# Transcript: Love Letters From Rev. Sex Ep 6: Audre Lorde and the Gospel of the Erotic

**Axis Mundi:** [00:00:00] Axis Mundi.

**Reverend Sex (Rev. Alba Onofrio):** Hi, beloved. Welcome to Love Letters with Reverend Sex. I'm your host, Reverend Sex, and I wanted to introduce myself to you. This series is a part of the Soulforce Podcast Channel. And it's a place for deep liberating conversations about being Queer and Latine, decolonial theology, faith, gender justice, and above all, sacred resistance and healing.

I wanna tell you a little bit about me because I think about you all the time. We may not have met yet in person. I may not be able [00:01:00] to recognize your face or your name, but I think about you all the time. I think about our people, especially now in this moment. I'm obsessed with how we find each other, how we connect, especially now amidst the chaos and confusion amidst the hurt and overwhelm.

I believe it's possible. I believe that that is the way we move from here to where we are going, and I can't wait to have more conversations with you.

So we've been hanging out for a while now. You know me as Reverend Sex, and it seems like a good time for you to learn a little bit more about the gospel that I preach, which of course is called the Gospel of the erotic.

You found me tonight in my office at home, in the quiet of the night as the house has gone to bed and settled down [00:02:00] and quiet with my faithful cat who loves to accompany me at all hours. We are both nocturnal creatures. And this love letter is specifically for those who need to hear a different kind of good news, a gospel that feels like something embodied and real and practical in this moment.

So this is Reverend Sex, and you're about to hear about the gospel of the erotic. So the gospel should be good news for all the people, and this one comes from Our Lord comma Audre. And that phrase, Our Lorde comma Audre, comes from a beloved who I deeply respect and admire, Dr. Alexis Pauline Gumbs,

who is a Queer Black feminist poet, oracle scholar, spiritual way maker, and healer.

I often return to her work. It makes me feel hopeful and like a [00:03:00] different world is possible and real and just at the edge of our fingertips. So I definitely recommend you pick up her work whenever possible. She is the biographer for Audre Lorde and her newest book is called Survival is a Promise, which is all about Audre Lord's life.

And I love her use of Our Lorde comma Audre because we don't need any more Lords or masters, and maybe it's nitpicky, but it reorients my soul to this idea of king of kings, Lord of lords, master, these kind of patriarchal terms that always point to systems of power in which those with wealth or privilege of some sort, have way more than everybody else and exploit the bodies and the labor and the knowledge and the land of those who have less. So I am a pretty intense stickler about that kind of [00:04:00] language within Christianity and using this term Our Lorde comma Audre, for me, not only gives me a little chuckle, but it helps me reorient toward a black feminist future that feels like everything is more doable or at least more livable in that pursuit.

So back to the good news, the gospel of the erotic. It sounds sexual, and I am a co-founder of the Sexual Liberation and I do love the sex work and the theology of sex. Um, but I wanna talk about how Audre Lorde explains the erotic. She has this one speech in particular, it's called Uses of the Erotic : the Erotic As Power.

She gives this speech in 1978, at a conference about the history of women. And the entire thing is like eight pages, double spaced, maybe. You can also like search it on YouTube and [00:05:00] hear her voice giving this speech. It's very short, but it totally changed my life and reoriented me within theology and has made me an incredibly committed evangelist and missionary on behalf of the Gospel of the erotic. So I really wanna tell you a little bit more about it.

She talks about the erotic as this life force, this like creative energy. I would go so far to say from a theological perspective that it's actually the Imago Dei that which makes us most like creator.

She calls it a source of power for change and a resource that's deep within each of us. And when we listen to it, we get this sense of satisfaction. We can recognize it when it happens because it's this very deep and intense kind of yes in our bones. [00:06:00] It also works the other way when there's a very deep and intense no.

But it's this question for me that feels like, how do I know this to be true in my bones, like bone deep? And especially now that so many veils have fallen away and you really can't defer. We really can't defer our morality to anyone, certainly not to institutions. Those are always suspect, but even our elected officials and leaders.

Faith communities and law enforcement all feel like they are being pulled and compliant to things that are truly evil and centered in death. And so for me, it feels like it's time. To really recognize that we may have differences of belief, and that's totally fine, [00:07:00] but we all have to take responsibility for the logical ends of the things that we say we believe.

Sometimes that's really hard. I know, because people will say, well, if the Bible can support this and the opposite of this, this and that, if it can support abortion and being against abortion. If it can support slavery and being against slavery. If it can support the death penalty and abolition. Like, if it can support all these things that are literally contrary and two opposing sides, how do you decide what to believe?

And for me, that's simple. It's about having an ethic that goes alongside it. And I use what I call the ethics of life.

If the logical end to your theology, your belief system is one that causes suffering and death for our planet and for all of the creatures in it, including human beings and especially [00:08:00] those most marginalized among us as creation. Then, that's a death dealing theology and it's not good even if it says so right there in the Bible.

And on the other side, if we follow theology or belief systems that lead to more people being able to survive, to live, to creation to be able to thrive, then that life giving belief, in its logical conclusion, if you walk it all the way out and apply it to everyone else and all of creation, then I would call that a good theology or a good way of believing.

And you'll hear me talk about the ethics of life often because sometimes I think it can be confusing. How should we decide between good things or what is the lesser evil?

Another part of that is the erotic. It's this other place of deep knowing and a resource [00:09:00] for us to use and trying to decide between this thing or that thing, or this way, or that way, or maybe many ways, many paths. So, that deep

"yes", that bone "yes." I feel like those of us who are LGBTQIA+ people, we often have a leg up in this.

We often have an advantage because almost all of us have had an encounter, a moment with ourselves or with another, where the overwhelming "Yes" in our bodies and in our bones, something that felt like attraction maybe, or that felt like seeing ourselves mirror in another, or in a community. That Yes, is so powerful that many of us are able to, maybe not get rid of entirely, but at least shake free from the bondage of having to fit in these boxes of what it means to be a good person or a good Christian. Because the [00:10:00] draw and pull to our people and those we are attracted to and love is so strong that we're willing to take the risk to try something.

That feels like it might be us, that it might be a better fit. And I feel like that's such a gift that I have as somebody who's experienced that, because it was really one of the first cracks in the system of Christianity that I was taught that helps me begin to be able to at least question, if not deconstruct, but it was the beginning point.

It was the "oh, how can this be so bad when every part of my spirit and body say yes?" So, the erotic helps us exercise that muscle. That deep, deep, deep, yes. And it helps us make decisions based on internal desire, not what others will think of us, or not what the pastor says. Audre Lorde says that in order for [00:11:00] systems of power, any system of power to main con, maintain control over us, that that system has to silence and vilify and suppress and deny the erotic.

Again, the erotic being this life force, this core being in the center of our spirit and our bones. That shift for us right and wrong, help us feel danger, help us feel secure. This is the primary work in Christianity. I see it over and over again that we are taught to not only ignore our bodies and our intuition, but to distrust our bodies, to ignore our creativity, or to funnel it in these very small channels for an appropriate purpose that is given to us.

Intuition and imagination. In terms of how we think about [00:12:00] God or what we know about what we desire for our own lives and bodies and pleasure and desire is completely vilified. We are taught that our power comes from obedience and submission, whether rather than what. Audre Lorde teaches us, which is the exact opposite. That it is that deep erotic, what I would call the Imago Dei that bone-deep yes or no, that is so close to creation and creator because it is there that we feel the interconnectedness of being part of something

bigger than ourselves. And not just a part of a community, but part of an entire species, part of an entire planet that's part of an entire cosmos.

All of which I would say is held by creator in loving admiration, support, interdependence. [00:13:00] So when we see the body as sinful or deceptive, or even demon possessed, as many of us have been told about our sexual orientation, then we give away so much power. We fit into what is considered good, or we try to.

And we have internalized what it means to be a good Christian and in order to be that good Christian, we have tried to kill the erotic. We've tried to disconnect from our bodies and often our minds that part of us that asks questions when things don't quite make sense or when the theology we're given doesn't square. Or, when it feels like there's hypocrisy all around us in the church where people say they believe a particular thing, but then live in a different way.

All of that, [00:14:00] all of that distrust of our own power, of our own knowledge, of our own guiding life force. All of that vilification and trying to squish it down and make it be quiet, all of that makes us so much easier to be controlled. One through fear of not getting it right or not doing it right, or not being a good Christian.

But then it has a like reinforcement mechanism of shame because when we don't live up to those imposed expectations and goals. When the threshold of good and being a good Christian is impossible, not only because of perfection, which is unattainable, but also because it's a total setup. When we can't live up to that, then, we have to try to hide it and cover it through shame. Or, we have to [00:15:00] confess and come clean and humble ourselves and submit ourselves to the judgment of the community and of our leaders and our families in order to regain belonging and kind of wipe our conscience clean, if you must. Um, that helps us try to reenter.

I think often about this concept of a Proverbs 31 woman, which is a total lie, right? It's this picture of a woman who not only does all of the housework and takes care of her children and takes care of her extended household.

But she also has time to create things with her hands and is brilliant businesswoman and makes money and does all these things while her husband sits at the city gate. And that's lauded in so many of our communities as the ideal woman. And while I am all for entrepreneurship and for people being self-sustaining, there is this [00:16:00] sacrificial nature of how women and caregivers are supposed to behave, that literally sacrifices our entire life, alter

creativity and energy, um, on this altar of capitalism or with this ideal of being a good mother or wife or a family person. And that can happen to all of us, not just straight or cis women. But it is this impossible expectation that builds into a system of control that punishes us for not living up to the impossible and makes us very easy to manipulate.

Because we either fear we won't be able to meet it, or we have shame or guilt that we didn't do it and we can't share how hard it is or what we failed at. And therefore we need to hide and we worry that we might be found out. Or, we do accomplish [00:17:00] it by, to all extents, um, and purposes on the external, but we have nothing left for ourselves.

We just become a shell of a person or a servant to all of those that we love. So what is the good news? The good news is that the erotic is in each of us. It's not just sexual. That is a different episode, and I do have a ton to say about sex and pleasure in the body and sexual desire. That's a different conversation that I do wanna have, but this erotic is about this very alive, vibrating life source.

This internal compass that is not driven by trauma or by fear, or by guilt, or by shame, or by duty, but by desire, by pleasure. Our Lorde comma Audre teaches us that when we listen to the erotic we get this deep [00:18:00] satisfaction. Whether it is in sex, or writing a poem, or creating something from scratch. And once we know that bone-deep kind of yes, and the satisfaction of letting it guide us in many ways.

For the, whether it's from a big yes, like our career path or embracing our gender or sexual orientation to little things like how we spend our 30 minutes of free time in the afternoon before the kids get home. The more that we listen and respond and hone our, our listening to the sound of our internal small voice that's deep, deep, deep inside.

And for some of us buried very deep and under a lot of layers of shame and guilt and fear, the more that we develop that muscle. The less acceptable everything else becomes. We're not willing to just exist [00:19:00] anymore or to be beholden to other people's vision of who we should be or what should make us happy, or how we should spend our lives.

We become indomitable. Our spirits become strong and steadfast and true. Our hearts and our minds become ungovernable and disobedient to the powers and principalities that seek to control us. We become shameless. Agential. Full of potent erotic will from the source of life and the source of love and the maker of all creation.

And there are few things more dangerous to a system of domination than a people without shame. And that is indeed good news of great joy for all the people. So welcome to the Gospel of the Erotic. I'm Reverend Sex. Will [00:20:00] you pray with me?

Creator of life, source of all that is and was and will be. Thank you. Thank you for that small still voice. Thank you for keeping it alive. Even when everything around us has trained us to silence it. Thank you for making us in your image in the ability and the power that is able to create.

Let us be makers of things, creators of things, harbinger of life. Help us to be what you know we can be. What you have made us to be. Help us each be brave enough that we are willing [00:21:00] to go digging, go mining for the erotic, wherever it is buried deep inside our souls. Make her strong, make her loud, make her undeniable in all of our beings.

And whenever we get that undeniable, yes, may we each be surrounded by community who love us and accept us for exactly who we are and who encourage us to be our full and brightest selves. Help us to heal our own bodies and spirits. Through the weaving work of mending. Mending our bodies back into our souls and our souls back into our bodies, our hearts and our minds tethered to each other as a system of checks and balances.

Let all of this amazing, integral [00:22:00] knowledge move together as one. Help us heal the traumas and understand our patterns so that we can recognize when the voices that are telling us what to do, we can recognize are those from you? Or, are those in response to what we've been taught and what we've been told?

Are they trauma responses or are they freedom calling us? Be with us. Be with our community, especially in these times where it feels like there is so little leadership that we can depend on. Let us depend on you. Let us depend on your gospel of the erotic. Of all that is true. Of all that is right in all that is good.

In all of the names that all of your children call you, we pray. Amen.

I [00:23:00] am grateful for your time today and I would love to know more about the kinds of things that you would like me to talk about in the future. We have so many topics and so many things to over go over and to go through, and we're just about to wrap up season one, and that means that we're planning for season two.

So, if you have questions that you'd like for me to answer as Reverend Sex, or if there's somebody's story that you wanna share, please reach out to us. You can find us on social media @Soulforceorg or @Reverend_Sex. And you can find out more about us alongside free theological resources at soulforce.org and Reverendsex.com. Make sure you like and subscribe and do all the things that you know how to do at podcast. Leave us a comment, let us know if this episode resonated with you. But most [00:24:00] importantly, if you have someone you love who came to mind during this time together tonight, maybe this is a nudge for you to send the episode over.

Maybe this is Divine, asking you to be one of God's angels, a messenger of love, and send this episode over for the healing of someone else's heart. May this be good news of great joy for you and for all of our people, and until we talk again, this is Love Letters with Reverend Sex.

Thank you for spending a little bit of your day with me and Love Letters from Reverend Sex. I'm your host, Reverend Alba Onofrio, also known as Reverend Sex, the ED and Spiritual Strategist here at Soulforce.

Make sure you also check out our Monday show, Teología Sin Vergüenza, which is a space for Queer and feminist [00:25:00] Christian, Latine folks navigating faith in family, sexuality and identity, where we talk to theologians, elders, and everyday saints about decolonizing our faith and working on social justice issues from a very informed political lens while shamelessly, theologically centered in our faith. You are welcome.

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