

SP/ETH/TH5/715: SPIRITUAL PRACTICE
FOR A JUST, SUSTAINABLE PLANET

Sallie McFague, Instructor
Fall 2009

PURPOSE:

This course hopes to address appropriate spiritual practice for a time of severe planetary peril, as manifested in climate change and the economic meltdown. The problems we face are principally geographical, not temporal, ones: space and energy, place and sustenance, are now central. Loss of habitat for human beings and other species; deterioration of arable land, clean air, and fresh water; poverty, starvation, and destruction of civil life in cities—these are the marks of the 21st century crisis.

What ethic might function at personal, professional, and public levels for a world that is destroying itself through excess of many sorts—energy use, consumer goods, debt, population, unlimited growth, insatiable desire? This course will investigate the concept of self-limitation (kenosis in Christianity), an ethic dependent on a sensibility oriented to egolessness and sacrifice; awareness of finitude; the sharing of space, place, and energy with others. While the course will focus on Christian sources, it will also include similar motifs from Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:

1. To learn about and comprehend the seriousness of the present planetary crisis, epitomized by climate change and the financial chaos;
2. To study and internalize the role of religion in both forming and re-forming basic assumptions about human nature and behavior;
3. To review and assess various ethical stances arising from religious traditions;
4. To investigate in some depth the tradition of self-limitation in religion and especially the notion of kenosis in Christian theology and ethics as resources;
5. To produce a paper or project embodying some of the above findings.

FORMAT AND EXPECTATIONS:

The class will be run as a seminar with the instructor giving lectures and guiding discussions. Credit students will also have a role in teaching, by introducing readings, presenting working papers and projects, and leading

discussions. Auditors are welcome but will have a less active role, expected to do the readings and participate in discussions.

All students will be expected to do the weekly readings and credit students will produce a major paper or project of a theoretical or practical nature, incorporating some of the learning on religious self-limitation. Proposals for the papers/projects will be due early in the semester and students will present them to the class throughout the semester. Evaluation will be based on general class participation, presentations of various sorts to the class, and the final paper (with the latter counting for half the credit).

REQUIRED TEXTS TO PURCHASE (available at the UBC Bookstore):

A Custom Course Pack
Gary Gardner, Inspiring Progress (to be read before the first class)
John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives, ed. The Emptying God
John Polkinghorne, ed. The Work of Love
John Woolman, Walk Humbly with God, ed. Stephen S. Wilburn
and Keith Beasley-Topliffe

CLASS SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER 17: Introduction: The Role of Religion

Read Gary Gardner, Inspiring Progress before class meets.

SEPTEMBER 24: On the Problem

Margaret Atwood, Payback, Ch. 5 (CP)

Thomas Homer-Dixon and Nick Garrison, "Introduction," Carbon Shift
pp. 1-26 (CP)

Sallie McFague, A New Climate for Theology, Ch. 3 (CP)

Issues/questions on readings_____

OCTOBER 1: Examples of Another Way

John Woolman, Walking Humbly with God (entire)

Gustave Thibon, "Introduction," Simone Weil: Gravity and Grace,
pp. vii-xl (CP)

George A. Panichas, ed., The Simone Weil Reader, pp. 350-356, 439-468 (CP)

Robert Ellsberg, ed., By Little and by Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day, pp. 89-119 (CP)

Issues/questions on readings _____
Presentation _____

OCTOBER 8: A Different Worldview

John Haught, God After Darwin, Chs. 4, 7 (109-114) (CP)

Nancey Murphey and Geroge F.R. Ellis, On the Moral Nature of the Universe, Ch.6 (CP)

Holmes Rolston III, "Kenosis and Nature," The Work of Love, Ch. 3

Issues/questions on readings _____
Presentation _____

OCTOBER 15: Some Religious Views

John Hick, An Interpretation of Religion, Chs. 17, 18 (316-25) (CP)

Christopher Key Chapple, "Sacrifice and Sustainability," Worldviews,
Volume 12, # 2-3, pp. 221-236 (CP)

James David Dunn, Window of the Soul: The Kabbalah of Rabbi Isaac Luria
pp. 25-30 (CP)

Gershom G. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, pp. 251-264 (CP)

Eugene Borowitz, "TzimTzum" (CP)

Issues/questions on readings _____
Presentation _____

OCTOBER 22: Some Religious Views (cont'd)

Masao Abe, "Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata," The Emptying God,

John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives, ed., pp. 3-65.

Essays by Catherine Keller, Jurgen Moltmann, Schubert Ogden, and
David Tracy, in The Emptying God.

Issues/questions on readings _____
Presentation _____

READING WEEK: OCTOBER 26-30

NOVEMBER 5: Christianity and Kenosis

L.J. Richards, A Kenotic Christology, pp. 158-182; 211-238; 245-270;
310-316 (CP)

Issues/questions on readings _____
Presentation _____

NOVEMBER 12: Christianity and Kenosis (cont'd)

Essay by Keith Ward in The Work of Love, ed. Polkinghorne
John D. Zizioulas, Communion and Otherness, pp. 81-88 (CP)
Andrew Louth, "The Place of Theosis in Orthodox Theology," Partakers of the
Divine Nature, ed. M.J. Christensen and J. A. Wittung, pp. 32-44 (CP)

Issues/questions on readings _____
Presentation _____

NOVEMBER 19: Christianity and Kenosis (cont'd)

Essays by Ian Barbour, Arthur Peacocke, George Ellis, Michael Welker,
Jurgen Moltmann in The Work of Love, ed. Polkinghorne

Issues/questions on readings _____
Presentation _____

NOVEMBER 26: Kenosis and Practice

Dorothee Soelle, The Silent Cry, Ch. 13 (CP)
Mark McIntosh, Mystical Theology, Chs. 6 & 7 (CP)
Wendy Farley, The Wounding and Healing of Desire, Chs. 3, 8 (CP)

Issues/questions on readings _____
Presentation _____

DECEMBER 3: Kenosis and Practice (cont'd)

Andrew Flescher, Heroes, Saints, and Ordinary Morality, pp. 1-9; 172-233 (CP)
Sallie McFague, A New Climate for Theology, Ch. 6 (CP)

Issues/questions on readings _____
Presentation _____

