

## IST2098 – Queer Theologies

Winter 2015

Wednesdays 6:00-9:30pm

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## Queer Theologies

*(A Pain in the Ass or Effing Fun Times? Or: "Do tell your mother what we do in class.")*

This course explores representative attempts at queering Christian theologies and at developing queer theologies. It will include a brief survey of modern theological projects with the emergence of queer theory as a critique of modern Western culture, and an exploration of aims and methods of queer theory and its differences to e.g. gay and lesbian studies.

"Queer" theology, taking cues from queer theory, transgresses dominant constructions of sexuality and gender identity. But the queer approach goes beyond merely holding a suspicion regarding fixed and stable gender-sex identities. It exposes and analyses persistent cultural and political identities and the assumptions and implications attached to them, and seeks to adopt and live into more fluid and shifting personal and communal identifications – therefore also paying attention to the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, ability, politics, etc.

Theologically, then, a "queer perspective" interprets and constructs expressions of Christian thought and practice that rethinks and subverts understandings of human life, community, and the divine. We will explore queer approaches to theology and biblical interpretation, especially where notions of identity (esp. gender and sex, but also race, ethnicity, class, ability) are concerned. Investigations into the potential of queer insights into Christian theology and biblical interpretation will include, but move beyond, apologetic arguments regarding inclusion of sexual minorities into Christian communities. In this course, we will learn to engage in "queering" Christian theology and biblical interpretation, and test the benefits and usefulness of queer theory as a tool for constructive theological projects and Christian practices.

Some of the critical questions we will consider:

- Is queer theory a new tool, one among many, for constructive theological work – or is it a foundational theological method?
- Is queering Christian theology a reinvention or a retrieval of religious insights? Both?
- Does Christian theology have anything to contribute to queer theorizing?
- What is the conversation/critique/challenge of "queer" to lesbian and gay communities? What does it have to do with Christian theologies and faith practices?

### GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1. To gain a basic overview of the historical and methodological trajectories, common themes and commitments, and the challenges and contributions offered by various queer theologies.
2. To distinguish between gay and lesbian perspectives and queer approaches.
3. Understand the biblical, theoretical, and theological underpinnings to queer theology.
4. To articulate an in-depth understanding of at least one specific issue and/or topic in queer theology.
5. Recognize some of the major controversies in the discipline.
6. Reflect theologically on the importance of queer theology for the church.

## COURSE TEXTS

### Required (also available on course reserves):

Marcella Althaus-Reid. *The Queer God*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2003.

Susannah Cornwall. *Controversies in Queer Theology*. London, UK: SCM Press, 2011.

Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990.

(you can read this online / download as pdf here <http://suplaney.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/foucault-the-history-of-sexuality-volume-1.pdf>)

Jay Emerson Johnson. *Peculiar Faith: Queer Theology for Christian Witness*. New York, NY: Seabury Books, 2014.

Dale B. Martin. *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

Kathy Rudy. *Sex and the Church: Gender, Homosexuality, and the Transformation of Christian Ethics*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1997.

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## NATURE OF THE COURSE

This class is designed for students who are interested in learning more about the emerging field of queer theologies or are looking for an opportunity to apply their skills in theological inquiry and analysis to a diverse and still developing field. The course will be divided into two sections.

- × The first section aims to provide a brief, basic overview of the emergence of queer theology as a field, the historical contexts of specific challenges and contributions offered, some of the methodologies employed, and the interrelations with queer theories.
- × The second section will examine a sample of (sometimes radically different) contemporary queer(ing) theological works, their methods, interlocutors, and major themes.

Throughout the class, we will explore issues of identity, interpretation, methodology, and praxis. The format of the class will be a combination of lecture, discussion, and other classroom activities. Students are expected to come to class prepared, having read and reflected thoughtfully on the assigned material, and ready to highlight key points or raise questions for discussion. The class is designed to be interactive, because we each bring our own questions, perspectives, and resources to this sort of work, so active participation is expected of all members of the class.

This class will not try to convert you into a queer theologian (or discourage you from that occupation). Rather, it will look at a variety of mainly scholarly sources to help you come up with your own understanding and analysis of the place of queer(ing) work in the field of Christian theology. Due to the limits of this class, as well as available textual sources, the emphasis of this course will be primarily on Christian theology. Students who have an interest in learning more about a particular non-Christian tradition (or any specific area within queer theologies) are encouraged to address this with the instructor during office hours, so that additional resources or alternate assignments may be offered.

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**Due Dates:** Assignments need to be completed and turned in on the dates specified on the syllabus, unless arrangements have been made with the instructor in advance. Penalties will be assigned for late assignments. As contingent faculty, I will **not grant incompletes**. If a situation arises where you believe you will not be able to complete the course requirements, please see me as soon as possible.

**Pass/Fail:** Students wishing to take the class **pass/fail** should discuss this with me by January 20.

**Academic Integrity:** All students are expected to abide by Iliff's statement on Academic Integrity, as published in the Masters Student Handbook, or the Joint PhD Statement on Academic Honesty, as published in the Joint PhD Student Handbook, as appropriate.

**Accommodations:** Students with disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss options with the instructor during the first two weeks of class.

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## EXPECTATIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS

### Participation/Contribution 20%

The interactive seminar nature of this course makes regular attendance essential. Credit will be given for involved participation (quality, not quantity) in lecture, discussion, in-class activities, and presentations (your own as well as those of other students), as well as for class attendance. In-class activities may not be made up. Contact the instructor as soon as possible if extraordinary circumstances arise that will affect your attendance or participation in class.

### Presentation/Discussion Facilitation 25%

Each student will be asked on one occasion to set the **agenda** for the class time, providing a set of discussion **questions** that will be used to guide a portion of the class for that day, and to serve as the leader of the class discussion time. See assignment description on canvas for details.

As part of the class discussion, the student setting the agenda will also provide an **artifact** that demonstrates an aspect of the topics/themes to be discussed during that class period. This can be a videoclip, photograph(s), object, a poem, etc.

*Note: Due date varies depending on your chosen date for discussion facilitation.*

### Queer Application 25%

This is your opportunity to think about how you would apply queer theology readings in your "real life" context. Examples: a short sermon, a youth group evening, a testimony to legislators who are debating a bill, a board of trustees presentation, an audio or video clip for your church/organization (this can be entertaining or teaching). In contrast to the theology experiment assignment, this assignment is not bound to the theological or the course material read, yet it must be based upon the material and draw from it in significant ways. The primary focus is to take what you learn into an area of your life where you would like to apply your learning, where you seek to make an impact, where you would like to see queer changes.

### Queer Theologizing 30%

Queer theologizing is not limited to matters of gender/sexuality; one can bring a queer perspective to any issue/theme in theological constructions. We will test this claim in this assignment. You will each begin a topic/issue/theme of your choice. Throughout the quarter you will become familiar with queer(ing) methodologies and perspectives, and you will develop a queer(ed) theological construction.

This assignment has several steps to it, culminating in your queer theological work.

#### **Step 1 – Choose a topic/issue/theme, decide on your learning goals**

Choose a topic/issue/theme that you are interested in, you like a lot, you dislike a lot, or you want to learn more about. It should be a common topic/issue/theme in theological discourse (one you might easily find encyclopedia entries / introductory expository about).

*Examples:* God, Holy Spirit, Christ, Miracles, Atonement, Incarnation, Soteriology, Being Human, Creation, Ecology, Hope, Idolatry, Love, Death, Family, Silence, Worship, Church, Priesthood, Ritual, Sacrifice, Eucharist/Communion, Grace, Sin, Law, ..... Please consult with me with any questions.

You must choose your topic/issue/theme by the end of the second day of class (January 14). Do this by posting in the “Queer Theologizing Topic” discussion page. Posting this on time is worth 10% of your grade for this assignment.

**This assignment will also be self-graded.** I will provide detailed written feedback on your queer construction, but you will evaluate your own work and assign yourself a grade based on your own expectations and learning goals. By the end of week 2 you should have a clearer picture of the course format and content, and you will articulate in writing what you intent to learn/develop with this assignment, how you will know if you achieved this, how you will evaluate the quality of your reflection/construction, and what grade you intent to achieve. This learning goal can be in any narrative format and serves as a formal agreement between you and I. **Email me this learning contract by January 18<sup>th</sup>, midnight.**

### **Step 2 – Learn the Basics (Figuring the “Normal”)**

Read about your topic/issue/theme in at least two standard commentaries / encyclopedic works (you can find many in the library reference section). I have no preference for which standard commentary you consult, and it will depend on the kind of theological construction you intend on doing (biblical, systematic, historical, etc).

Examples are: Oxford Companion to Christian Thought, Dictionary of Theology, Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation,...

If you are unsure if your “basic expository” is acceptable, please ask!

### **Step 3 – Queerly Approaching**

Decide which of the queer methodologies available (as described in Yip) you will employ (refer to our class discussion in week 2):

- Defensive apologetics
- Cruising texts (histories, traditions)
- Changing theology
- lived experiences within
- lived experiences outside

### **Step 4 – Queerly Imagining**

Develop your queerly constructed theological topic/issue/theme, due before the last day of class (March 11, 6pm). It must be around 2000 words, it must demonstrate a clear understanding of the theological topic/theme/issue engaged, present a brief backdrop of the “normal”, and it must be queer.

For more details, see the canvas page “Queerly Imagining.”

As an addendum to your final construction, and referring to your learning contract shared with me, evaluate in writing how you think you achieved your goals, how you evaluate the quality of your work, and what grade you assign your work. As the instructor, I am responsible for assigning final grades. In almost all cases, I will assign the grade you give yourself. However, if you wildly overrate or underrate your work, we will enter into negotiations about the grade for this assignment.

***Students must submit all of the above major assignments in order to pass this course.***

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## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

(all class sessions subject to change, as announced in class and posted on Canvas)

### Theory & Methods

#### Week 1 (January 7)

"Queer" – beginnings of theory on the move (post)structuralism, deconstruction	Foucault <i>"The History of Sexuality"</i> (159 pgs)
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#### Week 2 (January 14)

<i>"modern Theology"</i> "Queer" – priming (post)structuralism, deconstruction cont'd methods, strategies, critiques specific to theology and religious studies	Cornwall, Intro, ch. 1-3 (104 pgs) <small>canvas</small> Butler <i>"Critically Queer"</i> (12 pgs) <small>canvas</small> Butler, <i>"Against Proper Objects"</i> (22 pgs) <small>canvas</small> Butler, <i>"Performative Acts and Gender Constitution"</i> (13 pgs) <small>canvas</small> Yip, <i>"Coming Home from the Wilderness"</i> (16pgs)
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### Politics & Ethics

#### Week 3 (January 21)

Politics and Ethics How did we get here? Where could we go?	Rudy <i>"Sex and the Church"</i> (130 pgs) Cornwall, ch. 7 (25 pgs)
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Presenter/Discussion Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

### Lived Experiences

#### Week 4 (January 28)

Heike out of town: fieldtrip!!

"Dolls with Balls Drag Queen Bingo!" @ Hamburger Mary's

Reservation for 8:30pm (alternatives? Suggestions?)

Queering the spaces of theology Theologizing in queer spaces	<small>canvas</small> Califia, <i>"Sadomasochism and Spirituality"</i> (17pgs) <small>canvas</small> E. Patrick Johnson, <i>"Feeling the Spirit in the Dark"</i> <small>reserves</small> Remember Yip, <i>"Coming Home from the Wilderness"</i>
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### Apologetics

#### Week 5 (February 4)

Queer imaginations: Bible stuffs	Cornwall, ch. 4 (30 pgs) Martin ch. 1-11 (150 pgs) <i>pgs 25-35 optional!</i> <small>reserves</small> Pick one chapter from Goss & West <i>"Take back the Word"</i> (these are short, -10+ pgs)
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Presenter/Discussion Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

## Queer(ing) Imaginations & Practices

### Week 6 (February 11)

Guest speaker via skype: Avery Sledge

Queer Doings: Trans-queerness Bodily, spiritually, family-y	Cornwall ch. 6 (31 pgs) reserves Choose: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Pick two chapters out of Mollenkott "Omnigender"</li><li>- Pick three chapters out of Tanis "Trans-Gendered"</li></ul> Hero, <i>Toward a Queer Theology of Flourishing</i> (20pgs) Selections from Wilchins et al "GenderQueer"
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Presenter/Discussion Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

### Week 7 (February 18)

Queer theological strategies & imaginations	Althaus-Reid, Intro, ch. 1-6 (110 pgs) reserves Cheng, "Rainbow Theology" pick one chapter from Part 1, one chapter from Part 2
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Presenter/Discussion Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

### Week 8 (February 25)

Queer imaginations (queering traditions and histories)	Cornwall, ch. 5 (41 pgs) Althaus-Reid, ch. 7-9 (59 pgs) reserves Pick one chapter from Loughlin "Queer Theology"
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Presenter/Discussion Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

### Week 9 (March 4)

Queerly Bridging Theory, Theology, Practice	Johnson, <i>Peculiar Faith</i> (236 pgs)
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Presenter/Discussion Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

### Week 10 (March 11)

Queer Constructions	Cornwall, Conclusion (6 pgs)
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## **Masters Degree Learning Goals Supported By This Course**

### *MDiv Learning Goals:*

- 1.2. Students will demonstrate awareness of Christianity as a historically-situated movement that interacted and changed in relationship to its surrounding cultures and subcultures over time, resulting in various expressions of Christianity located within and influenced by social structures, historical events, and ethnic and cultural ideologies
- 3.3. Students will identify and articulate their constructive theological position on an issue, current event, or traditional Christian doctrinal category with clarity

### *MASJE Learning Goals:*

1. Students will engage in social, historical, and political analysis in order to identify key factors impacting situations in which social change is desired and potential contradictions within these settings that open up the possibility for change.
2. Students will articulate and critically evaluate a range of social change strategies engaged by historical and contemporary communities and identify the meaning and value systems (religious and secular) that undergird them.

### *MAPSC Learning Goals:*

2. Students will identify and critically evaluate the ways in which their personal, religious, and cultural experience, along with their activities in pastoral and spiritual care, shape their theology, moral orientation, and vocational formation.

### *MA Learning Goals*

4. Establish enough of a breadth of awareness of historic and contemporary thinkers within their particular discipline that they will be able to identify and choose good conversation partners within their field to engage their research question.

### *MTS Learning Goals*

1. Articulate the spiritual and social complexities of religious and cultural traditions related to the area of their specific focus/interest.
2. Demonstrate theological fluency with one or more of the academic disciplines involved in theological studies (historical theology, practical theology, biblical interpretation, ethics, etc.)