

**Syllabus: RCL 820**  
**Interdisciplinary Seminar: Human Sexualities and Christian Faith**  
**Spring Semester 2013**  
**Mondays and Thursdays, 2:00-3:25 pm, Addison 111**

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### **Course Description**

This interdisciplinary course addresses a broad range of topics related to human sexuality as these issues arise in the context of ministry. Topics to be covered include: biblical and theological resources for understanding human sexuality, the history of sexuality and the church, the conversation between science and theology in relation to sexuality, sexual abuse, issues of sexual ethics and justice in relation to larger socio-economic systems, and situating sexuality issues in the context of gender politics and attitudes toward the body. We will examine denominational policies and liturgical practices that serve as sources for Christian sexual ethics, as well as studying the implications of church conflict on these issues. The pedagogy of the course will offer opportunities for students to develop skills in offering education, counseling, preaching, liturgical leadership and witnessing on sexuality-related issues in one's faith community.

### **Learning Objectives**

In this course, students will:

1. Grow in awareness of how personal history, family experience, and religious and cultural contexts shape and influence perspectives on human sexuality, sexual behavior, gender and bodies, examining assumptions and agendas about what constitutes "sexuality" and "sexual issues";
2. Examine a range of biblical, historical and theological influences on understandings of sexuality and sexual ethics;
3. Compare various contemporary denominational and religious stances on sexuality;
4. Become knowledgeable about the work of several major scholars on religion and sexuality, sexual ethics, and matters of faith and science in relation to sexuality, through required course texts and the students' own research;
5. Explore current socio-political issues related to sexuality, gender and bodies, and develop theological responses appropriate for religious education, worship, preaching, pastoral care, and other ministry situations;
6. Examine misuses and abuses of God's gift of sexuality (sexual abuse, harassment and assault, pornography and cybersex addiction, sex trafficking, etc.) and their destructive consequences upon persons and communities.

### **Expectations of Learners:**

A) Attendance and Active Participation (10% of course grade): The course has been designed to promote active, engaged learning. Participants are expected to be present and participating in all

sessions of the class and in various activities such as group work, discussions, simulations/role plays, video viewing, etc. Participants are expected to come to class having completed readings and/or assignments for the day. If you must miss a class due to illness or other unavoidable problem, please make every effort to email the professors about your absence before class.

B) Students are expected to follow VTS academic standards regarding integrity of their work. Plagiarism is not tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course. Please make sure that you cite sources properly and consistently. If you have questions concerning citations, please consult a style manual such as the Chicago Manual of Style or Turabian's, or contact the writing center for assistance.

C) Because the words we choose both express but also shape the way we view the world, Inclusive/Expansive language is the norm for speaking and writing about humanity and the Divine here. This means avoiding the use of exclusively male terms ("men") when referring to all persons, the exclusive use of male pronouns in reference to persons and God, and the exclusive use of masculine imagery for God. See seminary guidelines in the student handbook.

D) Course participants with a documented learning difference should talk with the professors early in the semester so that appropriate measures may be taken to insure full participation and learning of all.

E) You are welcome to use computers to take notes, etc. but *please: no internet use that is unrelated to course work during class time, and let's try to be sensitive to the ways our devices can become barriers or shields in difficult conversations!*

**Textbooks:** Both the required textbooks below, and the additional required readings identified in the schedule of course work, have been selected to bring the class into conversation with a broad range of perspectives on our subject matter through the lenses of multiple disciplines. We have selected them neither for their agreement with each other nor for agreement with our own points of view, but as conversation partners and guides to help inform a substantive inquiry.

For purchase at Cokesbury:

Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999.

Marvin Ellison, *Making Love Just: Sexual Ethics for Perplexing Times*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.

Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*. New York: Continuum, 2006.

Margaret D. Kamitsuka, ed., *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.

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

Eugene Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God* (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell), 1999.

Other course readings will be available on MyVTS or on reserve in the library.

### Schedule of Course Work

#### **February 4: Introductions; forming a learning community; ground rules and guidelines**

Kate Ott, "Sexuality, Heath, and Integrity"

#### **February 7: Biblical Perspectives on the Body and Sexuality**

David H. Jensen, "The Bible and Sex," in *The Embrace of Eros*, 15-31.

Mark I. Wallace, "Early Christian Contempt for the Flesh and the Woman who Loved too Much in the Gospel of Luke," in *The Embrace of Eros*, 33-49.

#### **February 11: Denominational Statements on Sexuality (Larry Golemon, WTC)**

Posted on course website are various denominational statements. Students will read those of their own denomination plus two others (we will create a distribution of these in class), toward becoming familiar with similarities and differences among the churches.

#### **February 14: Biblical perspectives on the body and sexuality, continued**

Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 379-406.

Dale Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 51-64, 77-102 (Chapters 4, 6, and 7).

#### **February 21: Historical Perspectives: The Body and Sexuality in Early Christianity**

Peter Brown, *Body and Society*, 33-64, [190-209], 387-427, [428-447] (Chapters 2, [10], 19, [Epilogue]).

#### **February 25: Historical and Canon Law Perspectives (Robert Prichard)**

Robert Prichard, *A Wholesome Example*, 45-64.

Robert Prichard, Article on canon law. *Journal of Episcopal Church Canon Law*, Vol. 3, Number 1 (February 2012), 115-138. Available on: [www.vts.edu/publications](http://www.vts.edu/publications)  
Statement from VTS Faculty on Sexuality Issues, 1995 (on MyVTS).

#### **February 28: Historical and Theological Perspectives**

Eugene Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, 37-85 (Chapters 2 and 3).

#### **March 4: Social Scientific Approaches—**

American Psychological Association, Report on the Sexualization of Girls

<http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report-summary.pdf>

<http://www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/girls/report-full.pdf>

"Sexuality" in *Introduction to Sociology* (MyVTS course website)

**March 7: Sex, Gender and Bodies: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives**

Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” in *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, 120-134.

Sarah Coakley, “The Eschatological Body: Gender, Transformation, and God,” in *Powers and Submissions*, 153-167.

**March 11: Sex, Gender and Bodies: Queer Theology and Hermeneutics**

Gerard Loughlin, Introduction, in *Queer Theology*, 1-10.

Elizabeth Stuart, “Sacramental Flesh,” in *Queer Theology*, 65-75.

Mark D. Jordan, “God’s Body,” in *Queer Theology*, 281-292.

**March 14: Intersectionality—Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality**

Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, selections TBA

**March 18: Intersectionality, continued**

Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, selections TBA

**April 4: Sexual Ethics**

Margaret Farley, *Just Love*, 17-26, 109-173.

**April 8: Sexual Ethics, continued**

Margaret Farley, *Just Love*, 177-244.

**April 11: Desire and Pleasure**

Rowan Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” in *Ourselves, Our Souls and Bodies*, 58-68.

Eugene Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, 195-248.

**April 15: Marriage and Commitment**

Margaret Farley, *Just Love*, 245-311.

Dale Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 103-124 (Chapter 8).

Eugene Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, 249-275.

**April 18: Sexual Ethics in Practice**

Marvin Ellison, *Making Love Just*, 7-22, 41-58, 77-97, 115-137 (Chapters 1, 3, 5, 7).

**April 22: Sexual Ethics in Practice, continued**

Joyce Mercer, “Virtual Sex, Actual Infidelity”

James Poling, “God, Sex, and Power”

Darryl W. Stephens, “Fiduciary Duty and Sacred Trust”

**April 25: Missions and Interfaith Issues**

Margaret Farley, *Just Love*, 57-103.

Edward P. Antonio, *The Embrace of Eros*, 181-195.

Titus Pressler, “The Impact of the Sexuality Controversy on Mission,” 11-16.

**April 29: Constructive Theologies of Sexuality**

Thomas Breidenthal, "Sanctifying Nearness," in *Theology and Sexuality*, 343-355.  
 Laurel Schneider, "Promiscuous Incarnation," in *The Embrace of Eros*, 231-245.

**May 2: Liturgy**

"I Will Bless You and You will be a Blessing" (brief overview available on Church Publishing website; print volume on reserve in library)

Paul Lakeland, "Ecclesiology, Desire, and the Erotic," in *The Embrace of Eros*, 247-259.

Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff, *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, and Resurrection*, 127-141.

Ruthanna Hooke and Joyce Mercer, "Women (Per)Forming the Body of Christ: A Feminist Christological Proposal," paper given at AAR/SBL Annual Meeting, November 2011.

Joy Bostic, "Flesh that Dances," in *The Embrace of Eros*, 277-295.

**May 6: Preaching**

Ruthanna Hooke, "Queering the Pulpit: Hermeneutical Methods and Proclamatory Possibilities," Paper presented at AAR/SBL Annual Meeting, November 2012.

Sermons TBA

**May 9: Christian Education on Sexuality Issues**

We will look at how the churches educate on sexuality. Students will have opportunities to select two denominational curricula for comparative assessment. Details to be given in class.

**May 13: Final Class: Class Presentations****Assignments:**

1. Initial Personal Reflection: (20%) This brief assignment will be discussed in the initial session of class. It draws on the reading by Kate Ott, asking each person to construct a personal time line in reflection on their own sexuality, along with a brief (3 page) reflection paper interpreting what stands out as significant, what meanings and insights one draws from this personal overview. No one will be asked to share their time line publically, but students should be prepared to discuss interpretations and insights in class.
2. Midterm Assignment: (30%) For this assignment, students will write a short paper (5-7 pages) responding to a case study provided by the instructors. The response should incorporate resources from class (texts, discussions, etc.) and should reflect clearly the interdisciplinary nature of our work--i.e., approaches including pastoral care, bible, etc.
3. Final Integrative Assignments (40%) Students will have the opportunity to select the type of final product they will create using some form of practical theological method (Osmer, Green, Mercer, etc.) as an interdisciplinary mode of approach to a specific issue concerning sexuality and Christian faith. After describing the particular problem, issue, or situation you are addressing, write a "background paper" that shows your work, through this method, followed by your production of an "end product," either:
  - a. Design a teaching session on a current sexuality related issue

- b. Evaluate an existing liturgy and create your own
- c. Take a position on a sexuality-related issue in one of the following media: newsletter article; sermon; or in the arena of public theology, an Op-Ed or public speech in a civic context
- d. Write a sermon on a biblical text that deals with sexuality issues. This sermon should offer specific teaching on sexuality in relation to this text and to the congregational context.