

Theology, Spirituality and Altruistic Love

I. Course Description

This course explores ways in which scientific research and philosophical reflection on altruistic love can illuminate the intersection of Christian theology and spirituality. The complexity of factors that contribute to the formation of other-regarding agency requires us to take a robustly interdisciplinary approach – engaging biological, psychological, sociological and cosmological sciences as well as classical and contemporary resources for the practices of spirituality. In order to facilitate the conceptual and existential integration of these issues, the course will be run in a seminar format with introductory and concluding supplemental lectures. Each week students will engage a set of readings on specific themes that traverse the disciplinary concerns of science, spirituality and theology: compassion, adoption, kenosis, forgiveness, service and giving. This thematic approach will allow us to focus on the concrete task of integration by examining particular conceptual cases studies through a diversity of disciplinary frameworks.

II. Learning Objectives

The goals of the course are for each student to:

1. gain knowledge of basic conceptual issues surrounding the interdisciplinary relation between spirituality and Christian theology, with special attention on the theme of altruistic love [*thinking*];
2. develop and demonstrate transformational intellectual leadership abilities by engaging in interdisciplinary dialogue and presenting critical analyses and constructive responses to particular contemporary proposals on altruistic love [*doing*];
3. thematize his or her integrative own practices of spirituality and move into a deeper experience of sharing in the unlimited love of God [*being*].

III. Readings

Required Texts:

Polkinghorne, John (ed), *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001). ISBN: 0-8028-4885-0.

Post, Stephen G. *Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion, and Service* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2003). ISBN: 1-932031-31-6.

Shults, F. LeRon and Steven J. Sandage, *The Faces of Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003). ISBN: 0-8010-2624-5.

Collected Readings for Theology, Spirituality and Altruistic Love [Handout], containing the following articles and chapters (copyright permissions in process): Carlo, G., Allen, J.B., and D.C. Buhman, "Facilitating and Disinhibiting Prosocial Behaviors: The nonlinear interaction of trait perspective taking and trait personal distress on volunteering," *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 21/3 (1999), 189-197; Downey, Michael, "Living Freely from the Gift: The Grammar of Spiritual Life," ch. 5 in *Altogether Gift: A Trinitarian Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000); Foster, Richard, "The Discipline of Service," in *Celebration of Discipline*, rev. ed., (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 126-140; Habito, Ruben L.F., "Compassion out of Wisdom: Buddhist Perspectives from the Past toward the Human Future" in Post, et al., eds, *Altruism and Altruistic Love* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 362-375; Oliner, Samuel P., "Extraordinary Acts of Ordinary People: Faces of Heroism and Altruism" in Post, *ibid*, 123-139; Rokeach, M., "Religious Values and Social Compassion" *Review of Religious Research* 11 (1970), 24-39; Schrag, Calvin O., "From Ethics to the Gift," ch. 4 in *God as Otherwise than Being: Towards a Semantics of the Gift* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002); Shults, F. LeRon, "Sharing in the Divine Nature: Transformation, *Koinonia* and the Doctrine of God" in T. Speidell, ed, *On Being Christian... and Human* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 87-127; Silk, Joan B., "Human Adoption in Evolutionary Perspective" *Human Nature* 1/1 (1990), 25-52; van Lange, P.A. M., et al., "How to overcome the detrimental effects of noise in social interaction: The benefits of generosity," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82/5 (2002), 768-780; Waters, Brent, P., "Welcoming Children into our Homes: A Theological Reflection on Adoption" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55/4 (2002), 424-437; Wilson, David Sloan, "Forgiveness as a complex adaptation," ch. 6 in *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion and the Nature of Society* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 189-218.

Recommended Texts on Reserve:

Batson, C. Daniel, *The Altruism Question: Toward a Social Psychological Answer* (Hillsdale, J.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991).

Bowe, Barbara, *Biblical Foundations of Spirituality* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

- Downey, Michael, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997).
- George, Timothy and Alister McGrath, eds., *For All the Saints: Evangelical Theology and Christian Spirituality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003).
- Groeschl, Benedict J., *Spiritual Passages: The Psychology of Spiritual Development* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).
- Gutierrez, Gustavo, *We Drink from our own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002).
- Kierkegaard, Soren, *Works of Love*, ed. and trans H.V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1995).
- Lewis, C.S., *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960).
- May, H., ed., *Altruismus aus der Sicht der Evolutionsbiologie, Philosophie und Theologie*, Loccumer Protokolle 30/92 (Rehburg-Loccum, 1996).
- Oord, Thomas, *Science of Love: The Wisdom of Well-Being* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2004).
- Post, Stephen G. et al., eds., *Altruism and Altruistic Love: Science, Philosophy and Religion in Dialogue* (Oxford University Press, 2002).
- Post, Stephen G. et al., *Research on Altruism & Love* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2003).
- Sheldrake, Philip, *Spirituality and History*, new edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995).
- Sheldrake, Philip, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998).
- Shults, F. LeRon. *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).
- Sober, E. and D.S. Wilson, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Additional bibliographic reference sheets will be provided as handouts for each of the themes to be discussed (see course overview below).

IV. Course Schedule Overview

Date	Topic	Process
Mar. 28	Introduction: Theology, Spirituality & Altruistic Love	Introductory lecture and discussion of syllabus
Apr. 4	Theological, Scientific and Practical Issues in Integration: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pneumatology, Anthropology and the Doctrine of God 2. The Scientific Measure of Unlimited Love 3. Becoming Wise, Becoming Good, Becoming Free 	Lecture and group discussion
Apr. 11	Interdisciplinary Theme: <i>Compassion</i>	Lecture(s), presentations and integration exercises
Apr. 18	Interdisciplinary Theme: <i>Adoption</i>	Lecture(s), presentations and integration exercises
Apr. 25	Quarter Study Break: Work on Final Research Paper	
May 2		
May 9	Interdisciplinary Theme: <i>Kenosis</i>	Lecture(s), presentations and integration exercises
May 16	Interdisciplinary Theme: <i>Forgiveness</i>	Lecture(s), presentations and integration exercises
May 23	Interdisciplinary Theme: <i>Service</i>	Lecture(s), presentations and integration exercises
May 30	Memorial Day Observed	
June 6	Interdisciplinary Theme: <i>Giving</i>	Lecture(s), presentations and integration exercises

V. Course Requirements

Reading Integration Reports (60%)

This course is designed in a “seminar” format, which means that each class session will involve significant discussion on a set of assigned readings. The success of this approach depends on the extent to which all class participants come prepared to analyze, critique and respond to one another’s interpretations of the readings.

In order to facilitate this discussion, students will write a reading integration report for each of the last six class sessions, during which various interdisciplinary themes will be explored (see course schedule above). Reports should be three pages long (single-spaced), with one page each devoted to summary, evaluation and integration:

- *Page 1: Summary.* In three brief paragraphs, identify and paraphrase the main theses of each reading (we will have three readings for each class).
- *Page 2: Evaluation.* Provide an initial assessment of each reading. Because of the diversity of genres, this may require different types of evaluation; e.g., discussion of the warrants for a thesis, the clarity of the conceptual framework provided, or the fecundity of a theological reflection.
- *Page 3: Integration.* What implications do the scientific reading(s) have for your theological understanding of the theme? What implications do the theological or spiritual reading(s) have for your scientific understanding of the theme? We will discuss practical implications in class, so please focus here on the *challenges* and *opportunities* in the conceptual integration of the readings. You will keep the report during the “presentation” segment of each class (see below), so feel free to include a list of questions about the readings that would foster discussion.

Each report is worth 10 points, and late reports will receive no credit. 6-7 points will be granted for reports that are punctual and demonstrate a basic understanding of the material and a sincere attempt at evaluation and integration. 8-9 points will be given for reports that also show evidence of critical reflection, explaining **how** and **why** a position outlined in the reading(s) should (or should not) have a role in the integrative process. A score of 10 points is reserved for reports that also demonstrate outstanding analysis and creative synthesis, and clearly articulate the warrants for the student’s evaluation of the position(s).

Final Research Paper (40%)

Students will select one of the interdisciplinary themes treated in this course (see schedule above) and write a standard research paper. If you would like to propose another theme, please submit this for approval prior to April 30. Include a concise introductory paragraph and summative conclusion, clear transition sentences, and the formatting of the Turabian style guide (with footnotes, not endnotes). The length of the paper should be no less than 15 pages (double-spaced, font size 12), and should critically engage no less than 10 scholarly resources.

The thesis of the paper, which should be clearly stated at the beginning, must deal primarily with the question of conceptual integration. Outlining implications for your professional field (e.g., philosophical theology, marriage and family therapy, pastor) should be reserved for a concluding section.

In addition to clarity of presentation and argumentation, the main criteria for grading the final research paper will be the extent to which you demonstrate your understanding of the readings and critically engage them as you make evaluative judgments. Criteria for a “C” paper include punctuality, as well as proper spelling and grammar, and engagement with at least three external scholarly sources. In addition, a “B” paper will show substantial evidence of critical analysis of the argument, identifying assumptions, implications, potential rebuttals, and the relation of the author’s thesis to the broader conceptual frameworks within which that issue is embedded. In addition, an “A” paper will show outstanding evidence of ability to synthesize and utilize course knowledge, initiative expressed in preparing and completing the assignment, and creativity and originality manifested in assignment process and outcome. *The paper is due by 5:00pm, Friday, June 10.*

Grading

The final grade will be a composite of the following: up to 60 points for the reading integration reports (6 reports at 10 points each) and up to 40 points for the final research paper. The final grade (possible 100 points) will be based on the following scale:

A	95-100	B-	85-86	D+	75-76
A-	93-94	C+	83-84	D	72-74
B+	91-92	C	79-82	D-	70-71
B	87-90	C-	77-78	F	0-69

VI. Expanded Course Outline

Classroom Educational Methodology

Each class period will involve two 90-minute sessions divided by a 30-minute break. We will often have in-class breaks within sessions for brief small group exercises. Each session will involve one or more of the following:

- *Introductory Lecture.* The aim of these lectures will be to provide students with an overview of the broader discussion in the interdisciplinary dialogue within which the required readings are set. Depending on the theme, these lectures may also include an introduction to philosophical, exegetical or other issues.
- *Guest Lecture.* Two colleagues have been invited to give 30-minute presentations on areas of expertise relevant to our course.
- *Student Presentations and Discussion.* Students should be prepared to summarize their interpretation and assessment of the readings, based on their reading integration reports. The purpose of this large group interaction time is to clarify our understanding and appreciation of the texts before beginning the integration exercises.
- *Integration Exercises.* This process will involve small group activities in which students apply conceptual frameworks from science, theology and spirituality (see Week 2 lecture below) to the themes of the readings. Activities will include responding to concrete case studies, engaging video clips, exploring personal and professional implications, and critical incident exercises.
- *Concluding Lecture.* This final segment in each class will summarize the discussion and then offer a reconstructive proposal for integration based on the professor's work in progress.

Wednesday Precepts. The class meets on Monday mornings, but every Wednesday (12:00 – 2:00pm), we will hold a voluntary precept in the upper campus center to further discuss personal and professional integration issues.

Week 1. March 28.

Lecture: Theology, Spirituality and Altruistic Love.

Often Christian discussions of spirituality are abstracted from theology and science. In both cases, this separation may be driven by unhealthy anxiety. The journey of spiritual growth is already one that involves fear and trembling as we struggle to love God and our neighbors. The study of academic theology and contemporary science can sometimes inhibit the process of transformation by drawing us away from concrete existential concerns. For intellectual leaders of the church, however, transforming spirituality must include an integrated understanding of the relations between self, others and God. The

development of altruistic characteristics and the practice of compassionate love occur precisely within these concrete relations. This lecture will trace the historical divorce between theology and spirituality and introduce recent developments in the sciences of altruism and in philosophical theology that have contributed to a renewal of interest in healing this fracture through interdisciplinary dialogue.

Week 2. April 4.

Readings: Post, *Unlimited Love*, chapters 1-2, 9; Shults, “Sharing in the Divine Nature” [Handout]; Shults and Sandage, *Faces of Forgiveness*, chapter 5.

Lecture: Theological, Scientific and Practical Issues in Integration.

These three lectures, each followed by class discussion, are designed to provide students with some basic conceptual frameworks from the disciplines of theology, science and spirituality that will facilitate the task of integration.

Theological Issues: Pneumatology, Anthropology and the Doctrine of God

Because all of the Christian doctrines are systematically interrelated, any one theme affects the others. In relation to the issues of this course, three doctrines are particularly relevant: pneumatology, anthropology and the doctrine of God. A Christian understanding of spirituality and altruistic love presupposes a view of the human spirit and the Holy Spirit, both of which are implicated within a broader understanding of the doctrine of God. [Lecture based on chapters 1 and 6 in Shults, *Transforming Spirituality: Psychological and Theological Perspectives* (Baker Academic, forthcoming).

Scientific Issues: The Measure of Unlimited Love

Stephen G. Post expands upon the work of Pitirim Sorokin, outlining a five-dimensional model of love that can serve to guide scientific research questions in the study of altruistic love: intensity, extensivity, duration, purity and adequacy. This lecture will summarize this model in the context of an introduction to the broader methodological issues that shape the sciences that study unlimited love (*agape*), with special attention on the implications for interdisciplinary and existential integration.

Practical Issues: Becoming Wise, Becoming Good, Becoming Free

Summary of chapters 7-9 in *Transforming Spirituality*. The three dynamic processes of becoming wise, good and free are correlated philosophically to the areas of epistemology, ethics and ontology. Practically, they may be described as intensification in the Spirit of faith, love and hope. Special attention will be placed on the process of intensification in the classical “ways” of formation: awakening, purgation, illumination, union.

The three conceptual frameworks provided in this overview lecture will be applied during the “integration exercises” period of each remaining class session.

Week 3. April 11 – Interdisciplinary Theme: *Compassion*

Due: Reading Integration Report #1 on Habito, “Compassion out of Wisdom” [Handout]; Post, *Unlimited Love*, chapter 3; Rokeach, “Religious Values and Social Compassion” [Handout].

Introductory Lecture: Understanding the Concept of “Compassion”

This lecture will include a treatment of exegetical issues on biblical terms for compassion, mercy, and loving-kindness as applied both to God and humans. What are the problems in defining and identifying “compassion?” How does our understanding and practice of compassion impact our theological models of “sin” and “salvation?”

Student Presentations and Discussion: Interpretation and assessment of the readings.

Break

Integration Exercise: Small group critical incident exercise.

Describe an incident (or series of incidents) in which you experienced or witnessed intense compassionate love. Discuss the incident in terms of the theological, scientific and practical conceptual frameworks outlined in Week 2. Select a “reporter” to share one or more insights with the larger group.

Concluding Lecture: Sharing in Divine Compassion

After a summary of recurrent issues in the discussion, this lecture will attempt to outline the role of the concept and practice of “compassion” in a model of spirituality that is consonant both with contemporary scientific research on altruism and a Christian theological understanding of “sharing in the divine nature.”

Week 4. April 18 – Interdisciplinary Theme: *Adoption*

Due: Reading Integration Report #2 on Post, *Unlimited Love*, chapters 6-7; Silk, “Human Adoption in Evolutionary Perspective” [Handout]; Waters, “Welcoming Children” [Handout].

Guest Lecturer: Dr. Thorsten Moritz, Prof. of New Testament.

Professor Moritz and his wife are adoptive parents and he has developed workshops and lectured extensively on the importance of the biblical theme of adoption and its relation to soteriological and ecclesiological issues.

Student Presentations and Discussion: Interpretation and assessment of the readings.

Break

Integration Exercise: To be designed by Prof. Moritz.

Concluding Lecture: Sharing in Divine Adoption

After a summary of recurrent issues in the discussion, this lecture will attempt to outline the role of the concept and practice of “adoption” in a model of spirituality that is consonant both with contemporary scientific research on altruism and a Christian theological understanding of “sharing in the divine nature.”

Week 5. April 25 – Quarter Study Break

Quarter Study Break Begins. No class session. Students should use this week to begin research and organization of final research paper. Proposals for papers on topics other than those treated in the course must be approved prior to the end of this week.

Week 6. May 2 – Quarter Study Break

Quarter Study Break Continues. No class session. Students should use this week to continue doing research and develop a draft of their final research paper. Students are also encouraged to begin reading ahead for the integration reports that are due in the weeks that follow.

Week 7. May 9 – Interdisciplinary Theme: *Kenosis*

Due: Reading Integration Report #3 on Jeeves, “The Nature of Persons and the Emergence of Kenotic Behavior,” Ellis, “Kenosis as a Unifying Theme for Life and Cosmology,” and Moltmann, “God’s Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World,” in Polkinghorne, ed., *The Work of Love*.

Introductory Lecture: Understanding the Concept of “Kenosis”

This lecture will discuss in more detail the biblical idea of “kenosis” (Php. 2) and the broader implications for the doctrine of the Trinity. How are we to understand the idea of divine “self-limitation?” How does this impact our call to become “like Christ?”

Student Presentations and Discussion: Interpretation and assessment of the readings.

Break

Integration Exercise: Case Study.

A woman in your church has a verbally abusive husband. A prominent member of the congregation has advised her to empty herself in relation to her husband because this will help her to become like Jesus. In light of the readings and the conceptual frameworks of Week 2, develop a counseling strategy for this woman. Select a “reporter” to summarize your group’s discussion.

Concluding Lecture: Sharing in Divine Kenosis

After a summary of recurrent issues in the discussion, this lecture will attempt to outline the role of the concept and practice of “kenosis” in a model of spirituality that is consonant both with contemporary sciences of altruism and a Christian theological understanding of “sharing in the divine nature.”

Week 8. May 16 – Interdisciplinary Theme: *Forgiveness*

Due: Reading Integration Report #4 on Sandage, “Forgiveness and Intersubjective Formation” and “Saving Faces” [chapters 2 and 3 of *Faces of Forgiveness*] and Wilson, “Forgiveness as a Complex Adaptation” [Handout].

Guest Lecture: Dr. Steven J. Sandage, Prof. of Marriage and Family Therapy

Professor Sandage has written and published extensively in the area of forgiveness and “positive psychology.”

Student Presentations and Discussion: Interpretation and assessment of the readings.

Break

Integration Exercise: To be designed by Prof. Sandage.

Concluding Lecture: Sharing in Divine Forgiveness

After a summary of recurrent issues in the discussion, this lecture will attempt to outline the role of the concept and practice of “forgiveness” in a model of spirituality that is consonant both with contemporary sciences of altruism and a Christian theological understanding of “sharing in the divine nature.” [Summary of Shults, *The Faces of Forgiveness*, chapter 5, “Forgiveness as Sharing in Divine Grace.”]

Week 9. May 23 – Interdisciplinary Theme: *Service*

Due: Reading Integration Report #5 on Carlo, et al., “Prosocial Behaviors” [Handout]; Foster, “The Discipline of Service” [Handout]; Oliner, “Extraordinary Acts” [Handout].

Introductory Lecture: Understanding the Concept of “Service”

This lecture will provide an overview of the biblical idea of “service” and some classical treatments and exemplars of this Christian practice. What is the relationship between serving, loving and spiritual formation?

Student Presentations and Discussion: Interpretation and assessment of the readings.

Break

Integration Exercise: Film Analysis.

Students are urged to watch (or read) “The Lord of the Rings” prior to this class period. After showing a brief segment of the film, we will break into small groups and discuss the concept and practice of “service” in the spiritual formation of Samwise Gamgee. Select a “reporter” to summarize your discussion for the large group.

Concluding Lecture: Sharing in Divine Service

After a summary of recurrent issues in the discussion, this lecture will attempt to outline the role of the concept and practice of “service” in a model of spirituality that is consonant both with contemporary sciences of altruism and a Christian theological understanding of “sharing in the divine nature.”

Week 10. May 30 – Memorial Day Observed

No Class Session.

Students should use this week to complete the final research paper.

Week 11. June 6 – Interdisciplinary Theme: *Giving*

Due: Reading Integration Report #6 on Downey, “Living Freely from the Gift” [Handout]; Schrag, “From Ethics to the Gift” [Handout]; van Lange, et al., “The Benefits of Generosity” [Handout].

Introductory Lecture: Understanding the Concept of “Gift.”

This lecture will offer an overview of contemporary philosophical literature on the concept of “gift” in order to provide a broader context for understanding the readings. What is the relation between this concept and the theological theme of “grace?”

Student Presentations and Discussion: Interpretation and assessment of the readings.

Break

Integration Exercise: Small group critical incident exercise.

After breaking into small groups, describe a gift-giving incident that you witnessed or experienced, which illustrates the ambiguities of giving (e.g., a birthday party or a large donor to the church). Discuss the incident in light of the readings and the conceptual frameworks outlined in Week 2. Select a “reporter” to summarize issues that came up in your discussion.

Concluding Lecture: Sharing in Divine Giving.

After a summary of recurrent issues in the discussion, this lecture will attempt to outline the role of the concept and practice of “giving” in a model of spirituality that is consonant both with contemporary scientific research on altruism and a Christian theological understanding of “sharing in the divine nature.”

NOTE: Final Research Paper due by 5:00pm, Friday, June 10.