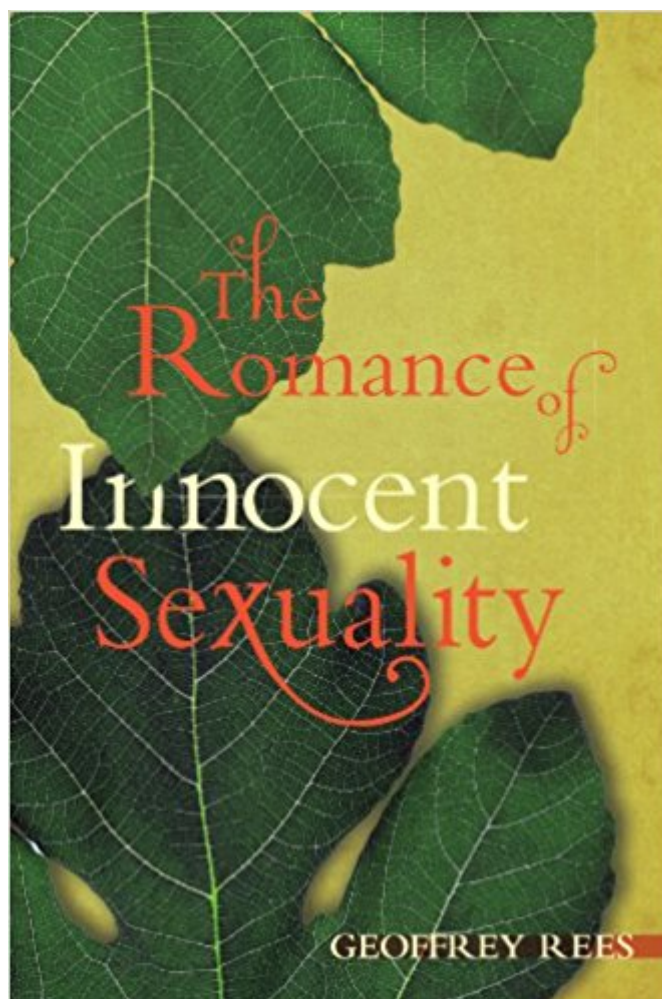


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The Romance Of Innocent Sexuality:



Synopsis

Synopsis: From the polling place to the pulpit, *The Romance of Innocent Sexuality* investigates the passions that are enacted in debates about same-sex marriage. In a critique that is at once humorous and unrelenting, Geoffrey Rees argues that sexual desire is fundamentally a desire to make sense of oneself as a whole person. Through a constructive engagement with the writings of Saint Augustine on original sin, Rees turns on its head the conventional wisdom regarding the goodness of sexual relationship, arguing that sin, not innocence, is the starting point in pursuing justice in sexual ethics. To that end Rees boldly reclaims the wisdom of the most disreputable teachings of the Augustinian tradition: that original sin is a literal inheritance of all humanity of the singular disobedience of Adam and Eve in Eden, and the inherent sinfulness of all human sexuality. This work also engages theological readings of nineteenth-century fiction and literary readings of contemporary theological writings. In so doing Rees shows that debates about same-sex marriage are so compelling because the participants are all telling a common story in which they seek to establish the innocence of their own preferred forms of self-understanding as defined against some other persons' sinful selves. In contrast to this, Rees argues for the acceptance of responsibility for the sinful exclusions that make possible finding the meaning of embodied personal identity through marriage between any two persons. Endorsements: "This is a highly original and provocative inquiry into the sexual politics of sin, marriage, and identity. Tackling sensitive and controversial material head on, Rees's tone is sober and serene. With Augustine and Foucault as guides, he crosses disciplinary boundaries between theology, philosophy, literature, and history with audacity and ease. Rees's book demonstrates how, when it comes to same-sex relations, the personal is deeply political and innocence is overrated. Here is a new religious ethics which generates a radically innovative conversation on the nature of original sin, death, and pleasure." --Richard Kearney Boston College "In this text Geoffrey Rees looks to the Augustinian tradition as providing constructive insights that are currently neglected, if not vilified, so that the tradition's association of sexuality and sin affords a corrective to the perfectionist and simplifying liberationist trends in contemporary discourse . . . he also considers romantic narrative conventions that appear in nineteenth-century literature, and claims, originally I believe, that they epitomize the strains in contemporary discourse on sexuality that extol its perfectionist and liberationist possibilities . . . in doing so, Rees shows himself to be an astute thinker and an engaging and elegant writer." --Gene Outka, Yale University Author Biography: Geoffrey Rees teaches health care ethics in the Department of Religion, Health, and Human Values at Rush University in Chicago, Illinois, where he also serves on the ethics consultation service.

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Customer Reviews

Rees' book is absolutely wonderful, easily one of the best and most important books written on sexuality in recent years. It is passionate, provocative, and profound--and yet it is written with a gentleness and beauty and humor that are rare in academic texts. Rees' basic argument is that theological discourse on sexuality is dominated by an inhospitable and sentimental emphasis on innocence, on who has the ability to lay claim to a properly sexed self and therefore to an intelligible and coherent identity. Following Augustine, Rees claims that such lust for intelligible and coherent identity located in the sexed self is a prideful disavowal of the impossibility of such identity that is the result of the universal catastrophe of original sin. Unjust and inhospitable exclusions of supposedly improperly sexed selves and bodies follow from such a refusal to claim responsibility for sin within the universal community of sinners. Sexual ethics, Rees argues, ought not to be driven by a quest for innocence, for no one is innocent, but rather by a concern to share equally the shame and lack of intelligibility that plagues the fallen self. This concern to share the shame of original sin and not unjustly load it onto despised and excluded others results in a basic and abiding posture of hospitality and care. Such hospitality and care are rooted not in the recognition of properly sexed selves but in the recognition of each other in the solidarity of sinful humanity. As Tom Waits puts it: "You're the same kind of bad as me."

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