



**Sex & Sin
In
Ancient Judaism & Early Christianity
HRHS- 8335**

Fall 2019

Starr King School for the Ministry

**Online Zoom Meetings
every Monday, 9:40-11am PST**

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Marc Chagall, *Eve* (1971)
Musée National Marc Chagall Nice
(Image accessed through Réunion des Musées
Nationaux-Grand Palais Collections)

Course Description:

This course will introduce ways in which sex was used as a proposed boundary marker for religious identity in Second Temple Jewish and Early Christian texts. Contextualizing these boundary markers in the cultural, religious, and political landscape of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean destabilizes the meta-narrative concerning the picture of 'proper' sexual ethics and gender identity by exposing the permeability of those boundaries. We will explore how Jewish and Christian pseudepigraphal and apocryphal texts from the third century BCE to the third century CE can offer alternative access points into Jewish and Christian tradition. These texts offer a diverse set of voices that can be used to subvert oppressive interpretations that have had lasting and painful repercussions in lived gender experience because of the conflation of sex, gender, and sexuality with sin. We will engage with traditional readings of passages known as 'lobber texts' and challenge them with counter-oppressive readings from a hermeneutical range including feminist, queer, postcolonial, liberation, and ecological perspectives. Topics such as religious leadership, ritual participation, sin, violence & rape, the afterlife, fertility & abortion, and sexuality in the Greco-Roman world will be surveyed and discussed in light of current debates on women's ordination, reproductive rights, and LGBTQI identity to track how ancient debates are alive today and consider how silenced voices from this period may be used as counter-oppressive lenses for Biblical and extra-Biblical interpretation.

This is an online synchronous with Zoom 3000 level course. The format is lecture/discussion. Lectures will be posted to voicethread each week. Zoom session participation is mandatory and will be primarily for group discussion of the lecture and the readings. Please note that due to the nature of the topic, some images and literary descriptions will be sexually explicit.

I. Student Learning Objectives

This course is meant to equip students with tools to engage in a meaningful way in the academy, ministry, life, and activism about what Jewish and Christian Sacred Texts and tradition teach about sex and sin. Contextualizing the history of the conflation of sex with sin over time allows us to see the (un)expected ripple effects that we still live with today. During the course, students will:

- Explore the historical context of biblical citations and extra-biblical traditions that are most often used to support systems of abuse and oppression of women and LGBTQI communities.
- Engage in open and respectful dialogue concerning different faith and cultural perspectives on sex, sexuality, gender, and sin.
- Apply historical-critical and post-modern feminist methodological frameworks to develop and practice a hermeneutic of suspicion. This hermeneutic of suspicion will be used to create and foster counter-oppressive readings of Jewish and Christian Sacred Texts and traditions.
- Learn how to access, search, and use library research tools and resources for academic research.

II. Student Learning Outcomes

After successful completion of all course requirements, students will be able to:

Learning Goal	Assessment/Evaluation
Identify examples in current events that either explicitly or implicitly cite Judeo-Christian Sacred Texts to support abuse and oppression and contextualize this use within the context of the course.	Completion of two 3-5 page reflection papers as described below. Active participation in the weekly zoom
Be prepared to engage in dialogue and communicate liberating readings of the aforementioned citations when encountered in ministry, life, and activism.	discussions that reflects engagement with the assigned readings and lectures.
Cultivate a process oriented understanding of the hermeneutic of suspicion. Create and foster counter-oppressive	Be able to identify 8 common methods that have been used to silence women (and other marginalized communities) in religious texts. This will be assessed through practical application in zoom discussions concerning the readings.
readings of a student's own faith and/or cultural tradition.	Offer a counter-oppressive reading through the completion of a final 10 -15 page long reflection paper and brief presentation as described below.

III. Educating to Counter Oppressions

This course seeks to advance the values expressed in the statement of [Educating to Counter Oppressions \(ECO\)](#) that is central to Starr King School for the Ministry's educational design.

The overall goal is to help each person prepare for religious leadership, within a multi-religious and counter-oppressive context to create just and sustainable communities.

This course falls primarily within the following SKSM Thresholds: 3) Sacred Text and Interpretation and 4) History of Dissenting Traditions and Thea/ological Quest.

IV. Course Policies

- a. *Participation*: 45% of final assessment. Student participation is determined by active engagement in online zoom discussion and watching the lectures. Students are expected to attend the weekly zoom meetings, attendance will be taken every week and constitutes half of the participation assessment. Each voicethread lecture is set so that the system logs if it has been watched to completion. Each lecture needs to be viewed before Monday's zoom meeting in order to get credit towards your final participation assessment. Developing an ability to discuss these texts is a learning objective of the course. Please note that contextualizing the history of the conflation of sex and sin may be triggering at times, so it is important to factor in time to process and reflect on the course material before the zoom discussion so that everyone can engage in open, respectful, and productive dialogue (see suggested course format below). *"Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist."* - Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," *Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Crossing Press, 1984), 112. This course is wrestling with texts that have been used for oppression so in order to develop the proper level of comfort in informed and liberating dialogue each student must engage with the material and the community. (See Zoom Discussion Guidelines/Community Expectations Handout).
- b. *Writing Assignments*: 30% of final assessment (15% each). **A 3-5 page reflection paper is due twice during the semester (October 7th & November 9th)** on how a current issue in the media (commercials, news broadcasts, YouTube videos, newspaper articles, Facebook trends, tweets, music, tv, film, etc.) and how it intersects with the themes/topics of the course by placing it in dialogue with the assigned readings. (See Writing Assignment Guidelines Handout). Engage with a minimum of 2 different course materials (quote or reference readings and/or lectures) in the reflection papers. These papers will reflect the student's critical engagement with the readings and act as a foundation for how to engage in current discourse with ancient sources.
- c. *Final Reflection Paper & Presentation*: 25% of final assessment. **A 10-15 page paper is due Thursday December 12th** that identifies how the student's faith tradition and/or cultural background has traditionally addressed an issue related to sex, sexuality, and/or gender and concepts of sin or how a theme/topic does or does not

intersect and engage with the student’s own faith tradition and/or cultural background. Engage with a minimum of 4 different course materials (quote or reference readings and/or lectures) in your final paper. The paper should offer a historical-critical analysis based in academic research of the issue within the context of the tradition and offer a liberating counter-oppressive interpretation. This research will allow the student the opportunity for deeper engagement within their own context, and thus act as preparation for conversations that they are likely to encounter directly in ministry, the academy, life, and/or activism. Students will give a brief 5 -10 minute presentation on voicethread prior to the last zoom meeting. (See Writing Assignment Guidelines & Guidelines Asynchronous Discussion and Final Presentation Handouts for further information).

- d. *Attendance Policy:* Students are expected to contact the instructor before the Monday zoom meeting if they are unable to attend. They will be asked to email a one-page reflection on a particular discussion point from the lecture and readings before the next zoom discussion in order to get full participation credit. A student will be marked with an unexcused absence if a student does not notify the instructor before the zoom discussion which will impact their participation assessment. Open communication is essential, if there is an emergency or extenuating circumstances please contact the instructor as soon as possible.
- e. If any students with disabilities or whose first language is not English are in need of academic accommodations, please contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss options and make arrangements. Planning and communication are essential to providing adjustments that will properly address student needs.

V. Course Format

There is a possibility that some of the reading may be triggering, so it is important for self-care as well as productive discussion for students to watch the lecture and complete the readings with adequate time left each week to reflect and process the material. Genuine participation and interaction is essential for this course to be successful.

Tuesday is the start of each week, meaning that the zoom discussion on Monday will always focus on the readings and lecture of the previous week. The new lecture will be posted after the zoom discussion to ensure that the discussion remains focused on the current topic/theme.

This is the suggested overall structure of the course to facilitate the learning outcomes:

Monday	Zoom discussion on previous weeks lecture & reading - 9:40-11am PST
Tuesday	New lecture posted
Wednesday	Read and reflect on course material
Thursday	Read and reflect on course material
Friday	Read and reflect on course material
Saturday	Reflect and process the material in preparation for zoom discussion.
Sunday	Reflect and process the material in preparation for zoom discussion.

The Voicethread lectures offer historical context and methods that compliment and supplement the readings, they do not summarize the readings. The readings for the course are a mix of primary sources (created in the time period being addressed) and secondary sources (commentary on primary sources from later periods, including but not limited to our own).

Required Texts:

- Jay Michaelson, [*God vs. Gay? The Religious Case for Equality*](#) (Beacon Press, 2011) ISBN: 978-0807001592
- Martti Nissinen, [*Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective*](#) (Fortress Press, 1998) ISBN: 9780800629854
- Teresa Shaw, [*The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity*](#) (Augsburg Fortress Press, 1998) ISBN: 978-0800627652
- A Bible with Apocrypha, any translation is acceptable, but students will have to cite the translation they are using in all written papers and have available for zoom discussions so that the class can address differences in translation and the potential ideological impact that may have on the topic at hand.

Course Schedule:

Week One: September 3rd-9th

- **Reading:** (Moodle) Peter Gardella, *Innocent Ecstasy: How Christianity Gave America An Ethic of Sexual Pleasure* updated edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), “Since 1985: Redeeming the Body” 159-181, notes 219-224.
- **Voice Thread:** Post & Watch Introductions
- **Zoom Discussion:** September 9th 9:40- 11am PST – Introductions, syllabus, and discuss reading. [special guest, Beth Kumar, GTU Reference Librarian will offer a brief 10-15-minute overview of online Library services]

Week Two: September 10th-16th

- **Lectures:** “Feminist Hermeneutics: Reclaiming the Voice of the Silenced” and “Natural? Who Decides?”
- **Reading:** Michaelson, *God vs. Gay? The Religious Case for Equality*, 30-40; Teresa Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh* (Fortress Press, 1998), 53-78; Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, 1-17. Listen to [Hedwig and the Angry Inch, Origin of Love](#).
- **Zoom Discussion:** September 16th 9:40- 11am PST

Week Three: September 17th- 23rd

- **Lectures:** “Internalized Dialogue: How do we reach people? How do we reach ourselves?” and “Similarity & Difference: Ancient Mores & Modern Preconceptions”
- **Reading:** *God vs. Gay?* 41-72, 94-102; *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, 37-88.
- **Zoom Discussion:** September 23rd 9:40-11am PST

Week Four: September 24th- 30th

- **Lectures:** “Hellenistic Judaism: Why A Gendered Voice of Prophecy Matters” and “The Watchers vs. Eve: The Implications of a Different Etiology of Sin”
- **Reading:** Genesis 2-3, 6:1-4; *Forming Femininity in Antiquity*, 1-37, 87-121. Moodle: I Enoch, Book of the Watchers 1-19; *Life of Adam and Eve*, 15-36.
- **Zoom Discussion:** September 30th 9:40-11am PST

Week Five: October 1st-7th

- **Lecture:** “Pandora, Lilith, and Eve: Breaking Cycles of Blame & Reclaiming Creation”
- **Reading:** Wojciech Kosior, “A Tale of Two Sisters: The Image of Eve in Early Rabbinic Literature and Its Influence on the Portrayal of Lilith in the Alphabet of Ben Sira” *Nashim* 32 (2018), 112-130 & **choose one** of the following: Anne Lapidus Lerner, “Back to the Beginning: An Exploration of the Roles Played by Eve and the Garden of Eden in Modern Poetry by Jewish Women” *Nashim* 19 (2010): 9-31 or Geoffrey and Avi S. Dennis, “Vampires and Witches and Commandos, Oy Vey: Comic Book Appropriations of Lilith”, *Shofar* 32.3 (2014): 72-95 (notes 96-101).
- **First Reflection Paper Due October 7th by 6pm PST**
- **Zoom Discussion:** October 7th 9:40-11am PST

Week Six: October 8th- 14th

- **Lecture:** “Taking the Next Step: Tolerance vs. Love, Complementarity vs. Equality vs. Equity”
- **Reading:** *God vs. Gay?* 3-14; *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, 135-140; Megan Warner, “Therefore a Man Leaves His Father and His Mother and Clings to His Wife”: Marriage and Intermarriage in Genesis 2:24, *JBL* 136.2 (2017): 269-288; Shelly Colette, “Eroticizing Eve: A Narrative Analysis of Eve Images in Fashion Magazine Advertising” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (2015) 31.2: 5-24; Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh*, 171-219.
- **Zoom Discussion:** October 14th 9:40-11am PST

Week Seven: October 15th- 21st

- **Lecture:** “Sex Positivity & Abstinence: Destabilizing the Focus on Reproduction”
- **Reading:** *God vs. Gay?* 15-23; M.L. Case, “Cunning Linguists: Oral Sex in the Song of Songs” *Vetus Testamentum* 67 (2017): 171-186; Ronit Irshai, “Judaism” *Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender* (2014): 413-431; *The Life of St. Mary of Egypt* by St. Sophronius.
- **No Zoom Discussion- Reading Week October 21st 25th**

Week Eight: October 22nd-28th

- **Lecture: No lecture Reading Week**
- **Reading: Begin research for final paper**
- **Zoom Discussion:** October 28th 9:40-11am PST- zoom discussion will be on the

week seven lecture and readings.

Week Nine: October 29th- November 4th

- **Lecture:** “Changing Perceptions of Personhood: The Religious and Political Foundations of the Abortion Debate”
- **Reading:** Jeannie Whitten-Andrews, “Calling for a Pro-Love Movement: A Contextualized Theo-Ethical Examination of Reproductive Health Care and Abortion in the United States” *Feminist Theology* 26.2 (2018): 147-159; Thia Copper, “Race, Class, and Abortion: How Liberation Theology Enhances the Demand for Reproductive Justice” *Feminist Theology* 24.3 (2016): 226-244; Seth Downland, “Family Values” and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda, *Church History* 78.3 (2009): 606-631.
- **Zoom Discussion:** November 4th 9:40-11am PST

Week Ten: November 5th- 11th

- **Lecture:** “Paul, Deutero-Pauline, & Gnostic Perspectives: Changing Concepts of Salvation and Its Impact on Gender Dynamics”
- **Reading:** *God vs. Gay?* 78-93; *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, 103-122; Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, “Emancipative Elements in Ephesians 5.21-33: Why Feminist Scholarship Has (Often) Left Them Unmentioned, and Why They Should Be Emphasized”, 37-58; Joseph Marchal, “The Exceptional Proves Who Rules: Imperial Sexual Exceptionalism in and Around Paul’s Letters” *Journal of Early Christian History* 5.1 (2015): 87-115 (111-115 Bibliography).
- **Second Reflection Paper Due November 9th by 6pm PST**
- **Asynchronous Voice Thread Discussion: (November 11th - Veterans Day) Post video on VoiceThread, (see guidelines handout in general section).**

Week Eleven: November 12th- 18th

- **Lecture:** “Exploring the Gospel of John Through the 5 Senses” a guest lecture by The Rev. Dr. Daniel London
- **Reading:** *God vs. Gay?* 24-29, 73-77; Dorothy Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Crossroad Pub, 2002), 29-64; Michael O’Sullivan, “Reading John 7:53-8:11 as a Narrative Against Male Violence Against Women” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71 (1), Art.#2939, 8 pages.
- **Zoom Discussion:** November 18th 9:40-11am PST

Week Twelve: November 19th - 25th

- **Lecture:** “The Triune Sibyl: Greek, Jewish, and Christian Manifestations of a Mutable Muse”
- **Reading:** *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, 123-134; Eugene F. Rogers Jr., “Doctrine and Sexuality” *Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender* (2014) 14 pages; Lydialyle Gibson, “The Bits the Bible Left Out” *Harvard Magazine* November-December 2018
- **Asynchronous Voice Thread Discussion. Post video on VoiceThread, (see guidelines handout in general section).**

Week Thirteen: November 26th- December 2nd

- **Lecture:** “Revelation, Thunder, and the Feminine Divine” and Elaine Pages interview “Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, & Politics in the Book of Revelation”
- **Reading:** Marion Carson, “The Harlot, the Beast, and the Sex Trafficker: Reflections on Some Recent Feminist Interpretations of Revelation 17-18”, *The Expository Times* (2011) 122.5: 218-227; Surekha Nelavala, “Babylon the Great Mother of Whores (Rev 17:5): A Postcolonial Feminist Perspective”, *The Expository Times* (2009) 121.2: 60-65; Joan Sakalas, “The Whore of Babylon metaphor—Permission to erase evil?” *Journal of Religion & Abuse* 5.4 (2003): 3-13; Stephanie Li, “Five Poems: The Gospel According to Toni Morrison” *Callaloo* 34.3 (2011): 899-914; Thunder, Perfect Mind translated by George W. MacRae.
- **Zoom Discussion:** December 2nd 9:40-11am PST – Reflections on the course & start of final presentations

Week Fourteen: December 3rd- 9th

- **Zoom Discussion:** December 9th 9:40-11am PST – Presentations on final papers
- **Final Paper Due on Thursday December 12th by 6pm PST**

If you have been the victim of sexual misconduct, including sexual and gender-related: violence, assault, harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking, first get to a safe location.

SKSM encourages all members of the SKSM community to report these incidents to local law enforcement authorities and to seek medical attention as needed.

For emergencies, call 911

- City of Berkeley Police Department: Emergency (510) 981-5911 or Non-Emergency (510) 981-5900
- Highland Hospital Sexual Assault Center: 1441 E. 31st St., Oakland, 510-437-4688
- Bay Area Women Against Rape 24-hour hotline: (510) 845-7273
- Rape Crisis Center 24-hour helpline: 1-800-670-7273
- National Domestic Violence hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
- Community Overcoming Relationship Abuse (CORA) 24-hour hotline: 1-800-300-1080
- National Sexual Assault hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

Incident(s) of possible sexual misconduct against SKSM students should also be reported by emailing a written complaint to the Title IX Coordinator or by using the on-line reporting form at <https://www.sksm.edu/reporting-sexual-misconduct/>

- Rev.Dr. Christopher Schelin, Title IX Coordinator; cschelin@sksm.edu