prior approval from me or your TA. Any plagiarism in an assignment will result in a missing designation. Exceptional work within each tier can result in the student receiving a + to their final grade. Unresolved incomplete work may result in receiving a - for the final grade. Those who take the course pass/fail must meet the requirements listed in the C-tier.

Assignments (each paper is 1500 word minimum):

1. Hebrew Bible passage analysis (due Feb 4)
2. New Testament passage analysis (due Feb 18)
3. Early Christian biblical interpretation analysis (due Mar 11)
4. From the Middle Ages to Modernity paper (due April 22)
5. Contemporary Issues and Debates paper (due May 9)
6. Bible in the News analysis (due anytime before May 9)

“A” Contract:

- Complete **ALL SIX** paper assignments
“*B*” Contract:
- Complete **FIVE** paper assignments
“*C*” Contract (also equivalent to Pass/Fail option):
- Complete **FOUR** paper assignments
“*D*” Contract:
- Complete **THREE** or fewer paper assignments

Readings

I recommend purchasing the required readings listed below (as you are able) from Amazon or another online book dealer. Any readings not found in these books will be available on the course website.

Note: It is necessary that you have access to a Bible for course readings. There are many different Bible translations available. In lectures and class discussion, I will be using the New Revised Standard (NRSV) translation of the Bible. As you look for a Bible, I recommend staying away from the (New) King James Version, the Living Bible, The Message, and the NIV, as each of these Bibles has issues that compromise their translations. If you have questions about your Bible translation, please email me.

Amy Derogatis, *Saving Sex* (also available online [here](#))

Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*

Schedule

I. Sex and the Bible: Text, Interpretation, and Practice

January 10 and 12

Scriptures and Interpretation

Reading:

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Introduction: Presenting the Issues" in *What Is Scripture Comparative Approach* (1-20)

Jonathan Z. Smith, "Sacred Persistence: Towards a Redescription of Canon" in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (36-52)

Note: Syllabus subject to change

Stanley Fish, "What Makes an Interpretation Acceptable?" in *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (338-355)

Rhiannon Graybill, "Fuzzy, Messy, Icky: The Edges of Consent in Hebrew Bible Rape Narratives and Rape Culture," *The Bible and Critical Theory*

January 17 - MLK Holiday - No Class

Jan 19, 24, and 26 The Hebrew Bible

Reading:

Genesis 1-3, 12-22, 34, 38

Leviticus 18-20

Deuteronomy 5-11, 22-30

Numbers 31

Judges 4-5, 19-21

Ruth

2 Samuel 11-13

Song of Songs

Proverbs 31

Ezekiel 16, 23

Hosea 1-3

Jan 31, Feb 2, and 7 The New Testament

Reading:

Matthew 5-7, 18-19

Romans 1

1 Corinthians

Ephesians 5

1 Timothy

Revelation 1-3, 17-22

***Hebrew Bible passage analysis due on Feb 4

II. Reading Sex Scripturally in the Pre-Modern World

Note: Syllabus subject to change

Feb 9 **Constructing Gender and Masculinity in the
Ancient World**

Reading:

Pseudo-Lucian, *Affairs of the Heart*

Feb 14 and 16 **Genesis, Gender and the ‘Fathers’ of the Church**

Reading:

Tertullian, “On the Apparel of Women”

John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 15, 16, 17, 18

Augustine, *City of God* 14.10-28

***** New Testament passage analysis due Feb 18**

Feb 21 - Presidents Day - No Class

Feb 23 **Ascetic Christian Women in the Second Century**

Reading:

The Acts of Paul and Thekla

The Life of Mary/Marinos

The Life of Mary of Egypt

Feb 28 and Mar 2 **Asceticism as an Interpretive Problem**

Reading:

Elizabeth Clark, “Intertextual Exegesis” in *Reading Renunciation:*

Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity (122-128)

Jerome, *Letter 22*

John Cassian, *The Institutes*, Sixth Book: The Spirit of Fornication

John Cassian, *The Conferences*, Twelfth Conference: On Chastity

Peter Brown, "Bodies and Minds: Sexuality and Renunciation in

Early Christianity" in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic
Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (479-493)

Mar 7 and 9 **Reading and the Rabbis**

Note: Syllabus subject to change

Reading:

Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (available [here](#)),
Introduction, Chapters 1-4

*** Early Christian biblical interpretation analysis due Mar 11

March 14-18 - Spring Break!

Mar 21 and 23 The Song of Songs from Antiquity to the Middle Ages

Reading:

Origen, *Homilies on the Song of Songs* 1

Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 2, 8, 84

**Love Me Sexy Jesus: Images of Jesus from Antiquity to
Modern America**

Reading:

Stephen Moore, "On the Face and Physique of the Historical Jesus"

**III. The Invention of Sexuality: Modernity, Postmodernity and Biblical
Interpretation**

Mar 28 and 30 The Invention of 'Sexuality' in the Modern World

Reading:

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure, Vol. 2*

(Introduction)

April 4 and 6 Gender, Bibles and Sex in the Victorian Age

Reading:

"Onania; or the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution" [selections]

Mary Carpenter, *Imperial Bibles, Domestic Bodies: Women, Sexuality and Religion
in the Victorian Market* (Introduction and Chapters 1-3)

Note: Syllabus subject to change

April 11 and 13 **Biblical Hermeneutics and Contemporary Cultural Debate (Protestant Sex Manuals and STDs)**

Readings:

Amy DeRogatis, *Saving Sex*, chapters 1-4

Tim and Beverly Lahaye, *The Act of Marriage*

Mark Driscoll, *Porn Again Christian*, chapters 1-8

Handouts on sexually transmitted demons

Apr 18 and 20 **Biblical Hermeneutics and Contemporary Cultural Debate (Homosexuality and the Politics of Marriage)**

Reading:

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons (1986)" in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (39-47)

Richard Hays, "Homosexuality" in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (379-406)

Bernadette Brooten, "Paul's Views on the Nature of Women and Female Homoeroticism" in *Immaculate and Powerful* (61-87).

Dale Martin, "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32"

Dale Martin, "*Arsenkoites* and *Malakos*: Meanings and Consequences"

***** From the Middle Ages to Modernity paper due April 22**

Apr 25 **Womanist Biblical Interpretation**

Reading:

Wil Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, selections

DeRogatis, *Saving Sex*, ch. 5.

Apr 27 **Taking Stock**

Reading:

TBA

May 9:

Contemporary Issues and Debates paper due
Bible in the News analysis (due by May 9)

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://adminopsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety>. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu> describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *Office of Student Accessibility Services* <https://osas.usc.edu> provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.