

Sex and the Sacred: Theo-Psychological Issues

Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies
Pacific School of Religion
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Course Summary

The challenge facing this course is that both its topics, sexuality and spirituality, are poorly understood and rapidly evolving. In light of extensive recent research in the biological and social sciences, sexuality is the easier topic. Accordingly, after introducing its topic and reviewing traditional approaches to it, this course proposes a clarification of the nature of spirituality in relation to religion, theism, and human psychology. Then, given such clarification, discussion of the relationship of sexuality and spirituality ensues and further mutual elucidation emerges. The guiding vision is an understanding of spirituality as, not a theological matter, but first and foremost the expression of an inherent, human mental quality, whose enhancement requires biopsychological integration and whose full elaboration entails theology. The phenomenology-like analysis of Bernard J. F. Lonergan specifies that mental quality, intentional consciousness or human spirit; and its application to a particular and burning topic, sexuality, illustrates the challenge facing traditional religions today and proposes a viable response. PowerPoint assisted lecture, personal reflection, and small- and large-group discussion will facilitate the course.

Learning Outcomes

Contrast traditional understandings of sexuality with currently evolving ones.
Articulate some general understanding of a non-theological nature of spirituality.
Use sexuality to illustrate the importance of personal integration for spiritual growth.
List Lonergan's "Transcendental Precepts" as postmodern guidelines for sexual practice.
Explain how the inherent spiritual nature of humanity opens onto belief in God and even union with God.
Suggest how this theological extrapolation expands the meaning of human sexuality.
Contrast standard religious treatments of this topic with the emphasis in this course.

Course Outline

I. Introductory Matters

- Personal introductions
- Class discussion on the meaning of spirituality
- Historical review of sex in Western civilization
- Saint Paul's teaching about sex
- Current religious opinions on sexuality and spirituality
- Overview of the emphasis of the course

II. Clarification of "spirituality"

- Many legitimate usages of the term

- The core issue: commitment to transcendence
- The relationship between spirituality and religion
- Lonergan's analysis: four levels and two modes of consciousness
- Guidelines for all human behavior: The transcendental precepts
- III. Human Integration: Body, Psyche, and Spirit
 - Psyche and spirit within the human mind
 - The tug and pull between the two: human integration
 - Self-constitution and the possibility of self-re-formation
 - Examples in Freudian and Jungian psychology
 - Human development: a physical, organic, psychological, and spiritual process
- IV. The Meanings of Human Sexuality
 - Sexual implications of body, psyche, and spirit
 - The priority of spiritual, over biological and psychological, concerns
 - Non-theological, spiritual implications of human sexuality
 - Further implications of belief in God and in union with God
 - Application of these themes to the LGBTIQ range of natural sexual variations
- V. Sexual Ethics for the Postmodern World
 - The meanings and nature of *ethics*
 - Science-based natural law, a most promising option
 - Universal principles and developmental applications
 - Positive and negative guidelines and contemporary sexual "sins"
 - Summaries, debriefings, evaluations, and good-byes

Sources (includes required and recommended reading)

- Donnelly, Dody H., *Radical Love: An Approach to Sexual Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston, 1993).
- Gendreau, GERALYN; PEYSER, RANDY; GENTILE, FRANCESCA, and ARNOLD, COURTNEY (Eds.), *The Marriage of Sex and Spirit: Relationships at the Heart of Conscious Evolution* (Fulton, CA: Elite Books, 2006).
- Haughton, Rosemary, *The Mystery of Sexuality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972).
- Helminiak, Daniel A., *The Human Core of Spirituality: Mind as Psyche and Spirit* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996).
- Helminiak, Daniel A., *Religion and the Human Sciences: An Approach via Spirituality* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).
- Helminiak, Daniel A., *Sex and the Sacred: Gay Identity and Spiritual Growth* (New York: Haworth Press, 2006).
- Kelsey, Morton, and Kelsey, Barbara, *Sacrament of Sexuality: The Spirituality and Psychology of Sex* (Warwick, NY: Amity House, 1994).
- Kraft, William F., *Whole and Holy Sexuality: How to Find Human and Spiritual Integrity as a Sexual Person* (St. Meinrad, IN: Abbey Press, 1999).
- Manning, Christel, and Zuckerman, Phil, *Sex and Religion* (Belmont, CA: Thomas Wadsworth, 2005).
- Nelson, James B., *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1978).
- Nelson, James B., *Body Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

- Nelson, James B., and Longfellow, Sandra P., *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).
- Newman, Susan D., *Oh God!: A Black Woman's Guide to Sexuality and Spirituality* (New York : One World/Ballantine Books, 2002).
- Ohanneson, Joan, *And They Felt No Shame: Christians Reclaiming their Sexuality*. (Minneapolis, MN: Winston, 1983).
- Woods, Richard, *Another Kind of Love: homosexuality and Spirituality*, 3rd ed., (Fort Wayne, IN: Knoll, 1990).
- Whitehead, James D., and Whitehead, Evelyn Eaton, *Holy Eros: Recovering the Passion of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009).

Recent Statements of religious denominations and of secular agencies committed to sane and healthy sexuality will also be provided for recommended reading.

Daily Readings

- I. Sexuality and Spirituality: Friends, Not Foes (Helminiak, *Sex & Sacred*, pp. 35-51)
The Spiritual Dimension of the Lesbian and Gay Experience (Helminiak, *Sex & Sacred*, pp. 1-11)
Opening a Can of Worms (Helminiak, *Religion & Human Sciences*, pp. 1-30).
- II. Description of Human Spirit (Helminiak, *Religion & Human Sciences*, pp. 43-59)
A Systematic Account of Human Spirit (Helminiak, *Human Core*, pp. 81-94, 99-120)
- III. Suggestive Description of Psyche (Helminiak, *Human Core*, pp. 131-139)
Human Psyche as Enspirited (Helminiak, *Human Core*, pp. 141-150)
The Human Organism (Helminiak, *Human Core*, pp. 195-200)
The Unity of the Human Subject (*Helminiak, Human Core*, pp. 201-222)
- IV. A Spiritual Lesson from the AIDS Epidemic (Helminiak, *Sex & Sacred*, pp. 13-33)
Sexuality and Spirituality (Helminiak, *Human Core*, pp. 233-267)
- V. Sexual Ethics without Religion (Helminiak, *Sex & Sacred*, pp. 81-86)
The Right and Wrong of Sex, Queer and Otherwise (Helminiak, *Sex & Sacred*, pp. 87-98)
Jesus: A Model for Coming Out (Helminiak, *Sex & Sacred*, pp. 111-128)
Gay Marriage: A Response to the Vatican (Helminiak, *Sex & Sacred*, pp. 153-163)

Course Requirements

1. Daily **preparation** by study of assigned readings
2. Daily **attendance** and active participation in class
3. In addition, for credit students: A **term paper**, about 12 to 15 pages, on a topic that treats some relevant aspect of the course and has been approved by the instructor. The paper may be a reflection paper, which both objectively and personally integrates the course material critically, or else a research paper, which uses outside sources to delve more deeply in some one aspect of the course. In some way all papers must reflect an impact of the material presented in the readings and the course lectures. Papers are to be

typed in 12-point Times New Roman font and double-spaced on 8.5" x 11" paper, with 1" margins on all sides. Pages must be numbered and stapled together. Papers must bear a title, be organized into sections that bear subtitles, include an introduction and a conclusion, and be documented as needed. Papers are to be written with correct American English spelling, grammar, and punctuation and are to consistently follow some stylebook. In the event of numerous errors in these technical areas, papers will be returned for rewriting. Students are advised to use a word processor and run grammar and spell checks before submitting the paper. Papers are not to deviate significantly from the required lengths. Papers are due one month after the last day of the course.

Evaluation

Term papers will be taken as evidence of student learning and integration of material. Grades are according to the standard PSR grading policy at <http://www.psr.edu/grades>.

Brief Vita: Daniel Helminiak is Professor of Psychology at the University of West Georgia. Ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1967, he holds a PhD in Systematic Theology from Andover Newton Theological School and Boston College, where he was teaching assistant to Prof. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, "the Thomas Aquinas of the twentieth century," and a PhD in Human Development from the University of Texas at Austin. As a psychotherapist, social scientist, and theologian, he is concerned to integrate religion and psychology and, thus, to suggest what wholesome human living means in a pluralistic and secularized world. Said otherwise, his specialization is spirituality. His areas of special interest are post-childhood development and human sexuality. He is widely known for his bestseller *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*. His other books include *Spirituality for our global community: From traditional religion to a world at peace* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), *The transcended Christian* (Alyson, 2007), *Sex and the sacred* (Haworth Press, 2006), *Meditation without myth* (Crossroad, 2005), *Religion and the Human Sciences* and *The Human Core of Spirituality* (State University of New York Press, 1998, 1996), and *Spiritual development* and *The Same Jesus: A Contemporary Christology* (Loyola University Press, 1987, 1986). His web site is www.visionsofdaniel.net.

A Popularized Course Blurb

Today we know a wide range of human sexualities, and we recognize the profound psychological import of sex. Traditionally, in contrast, along with all physical reality, sex was thought to be ignoble and even dirty or nasty, so sex was allowed only for procreation. Marriage and child-rearing were to hallow sex temporarily, but only its avoidance would sanctify the unmarried. So linking sexuality with spirituality today poses a novel challenge. To meet it head on, this course suggests a novel solution: to recognize spirituality as first and foremost an essential facet of humanity—namely, the unfolding of an open-ended, self-transcending dynamism within the human mind—not necessarily as something connected with organized religion or even belief in God. These would be expressions of spirituality, not its source. This solution turns the traditional emphasis up-side down; it elaborates the nature on which grace is to build; it illumines the mystery of creation, which points to its Creator. In considerable detail, the

combination of contemporary psychology and Bernard Lonergan's account of the human spirit (consciousness) fills out this new vision. It exemplifies Lonergan's *Method in Theology*, proposes a viable solution to the current challenge of sex, and suggests the direction helpful religion must take to serve a global, i.e., pluralistic, community.