

Christian Symbolism of the Body

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Course Description

This course examines Christian perspective on the body in relation to their cultural origins, their religious significance, and their development over time. What effect do beliefs such as the incarnation and resurrection have on how we view bodies? How do new discoveries challenge, reinforce or change traditional doctrines about the human body, its value and its meaning?

The course is organized into three units:

1) The Definition of the Body: In this section we will explore traditional understandings about what constitutes a human body. We will explore what this means in terms of physical boundaries and concepts such as anatomical sex. We will also look at how Christianity and its influencing traditions have viewed the body in relation to concepts such as the spirit or the soul.

2) The Meaning of the Body: We explore factors affecting the Christian community's experience and understanding of the body. We will examine how groups assign, read, or project moral meaning onto the body, and how these meanings get expounded in ethical expression as rules, norms or practices.

3) The Significance of the Body: Lastly, we use case studies to understand how individuals and groups have attached religious significance to the body. We will focus on how this theology emerges from within their social location and how it reflects various assumptions about the value and meaning of the body.

Reading Materials

Whenever possible, the assigned readings will be available in the reserve reading section of the library. Several articles are also available online, or electronically through the library website.

Course Objectives

1. Discover, express and evaluate your own views on the human body and its religious symbolism, moral value, or ethical significance.
2. Accurately assess views different from your own. You should also be able to engage with opposing views on a level that moves beyond superficial differences to differences of values and methodologies.
3. Discover the influence of social and cultural positioning on views about the body.
4. Be able to address questions about the religious, moral and ethical meaning of the body within a Christian tradition of your choice.

Assignments and Marking

Attendance (10%): Attendance will be taken in each class and will form a percentage of your final mark for the course. Students are asked to contact me through email if they are unable to attend. In some circumstances a quiz will be assigned in place of missed classes to ascertain the students understanding of the reading material.

Reading questions (10%): A one-page set of questions will be assigned for each of the three reading unit. They are intended not only to guide reading, but also to direct your attention to the implications of what you have read. They are to be briefly answered by the student, brought to tutorial sessions for discussion, and passed in at the end of class. Please limit your answers to two typewritten pages.

Reflection papers (30%): Students will write two reflection papers of two to three pages each on a unit of assigned readings. The first reflection paper is due by class 4. The second is due by class 9.

Major paper (50%): The student will choose a significant church document (examples below) and examine its use of the body in relation to the topics covered in this course. Papers shall be no less than fifteen pages and no more than twenty. Papers are due on the last day of class.

Here are some documents that could serve as the basis for your major paper. If you have other documents in mind, please see me to discuss them.

Paul VI, *Gaudium Et Spes* (1965). http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* (1968). http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae_en.html

Anglican General Synod, *Report of the Primate's Theological Commission of the Anglican Church of Canada on the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions* (2005). <http://www2.anglican.ca/primate/ptc/smr.htm>

About Plagiarism

It is the responsibility of every student to inform themselves about the university's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters <<http://www.utoronto.ca/govcncl/pap/policies/behaveac.html>>.

Examples of plagiarism includes:

- Copying the ideas, structure or words of another person (ex: cutting and pasting material found in a book, article, or web page, even if you reword or alter it in some way.
- Borrowing or buying another persons work and passing it in as your own.
- Submitting the same material to more than one course.

Details about how to avoid Plagiarism can be found online at <<http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/plagsep.html>>

Unit 1: The Definition of the Body

Week 1: Introduction: What is “the body”?

The class will begin with an overview of the historical meaning of the body, how these meanings emerge from historical circumstances, and how they change over time.

Anthony Synatt, “Chapter 1: Tomb, Temple, Machine and Self,” in *The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society* (London: Routledge, 1993), 7-37. (30)

Week 2: Body and Spirit

This class will examine historical views of the body and its relation to the spiritual. Are these two separate? Is the spirit trapped, housed, or integral to the body?

Richard Broxton Onians, “Ancient Jewish Conceptions of the Mind or ‘Soul,’ the ‘Spirit,’ the ‘Holy Spirit,’ the Body, and the Divinity of Christ,” in *The Origins of European Thought About The Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 480-504. (24)

Week 3: Sexing the Body

This class will consider the physical structures of anatomical sex and the significance attached to such distinctions.

Karen Lebacqz. “Difference Or Defect? Intersexuality And The Politics Of Difference,” in *The Annual of The Society of Christian Ethics*, vol.17, John Kelsay and Sumner B. Twiss, eds. (Chicago: Society of Christian Ethics, 1997), 213-229. (16)

Jacqueline Murray, “Chapter 2: One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?” in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe*, Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) 34-51. (17)

Emily Martin, “The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed A Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-female Roles,” in *Constructing Sexualities: Readings in Sexuality, Gender and Culture*, Suzane LaFont, ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 23-33. (10)

Week 4: The Body in Christian Ritual

What role does the body serve in Christian rites? How is the form, movement and spectacle of the body used to effect and what are the ramifications of this use?

Anthony B Pinn, “Watch the Body With New Eyes: Womanist Thought's Contribution to a Humanist Notion of Ritual,” *Cross Currents* 57, no. 3, (Fall 2007): 404-411. (7)

Giovanni Filoramo, "Baptismal Nudity As A Means of Ritual Purification in Ancient Christianity," in *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, Jan Assmann, Guy G. Stroumsa, and Gedaliahu A.G. Stroumsa, eds. (Boston: Brill Academic Publishing, 1999), 393-404. (11)

Mary Richards, "Specular Suffering: (Staging) the Bleeding Body," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 30, no. 1 (January 2008): 108-119, (11)

Unit 2: The Meaning of the Body

Week 5: The Body and Masculinity

The male body has traditionally been posited as the standard for humanity. Yet what we think of as masculine is often culturally specific, and mutable. This week examines particular crises of masculinity and how they were addressed theologically.

Maud W. Gleason, "By Whose Gender Standards (If Anybody's) Was Jesus A Real Man?" in *New Testament Masculinities*, ed. Stephen D. Moore, Janice Capel Anderson (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 325-328. (3)

Graham Ward, "Theology and Masculinity," *The Journal of Men's Studies* 7 (1999): 281-286. (5)

Vern Bullough, "On Being a Male in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages, Medieval Cultures, vol. 7*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 31-46 (15)

Brandon O'Brien, "A Jesus for Real Men: What the New Masculinity Movement Gets Right and Wrong," *Christianity Today* 52, no. 4 (April 2008): 48-52. (4)

Mathew Keufler, "Chapter 4: I am a Soldier of Christ: Christian Masculinity and Militarism," in *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 2001), 105-124. (19)

Week 6: The Body and Femininity

The female body has been constructed as the Other to the male paradigm. This week examines social constructions of femininity and their theological context.

Merran Toerien and Sue Wilkinson, "Gender And Body Hair: Constructing The Feminine Women," *Women's Studies International Forum* 26 no. 4 (2003): 333-344. (11)

Lisa Isherwood, "Learning To Be A Woman: Feminist Theological Reflections On Sex Education In Church Schools," *Sex Education* 4, no. 3 (November 2004): 273-283.(10)

Michelle Mary Lelwica, "The Good, The True, and The Beautiful Female Body: Popular Icons of Womanhood and the Salvation Myth of Female Slenderness," in *Starving for Salvation: The Spiritual Dimension of Eating Problems Among American Girls and Women* Michelle Mary Lelwica (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 39-66. (27)

Week 7: Theologizing Gender

This week we will examine the work of Lisa Sowle Cahill whose theology examines the body from a Catholic feminist perspective.

Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Accent on the Masculine," in *John Paul II and Moral Theology*, ed. Charles A. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1998), 85-91. (6)

Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Chapter 4: "The Body" - In Context," in *Sex, Gender & Christian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 73-107. (34)

Week 8: The Body and Age

The Gospel of Luke estimates that Jesus was 30 when he began his work. What effect does Jesus' young death, and his missing adolescence, have on our view of Christian life? This week looks at how Christians have viewed children and the elderly and the effect this has had on our theology of the body.

Beverly Wildung Harrison. "The Older Person's Worth In The Eyes Of Society," in *Making The Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*. Carol S. Robb, ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 152-167. (15)

Odd Magne Bakke and Brian McNeil, eds. "The Formation of Children," in *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood In Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2006), 215-222 (7)

Phyllis B. Katz, "Educating Paula: A Proposed Curriculum for Raising A 4th Century Christian Infant," in *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy*, Ada Cohan, Jeremy B Rutter, ed. (Athens: American School of Classical Studies, 2008), 115-127. (12)

Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "Older Adults," in *Sexuality and The Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*. James B. Nelson and Sandra P. Longfellow, ed. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 297-304. (7)

Unit 3: The Significance of the Body

Week 9: The Body and Christic Symbolism

Case Study: Ordination

In what sense do ordained people represent Christ? Which bodily features are considered symbolic and which are deemed inconsequential? What effect does this have on our understanding of Christ's own embodiment?

Kelly Anne Raab, "Christology Crossing Boundaries: The Threat Of Imaging Christ As Other Than A White Male," *Journal of Pastoral Psychology* 45, no. 5 (May, 1997): 389-399.(10)

Stanley Atkins, "The Theological Case Against Women's Ordination," in *The Ordination of Women: Pro and Con*, ed. Michael P. Hamilton and Nancy S. Montgomery (New York:

Morehouse Barlow, 1975), 18-28. <http://www.womenpriests.org/classic/atkins.asp> (10)

Marianne H. Micks, "The Theological Case For Women's Ordination," in *The Ordination of Women: Pro and Con*, ed. Michael P. Hamilton and Nancy S. Montgomery (New York: Morehouse Barlow, 1975), 2-16. <http://www.womenpriests.org/classic/micks.asp> (14)

Week 10: The Body and Sexuality

Case Study: the Sexual Christian

Sexuality has been a centre of controversy within Christianity since its inception. This week examines key issues in the role of the body in constructing normative models of Christian sexuality.

Ronald Modras, "Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body," in *John Paul II and Moral Theology*, ed. Charles A. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1998), 149-156. (7)

Peter Brown, "Bodies and Minds: Sexuality and Renunciation in Early Christianity," in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 479-490. (11)

Joyce E. Salisbury, "Gendered Sexuality in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 81-102. (21)

Week 11: The Broken Body

Case Study: Illness & Disability

How do Christians make sense of the experience of pain, disease, and disability? What significance do these experiences have for Christians, and what role do these bodies play?

Elizabeth Stuart. "Disruptive Bodies: Disability, Embodiment And Spirituality," in *Good News of the Body: Sexual Theology and Feminism*. Ed. Lisa Isherwood (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 166-184. (18)

James B. Nelson, "Illness as Body Interpretation: HIV and AIDS," in *Body Theology*, ed. James B. Nelson (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1992), 165-178. (15)

Week 12: The Future of the Body

Case Study: Cloning

Where will the boundaries of the human body be drawn in the future? This class will examine the issues of human cloning and the integration of mechanics into the body.

Dr. Patrick Dixon, "Human Cloning: How Clones Will be Made, Stem Cells and Future Research," (18:28 mins) Online at <http://video.google.ca/videoplay?docid=3233737443293258967&hl=en>

60 Minutes, "Brain Power," Online at <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=4564186n>

Gregory E. Pence, "Human Cloning Is Not Against The Will of God," in *Cloning* ed. M.L. Rantala and Arthur J. Milgram (Open Court Publishing, 1999), 159-162. (4)

Stephen Garrard Post, "The Judeo-Christian Ethic Opposes Cloning," in *Cloning* ed. M.L. Rantala and Arthur J. Milgram (Open Court Publishing, 1999), 153-158. (6)

Additional Bibliography

"Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity (203)," in *Medieval Sourcebook*, ed. Paul Halsall, Fordham University Center For Medieval Studies, 2006. Online at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/perpetua.htm>

Anne Carson, "Putting Her In Her Place: Woman, Dirt, and Desire" in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 135-169.

James B. Nelson, "Sexuality and Spirituality: Agenda for a Continuing Revolution," in *Body Theology*, ed. James B. Nelson (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1992), 15-54.

John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988). http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_15081988_mulieris-dignitatem_en.html

Martin Irvine, "The Pen(is), Castration, and Identity: Abelard's Negotiations of Gender," presented in *Cultural Frictions: Medieval Studies in Postmodern Contexts Conference Proceedings*. Online at www8.georgetown.edu/departments/medieval/labyrinth/conf/cs95/papers/irvine.html

Melanie Heath, "Soft-Boiled Masculinity: Renegotiating Gender And Racial Ideologies In The Promise Keepers Movement." *Gender & Society* 17, no.3 (2003): 423-444.

Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio, Part 2: the Plan of God for Marriage and The Family* (1981). Online at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. "Chapter 5: Femininity, Masculinity, And Human Fulfilment," in *Sensuous Spirituality: Out from Fundamentalism*. New York: Crossroad Press, 1953.