

GONZAGA-IN-FLORENCE SYLLABUS

Course: RELI 331: Christian Sexual Morality
Credits: 3 Credits
Instructor: Patrick Burke, Ph.D



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COURSE DESCRIPTION

The *purpose of this course* is to introduce the student to the ethics of human sexuality from Christian theological perspectives. This means that this course is a **theological ethics course**. As a theology course it claims that belief in God and in God's purposes in creation as these have been revealed through Jesus Christ, and developed by the Christian tradition which seeks to follow him, have a relationship to how human sexuality ought to be understood. As an ethics course, it insists that human kind has the capacity to develop normative standards for human life through reasoned and consistent arguments. Further, as a theological ethics course it holds to the conviction that the construction of a rational ethical standard is compatible with and not contradictory to one's religious beliefs.

Precisely what the relationship is between the faith of Christian tradition and an ethical framework for human sexuality has been a matter of considerable intellectual discussion historically and into contemporary times. This course will explore that discussion in two ways:

1. by an *historical overview* of Christian thought regarding sexual ethics from biblical times, and
2. by a *contemporary study* of constructive attempts of some contemporary Christian thinkers. In order to facilitate such a discussion, the interrelationship of several forms of human knowledge within Christian ethical thought will be analysed:
3. the development of *systematized theological positions* within the Christian tradition as these affect normative notions about sexuality (images of God, the doctrine of Creation and its related notions of human nature and vocation, the problems of sin and evil, Christology and its attendant themes of Incarnation and Redemption, developing ecclesiologies within Christianity, the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Holy Spirit),
4. *philosophical views* about human nature and the human person,
5. *socio-economic* and *political* presuppositions of the culture,
6. *scientific* and *empirical information* about human persons and human societies (the contributions of modern bio-genetic, psychological, cross-cultural and anthropological as well as sociological research).

CORE THEME:

As a course in the Gonzaga University **Core Curriculum**, this course has the overall objective of fostering in the students an intellectual and practical commitment to the theme of **responsibility and service**. This means that a central goal of this course will be to engender in the students a responsibility for and a commitment to the common good of the human community which a person educated in the Catholic Jesuit tradition is expected to embrace. Further, it means that within the course itself students will be expected to engage in the serious intellectual work which the construction of an ethical framework for human sexuality requires so as to make their own contribution to the articulation of theological ethics for the human community.

GOALS

As an advanced course in theology/religious studies (300 level), it has twin goals:

1. relative to student skills, to sharpen the student's critical and analytical skills in the field of theological ethics, and
2. relative to content
 - i. to assist the student in obtaining a sympathetic yet critical understanding of the contributions from the Scriptures and Christian tradition to the discussion of human sexual ethics,
 - ii. to enable the student to discover within the Scriptures and Christian tradition the contributions of culture, philosophy, and other sources of wisdom to the ethics of biblical times and throughout Christian history,

- iii. to expose the student to the contemporary scholarly discussion within Christian ethics regarding human sexuality as this involves the dialogue between contemporary Christian beliefs and developing knowledge about the human person and the societies in which persons live,
- iv. to enable the student to make his/her own contribution to an adequate ethical framework relative to human sexuality, committed love, and marriage when this is done from the stance of Christian faith.

REQUIRED READING:

Bernard Lonergan, *“Finality, Love, Marriage”*, Chapter Two of ***Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan***, edited by Frederic E. Crowe and Robert Doran.

James Nelson, ***Embodiment***

James Nelson and Sandra Longfellow (eds), ***Sexuality and the Sacred*** [selected readings]

Pope John Paul II, ***Veritatis Splendor***

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *“Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*

J. and E. Whitehead, ***A Sense of Sexuality***

“Lawrence vs. Texas,” U.S. Supreme Court decision regarding anti-sodomy laws; “Goodridge vs. the Public Health

Authority,” Massachusetts Supreme Court decision regarding same-sex marriage.

Collateral Texts [on reserve in the library]

Kathleen Fischer, ***Transforming Fire: Women Using Anger Creatively*** [selected chapters]

H. Katchadourian, ***Fundamentals of Human Sexuality***

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. *Class attendance:* we will observe Gonzaga University’s policy regarding absences. Please **be mindful** that it is distracting to the professor and the other students for persons to be tardy.
2. *Careful reading* of the assigned pages prior to each class session and thorough review of class notes.
3. *Active participation* in class discussions through observations, thoughtful questions, and offering of one’s own insights. Besides oral contributions, other methods of participation will be offered, such as required written responses to questions dealing with selected readings and the keeping of a journal. Directions for journal writing are attached to this syllabus.
4. Mid-term and final essay *examinations*.
5. *Position paper* on a moral problem pertaining to human sexuality no more than 10 pages in length. The essay must reflect, in part, the reading material assigned for the course. Specific directions for the paper will be submitted by the middle of February, and are to be observed rigorously. Two *preliminary drafts* are required, the first of which will be beginning of March, the second towards the end of March. The final draft of the paper is due beginning of April. Exact dates TBA.

COURSE GRADE:

The course is scored on a 500 point scale, as follows:

100 points ----- mid-term examination

150 points ----- final examination

150 points ----- position paper [including preliminary drafts]

100 points ----- class participation [includes written response to various question sets]

OFFICE HOURS: *by appointment only.* Generally, Dr. Burke will be available immediately after class on Mondays and Tuesdays, and on some afternoons to discuss pertinent issues for the position paper and any other aspect of the course. He will also be available for review sessions outside class time prior to the examinations. Make appointments to see him immediately after class or by calling him at home before 9:30 p.m.