

**Kathy L. GACA**

**Eros and Political Reform in Greek Philosophy and Early Christianity**

I show how sexual morality in post-classical western culture is constituted in fascinating and hitherto unappreciated ways from Greek philosophical and early Christian plans to reform ancient Greek sexual mores and civic order. In particular, I resolve a pivotal question about the reshaping of sexual morality since the second century CE: Whether Christian sexual restrictions that eventually gained social prevalence differ from, or are continuous with, the Platonic, Stoic, and Pythagorean sexual reforms that patristic writers adapted in their own proposals for Christian sexual and social change. Though numerous scholars, Foucault included, favor the continuity theory, it proves misguided on numerous counts to regard Greek ethics in any form as the basis of patristic sexual austerity. Ascetic patristic writers, such as Clement of Alexandria and Tatian, transform all that they borrow from Greek ethics and political philosophy to launch innovative programs against "sexual fornication." Their driving motivation--to suppress sexual arousal and activity as forces of religiously alienating worship--is antithetical to Greek cultural mores, popular and philosophical alike. The main impetus for these anti-fornication reforms comes from the religious sexual rules and reinforcing poetics of the Greek Bible as reworked by Philo of Alexandria and the apostle Paul. In these radical new guises, the Septuagint's sexually grounded social mandate to worship the Lord alone leads to a revolutionary Christian program to eliminate Gentile religious sexual mores altogether, only for early Christians to find this impossible to carry out without going to extremes of sexual renunciation. Neither the Septuagint nor Greek philosophy envision or endorse this program, though major ingredients of the Greek biblical and philosophical sexual reforms do go into its formation. Nonetheless the Christian anti-fornication rules that emerge in the patristic period are new sexual norms that take up station like gargoyles around the church as Christ's bride, in order to guard 'her' religious virginity of pure monotheism. Libertine Christian patristic writers, such as Epiphaneus, tried to use Platonic and Stoic arguments to prevent these rules from gaining church authority, but they failed and were declared heretical for their efforts.