

SYLLABUS: PSR Summer 2010

Queer Theology, Queer Politics

Justin Tanis

505.610.7812

justintanis.dc@gmail.com

Overview:

This course will examine contemporary issues facing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in the public arena through the lens of theological reflection. Queer people have made significant strides in the movement for equal rights and yet continue to face violence, discrimination and health disparities which point to the continued prevalence of prejudice based on sexual orientation and gender identity. We will consider the intersections of theology and politics around these issues and the role that people of faith—from a variety of viewpoints—play in the public sphere. The class will include opportunities to put our reflection into practice as we take direct action around these issues.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the class, students will be able to:

- Express their understanding of the interconnection between belief and political action and articulate how their personal and professional principles impact their choices about activities in the public sphere;
- Incorporate the history of both the LGBT religious and political movements and describe how the intertwined nature of queer theology and the LGBT politics have influenced the development of both movements;
- Describe the role that religious institutions can play in regards to the public policy, including legal limitations and moral responsibilities;
- Reflect theologically on issues related to public policy;
- Describe the key issues in current LGBT advocacy and the role that religious people and institutions do and can play in political liberation;
- Practice practical advocacy skills, including direct interactions with policy makers on a topic of the student's choice, based upon increased knowledge of the US political system.

Method:

Each class period will be devoted to engaging a particular aspect of LGBT political work and exploring the theological implications and positions related to that theme. The classes will include lectures to provide a comprehensive look at the current political realities facing the LGBT community, an investigation of relevant topics in scripture and theology, and an opportunity for students to formulate and express their own beliefs.

For each topic, a student or small group (depending on the number of overall participants) will give an in-class presentation on the most recent actions and communications related to that theme. This will develop skills in understanding current politics in a rapidly changing world and provide the class with a current "snapshot" of that issue.

The final project for the class will be *one* of the following:

- Engaging a policy maker directly on a sexuality or gender related issue of the student's choice and advocating for a particular position that is important to the student. The student will then write a paper reflecting on the theological reasons for selecting that position, describing the actions taken, articulating the desired outcome and outlining next steps that could be taken in approximately 10 pages; policy makers can include federal, state or local officials, consular officials and others. OR
- Composing a sermon (20-25 minutes in length) providing a theological underpinning for a particular social position related to gender or sexuality, including adequate details to inform the listeners of the topic and to provide relevant and spiritual appropriate commentary on it

Requirements

Grades will be based on:

- 40% on participation in class projects and contributions to class discussions, demonstrating engagement with the material and with others
- 10% on class presentation of denominational position on public policy advocacy (due on Tuesday of class)
- 10% on op-ed assignment (max of 200 words, due on Friday of class)
- 40% on final project as outlined above, due 3 weeks from the last date of class

Grading and Plagiarism Policy

Please see the following links for information on PSR's policies on grades:

<http://www.psr.edu/grades> and on plagiarism: <http://www.psr.edu/plagiarism-policy>

English as Second Language (ESL) Policy

- Upon request by the ESL student to the faculty, the faculty member will extend the deadline for papers one week to allow time for editing.
- Upon request by the ESL student, faculty will allow twice as much time for ESL students to complete in-class written exams.

Texts:

- Students should read a history of the LGBT movement prior to class; strongly suggested is *Long Road to Freedom: The Advocate History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, Mark Thompson, ed. (Liberation Publications, 1994). This book is out of print but widely available used.
- *The Politics of Gay Rights*, Craig A. Rimmerman, Kenneth D. Wald and Clyde Wilcox, eds. (University of Chicago Press, 2000).
- Additional articles below

Course Outline

Monday: The Queer Movement

Reading:

- Movement Advance Project, *A Decade of Progress on LGBT Rights* (Dec. 2009): <http://www.lgbtmap.org/file/a-decade-of-lgbt-progress.pdf> and *The Momentum Report* (Oct. 2009): <http://www.lgbtmap.org/app/webroot/file/momentum-report-2009.pdf>
- GLBT Historical Society, online exhibit, "Council on Religion and the Homosexual," <http://www.lgbtran.org/Exhibits/CRH/Exhibit.aspx?P=1>
- Jenn Thiessen, "WWJD or Jesus Goes to Pride Day," in *ReCreations: Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of Queer People*, Catherine Lake, ed. (Queer Press, 1999), pp. 49-51.
- National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality, *National Transgender Discrimination Survey*, preliminary results (November 2009): http://transequality.org/Resources/NCTE_prelim_survey_econ.pdf
- National Center for Transgender Equality, *Transgender Equality and the Federal Government* (Feb. 2009): http://transequality.org/Resources/NCTE_Federal_Government_web.pdf
- "Beyond Political Mainstreaming: Reflections on Lesbian and Gay Organizations and the Grassroots," and "Where Rhetoric Meets Reality: The Role of Black Lesbians and Gays in 'Queer' Politics," in *The Politics of Gay Rights*

Material to be covered:

- Demographics
 - What are the realities of LGBT lives
 - Who are LGBT people
- Development of LGBT community
 - History
 - Community institutions
 - Values
 - Religious Life
 - Global perspectives
- Concurrent development of queer religious movements and political movements
 - "Gay is good"
 - Early MCC and Dignity writings/parallel with early political writings
 - Queer liberation theology
 - What are the connections between queer theology and politics?
 - Theological underpinnings of human and civil rights
- Anti-discrimination legislation and implementation (each category will include factual information on current laws and an opportunity for students to reflect theologically on that issue in small groups)
 - Employment
 - Employment laws—federal, state, local
 - Impact on religious employers

- None
 - Impact of choosing to voluntarily submit to anti-discrimination laws
- Public accommodation
 - Fear tactics around restroom/locker room usage (show montage of video clips against bathroom usage by transgender people)
 - Rights of individuals to public spaces
 - What responsibility do religious organizations have for public spaces
- Housing
 - Impact of housing discrimination on community life
 - Religious responses
- Credit
- Religious
 - support
 - efforts to repeal anti-discrimination legislation
 - impact on religious institutions
- Military service
 - Current state of Don't Ask/Don't Tell and Military Readiness Enhancement Act
 - Theological reflections on military service
 - Do sexuality and gender impact military service?
- Taking Action: Students will participate in a current action called for by OutFront, Amnesty International's LGBT program (such as letter writing on behalf of an imprisoned gay activist etc.); specific action will be chosen based on what is currently happening at the time of the class

Tuesday: People of faith in the public sphere

Reading:

- Robert Goss, "From Christ the Oppressor to Jesus the Liberator," in *Queering Christ* (Pilgrim Press, 2002), pp. 140-169.
- Alpert, Rebecca, "Exodus," in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, Deryn Guest, Robert Goss, Mona West and Thomas Bohache, eds. (SCM Press, 2006), pp 61-76.
- Didi Herman "The Gay Agenda is the Devil's Agenda: The Christian Right's Vision and the Role of the State," *The Politics of Gay Rights*, pp. 139 – 155
- Internal Revenue Service, "Tax Information for Churches and Religious Organizations," <http://www.irs.gov/charities/churches/index.html>
- Students should identify and read materials from their own denomination or a denomination of their choice about public advocacy and bring one example to class

Material to be covered:

- Theological basis for addressing prejudice
 - Individual liberty/conscience
 - Responsibility to the vulnerable in society

- Exodus and Jesus as models for political and theological liberation—discussion of readings
- Thinking theologically about equal rights
 - Student self-writing project in class on their own reasons for addressing issues of inequality in society
 - Sharing/discussion to follow
- What responsibilities do queer people of faith and our allies have for matters of public policy?
- Do sexuality and gender matter in public policy? Why or why not?
- Discussion in small groups: in what ways has your experience of sexual orientation and gender identity shaped your experiences as a person of faith?
- Discussion of the role of people of faith impacting public policy
 - What ethical responsibilities do we have to impact public policy?
 - What guides us on which issues to respond to and how?
 - What are the limits?
 - Religious
 - Denominational—students to share their research
 - Legal

Wednesday: Marriage, Family and Children

Reading:

- “Isn’t Marriage a Religious Matter?” and “Is Marriage Equality a Question of Civil Rights?” in Evan Wolfson, *Why Marriage Matters: America, Equality and Gay People’s Right to Marry* (Simon & Schuster, 2004).
- “AIDS and the Discursive Construction of Homosexuality,” by Steven Seidman in *Sexualities in History: A Reader*, Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay, eds. (Routledge, 2002), pp. 375-385.
- Robert E. Goss, “Ephesians,” in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, Deryn Guest, Robert Goss, Mona West and Thomas Bohache, eds. (SCM Press, 2006), pp. 630-638
- GLSEN, *The 2007 National School Climate Survey*, Executive Summary: http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENTS/file/000/001/1306-1.pdf

Material to be covered:

- Marriage
 - What does the Bible actually say about marriage
 - Students research passages relating to marriage
 - Hebrew scriptures
 - Gospels
 - Epistles
 - What is the development of concept of marriage through the Biblical text?
 - History of same and opposite sex marriage within the church

- Boswell research
 - Changes through Medieval period and modern period
 - “Marriage = one man and one woman” or does it
 - Religious opposition to same sex marriage
 - Organized movements
 - Examples of Christian defense of marriage initiatives and fundraising efforts
 - Religious advocacy for same sex marriage
 - Examples of current advocacy, including specific examples
 - Evaluation of theological underpinnings behind those messages
- Creation of families
 - Adoption
 - Foster care
 - What are the theological implications of our choices of how to bear children?
- Participation in education
 - Current state of schools for LGBT students (GLSEN School Climate Study)
 - Bullying
 - Impact on health of LGBT students
 - Anti-bullying initiatives
 - GSAs
 - Religious based opposition
 - Impact of GSAs on student well-being
 - Comprehensive sexuality education
 - What is and can be said to students
 - Religious based support and opposition
 - To what degree should sexuality education take place within the faith community

Thursday: Health and well-being

Reading:

- “Direct Action: ACTing UP and Sitting In,” in Randy Shaw, *The Activist’s Handbook: A Primer*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 212-250.
- SAGE (Service and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Seniors) and the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce, *Outing Age*, 2010, http://sageusa.org/uploads/outingage_screen4.pdf
- Morris Floyd, “The Church and Antigay Violence,” <http://www.umaffirm.org/gaither.html> (please read article and links page that follows)
- National Coalition for LGBT Health: *Guiding Principles for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Inclusion in Healthcare Reform*, http://www.lgbthealth.net/documents/LGBTGuidingPrinciplesFINAL_000.doc

- Justin Tanis, ed., “Responding to Hate Crimes,”
http://transequality.org/Resources/NCTE_Hate_Crimes_Manual.pdf

Material to be covered:

- What role do religious organizations have to play in people’s physical well being, along with their spiritual well being? Is there a difference? How do these things manifest themselves in our communities of faith?
- HIV/AIDS
 - Current status of HIV/AIDS in the world
 - Examples of communities of faith doing work with HIV
 - What is your reaction to the protests in churches described in the Shaw reading?
 - What is the responsibility of religious people to people with HIV/AIDS
 - What are the theological implications of HIV and its current face in our world
 - How does public funding and public policy impact the work being done by communities of faith
- Violence
 - Statistics and information on violence against LGBT people
 - Religious right
 - Explicit and implicit calls for violence
 - Does religiously based homophobia incite violence? If so, are preachers morally responsible? (note: not legally responsible) Student discussion
 - Denial of civil rights creates climate in which violence is more likely?
 - Religious resources to combat violence
 - Theological underpinnings to respond to violence
 - Religious resources to work within communities
 - How might religious communities address hate motivated violence?
 - Student case studies, in small groups, of specific incidents to formulate plan of religious response
- Sexuality
 - Sodomy laws—often religiously argued
 - Public sex
 - Creation of alternative sexuality cultures
- LGBT Elders
 - State of LGBT Elders
 - Role of religious communities in providing elder care that is culturally appropriate

Friday: Where we go from here?

Reading:

- Students will read self-selected material and complete a project of writing an op-ed piece (max 200 words) on a current issue of LGBT politics, of their choosing, that includes their position as people of faith; students will
 - Present the issue to the class
 - Share their op-ed
 - Answer questions on the issue
- Handouts from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality on visiting your member of Congress

Material to be covered:

- Training: How to visit your legislators on public policy matters
 - Setting up appointments
 - Preparing for the meeting
 - Bringing a team
 - During the visit
 - Making your case
 - Follow up
 - Evaluation
- Students present op-eds
- Where do we see the LGBT movement going?
 - Continued development of queer theology
 - Development of queer culture
 - Political movements for rights
 - Ways to end discrimination and prejudice based on sexual orientation and gender identity
- How do communities of faith interact with the global LGBT movement?
- What future intersections do we see between queer politics and queer theology?
- Take Action: Make appointment to visit to the local office of one member of Congress representing California (Senators or Representative from PSR's district)