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.

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):


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


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:


Jan 5 Introduction: Eros


Jan 6 Sexuality and Spirituality

Ch. 4 Heyward


Ch. 12 Goss


**Jan 7 Eros, Sexuality, and the Bible**


**Recommended (On reserve):**


**Jan 8 Eros and the Love of God**


Recommended (On reserve):

Jan 9 Eros and Jesus


Jan 12 Embodied Love


**Jan 13 Eros in Cross-Cultural Perspectives**


**Jan 14 Eros, Wounding, and Spiritual Health**

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


**Jan 15 Eros and the Churches**

Ch. 8 Haffner


Ch. 18 Underwood


**Jan 16 Sustaining Eros through Spiritual Practice**

Ch. 2 Plaskow


Recommended Readings

Gay and Queer Theology, Religion, and Philosophy


Lesbian and Queer Theology, Religion, and Philosophy


**Bible and Early Christianity**


**Sexuality: History, Theology, and Ethics**


**Liturgy**


**World Religions**


**Cross-Cultural and Racial Minority Perspectives**


**Postcolonial Perspectives**


