

**Religion 308**  
**Sex & Sexuality in the Christian Tradition**

Prof. Alison I. Beach  
The College of William and Mary  
Spring Semester 2003

Class Meeting: Tuesday & Thursday, 11:00 – 12:20, Morton 239  
Office: Wren 306  
Office Hours: Wednesday 9:30 – 11:00 and 2:00 – 3:30, and by appointment  
Telephone: 221-2179  
e-mail: aibeac@wm.edu

**A. Course Organization and Requirements**

Sex & Sexuality in the Christian Tradition is an upper-level Religion Seminar.

*By a seminar I mean:*

- a group of advanced, **self-motivated** students studying under the guidance of a professor with each investigating a specified topic and exchanging results through reports and discussion...
- an advanced course featuring informality and discussion...
- a meeting for giving and discussing information...

My job as professor is to direct the course, provide the readings (except for the student-led sessions), and act as catalyst, facilitator and evaluator in a collaborative learning experience. ***If you prefer a course in which you sit back and listen to the "experts" talk, then this course is not for you.***

We will begin by questioning the terms “sex” and “gender”, and then move chronologically, beginning with ancient Greek and Rome and culminating with a series of student-led sessions focusing on contemporary challenges and issues related to the sex and sexuality.

Class Meetings:

The class will meet Tuesday and Thursday from 11:00 to 12:20. Reading assignments for all sessions are listed in section D of the syllabus.

Written Work:

- (a) Six 2-Page Written Assignments (20%): The purpose of these short writings is to help you work through the readings and to generate discussion in class.
- (b) One 12 to 15-Page Seminar Paper (30%): An assignment handout will be distributed in class and posted on Blackboard under Assignments/Paper Assignment.

Class Activities:

- (a) Participation in Weekly Discussions (40%): I am interested both in the quality of your contribution to the class and in the frequency of your active participation. *Please take this grade seriously: you won't get an A for participation simply by attending class.*
- (b) Student-led Discussion (10%): You and a small group of fellow students will lead class during the final weeks of the semester. Your group will be graded on organization, choice of readings, presentation of necessary background material, and the effectiveness of the discussion generated.

## **B. Grading Policy**

My interpretation of letter grades on written work is:

### **A and A-: Excellent**

Papers and exams that are correctly written in a technical sense, develop a logical, coherent argument, and contain a sequence of related paragraphs that lead to clear conclusions. An A-range paper demonstrates a firm grasp of the assigned material and offers original and insightful analysis.

### **B+, B, B-: Good**

Papers that have only minor technical flaws, develop an argument, but one that may be less subtle or well-reasoned than an A-range paper. B-range papers demonstrate a more than adequate grasp of the text(s), and make thoughtful use of the text(s) without necessarily adding something new.

### **C+, C, C-: Adequate**

Papers that have numerous technical errors, treat the assigned material only superficially, and/or fail to answer the assigned question adequately.

### **D+, D, D-: Poor**

Papers with numerous serious technical errors and/or that fail to address the assigned question in any effective way.

My interpretation of letter grades for class participation is:

### **A and A-: Excellent**

The student is always prepared to discuss the **specifics** of the assigned readings, asks interesting and focused questions, brings appropriate previous knowledge into the discussion, and listens and reacts respectfully to the comments of others in the class. The student has not missed more than one class meeting (without a valid medical excuse).

### **B+, B, B-: Good**

The student is usually, but not always, prepared to discuss the specifics of the assigned readings. The student is usually a good questioner and listener. The student has not missed more than three class meetings (without a valid medical excuse).

### **C+, C, C-: Adequate**

The student is often not prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Questions and contributions reflect spotty preparation for class. The student is sometimes not a respectful listener. The student has not

missed more than four class meetings (without a valid medical excuse).

**D+, D, D-: Poor**

The student is generally not prepared for class and demonstrates little engagement with the readings or the class discussion. Student is inappropriately argumentative or offensive to fellow students. The student has not missed more than five class meetings (without a valid medical excuse).

**F: Unacceptable**

The student has missed more than five class meetings (without a valid medical excuse).

**C. Course Reader**

I have organized all of the readings for the course into a course reader, available for purchase at Staples on Richmond Road. Because of the elimination of the student print quota, I have decided not to use e-reserves. The course reader has consecutively numbered pages, and these are listed in the syllabus.

**D. Schedule of Classes & Readings**

**January 16**

Course Introduction

**January 21 & 23**

Definitions: Sex & Gender

*Read:*

- Malcolm Potts & Roger Short, "Sex and Gender," in *Ever Since Adam and Eve: The Evolution of Human Sexuality* (CR 1-32).
- Joan Scott, "Gender: a Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (CR 33-48)
- Anne Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are not Enough," in *The Sciences* (March/April, 1993) (CR 49-53)
- John Boswell, "Definitions," in *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (CR 54-64)

**January 28, 30 & February 4**

The Ancient Greece & Rome Sexual Heritage

■ **Assignment #1** due January 28

*Read:*

- Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* (CR 93-121)
- Guilia Sissa, "The Sexual Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle," in *From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints. A History of Women in the West 1* (Cambridge, MA, 1992). (CR 122-140)
- John Boswell, "Rome: The Foundation," in *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (CR 65-78)
- Aline Rouselle, "Body Politics in Ancient Rome," in *From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints* (CR 141-161)
- Ariadne Staples, *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgin* (CR 162-179)

## February 11, 13 & 18

### What do the Hebrew Bible and New Testament Have to Say about Sex & Sexuality?

#### ■ Assignment #2 due February 11

Read:

- Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Sex in the Bible,” “Sex and the People,” and “Gifts of the Greeks,” in *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (CR 180-195)
- Elaine Pagels, “Introduction,” and “The Kingdom of God is at Hand,” in *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (CR 196-218)
- Peter Brown, “From Apostle to Apologist,” in *Body and Society in Late Antiquity* (CR 229-246)
- John Boswell, “The Scriptures,” in *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (CR 79-92)

## February 20, 25 & 27

### What’s so Great About Virginity? Marriage, Virginity & Celibacy in the Early Church

#### ■ Assignment #3 due February 20

Read:

##### ❖ Choice 1:

- St. Jerome on the History of Sex – *Viator* 24 (1993): 1-22
- Ambrose, *On Virginity*
- Peter Brown, “Learn of Me a Healthy Arrogance: Jerome,” and “Aula Pudoris: Ambrose,” in *Body and Society*

##### ❖ Choice 2:

- Augustine, *On Holy Virginity*
- Augustine, Anti-Manichean Writings and Anti-Pelagian Writings, in *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, ed. Elizabeth Clark
- Peter Brown, “Augustine: Sexuality and Society,” in *Body and Society*

##### ❖ Choice 3:

- John Chrysostom, *On Marriage and Family Life*
- Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*
- Peter Brown, “Marriage and Mortality: Gregory of Nyssa,” and “Sexuality in the City: John Chrysostom,” in *Body and Society*

Everybody Read:

- Elaine Pagels, “The Paradise of Virginity Regained,” in *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (CR 219-228)

***Spring Break: No Class March 4 & 6***

## March 11

### Celibacy in Practice: The Desert Fathers & Mothers

Read:

- *Sayings of the Desert Fathers/Mothers* (CR 262-285)
- Athanasius, *Life of Saint Anthony* (CR 286-291)

- Gregory the Great, “How Benedict Overcame the Temptation of the Flesh,” and “How Some Poisoned Bread was Thrown Away by a Raven,” in *Dialogues* (CR 292-295)
- Peter Brown, “The Desert Fathers: Anthony to John Climacus,” in *The Body & Society in Late Antiquity* (CR 247-261)

### **March 13**

#### The Early Middle Ages: Sexual Humor in a Women’s Community

##### ■ Assignment # 4 due March 13

Read:

- Vern L. Bullough, “Sex in History: a Redux,” in *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (CR 296-307)
- Hrotsvita of Gandersheim, *Callimachus* (CR 317-329)

### **March 18**

#### Playing by the Rules: Sex in Medieval Canon Law

Read:

- Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: the Development of a Sexual Code 550-1150* (CR 330-357)
- Vern L. Bullough, “The Sin against Nature and Homosexuality,” in *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, ed. Vern Bullough and James Brundage (CR 358-367)
- James A. Brundage, “Playing by the Rules,” in *Desire and Discipline* (CR 307-316)

### **March 20 & 25**

#### Love & Sex (Physical & Spiritual) in the High Middle Ages

##### ■ Assignment # 4 due March 20

Read:

- Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* (CR 368-374)
- Jacques de Vitry, *The Life of Marie D’Oignies* (CR 374-376)
- Peter Abelard, *History of My Calamities* (CR 377-403)
- Yves Ferroul, “Abelard’s Blissful Castration,” in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (CR 404-415)
- John F. Benton, “Clio and Venus: An Historical View of Medieval Love,” in *The Meaning of Courtly Love* (CR 416-429)

### **March 27 & April 1**

#### Reformers & Puritans

##### ■ Assignment # 5 due March 27

Read:

- Eleanor L. McLaughlin, “Male and Female in Christian Tradition: Was There a Reformation in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Male and Female: Christian Approaches to Sexuality* (CR 430-438)

- Ed Ingebretsen, “Wigglesworth, Mather, Starr: Witch-Hunts and General Wickedness in Public,” in *The Puritan Origins of American Sex: Religion, Sexuality and National Identity in American Literature* (CR 439-450)
- Nicholas F. Radel, “A Sodom Within: Historicizing Puritan Homoerotics in the Diary of Michael Wigglesworth,” in *The Puritan Origins of American Sex* (CR 451-458)
- Russ Castronovo, “Enslaving Passions: White Male Sexuality and the Evasion of Race,” in *The Puritan Origins of American Sex* (CR 459-471)

### **April 3 & 8**

The Nineteenth Century: the Birth of “Homosexuality”

■ **Assignment # 6** due April 3

*Read:*

- Richard von Kraft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (CR 472-498)
- Harry Oosterhuis, Richard von Kraft-Ebing’s “Step-Children of Nature” in *Sexualities in History* (CR 499-511)
- Judith R. Walkowitz, “Dangerous Sexualities,” in *A History of Women: Emerging Feminism to World War. A History of Women in the West 4* (CR 512-528).

### **April 10**

The “Magdalene Laundry” Controversy in Ireland (student-led)

### **April 15**

Gay & Lesbian Ordination in Protestant Denominations (student-led)

### **April 17**

The American Catholic Church Sexual Abuse Scandal (student-led)

### **April 22**

“The New Virginity” and “Lordship Dating” (student-led)

### **April 24**

Course Conclusion (overflow day, if needed)