

SYLLABUS: [EL] PSYH 784H
THE PSYCHOLOGY AND THEOLOGY OF FORGIVENESS

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Andover Newton Theological School

Prof. J. Earl Thompson, Jr.

e-mail: jetmlm@bellsouth.net

3802 Timber Trail
Asheville, NC 28804
Tel. 828-225-6075

This is a course in personality theory or theological anthropology. This is also a course in practical theology that will explore forgiveness as a transformational practice. We will ask what it means to be fully human, to be created in God's image. What part do emotions play in our humanity, in the way we understand and live our life? What function do they have in the development and maturation of our personality? Of first importance, what are and what should be the place and role shame, guilt, anger, and resentment in our lives, emotions often triggered by an interpersonal injury and inviting forgiveness and possibly reconciliation? Do these emotions have a positive or only a negative role to play in our life? In what ways do these emotions distort, inhibit, block, or even enhance our willingness and ability to forgive those who have hurt us? Can God's forgiveness of us, our forgiveness of others, and our forgiveness of ourselves transform our emotional and spiritual life, especially the hold that guilt, shame and resentment have upon us? Can forgiveness of others and ourselves lead us beyond the frightening and painful emotions of unforgiveness to contain and resolve them?

For centuries in the West the central human dilemma has been understood and interpreted theologically in terms of sin and guilt, arising in part from the injuries we have received from and inflicted upon others. What it has meant to be human has been linked to our struggle with original sin and original guilt and their consequences in our life. The secular contributions of Sigmund Freud and Existentialism to our construction of personality theory and the human dilemma have further strengthened the significance of guilt in the human struggle for identity and authenticity. One purpose of this course, however, is to challenge, question, and explore the claim that the paramount human predicament is sin and guilt. We will test and develop the premise that the fundamental human problem is sin and shame. Shame has to do with a profound sense of personal inadequacy, failure, unworthiness, and even dirtiness. "Shame is "a felt sense," not of making a mistake, but "**being** a mistake." (Jill McNish, p. 24) I agree with Donald Capps's (1993) assertion that in our culture of narcissism shame has replaced guilt as that which causes people "to feel bad about themselves, to feel that something is seriously wrong with them. (Page 39) He adds (p. 41) that the experience of sin in our day is primarily one of shame, not guilt. On a more positive note, I also agree with James Fowler (1996) who asserts that "there is no path toward

spiritual aliveness and integrity in today's society that does not embrace the challenge of working this most elusive and painful emotion [shame]. Serious embrace of the challenges of dealing with shame leads in the direction of vitality, intimacy, responsiveness, and attentiveness to what is truly important to us. It leads to a passion for respecting self as well as others. . . ." (Page 93) Our primary but exclusive emphasis in this course, therefore, will be upon sin, shame, and forgiveness, not sin, guilt, and forgiveness.

This will not be easy because there are so few cultural warrants for identifying and assessing the manifestations and functions of shame in individuals, in interpersonal relationships, in the church or in our society at large. Our investigation of shame and forgiveness will proceed by studying representative examples of theological and psychological literature. In addition, we will read and analyze critically some classical and contemporary literature from the perspective of the dynamics of shame and forgiveness. Could it be that some of our creative writers have grasped the human situation more cogently than many philosophers and theologians? Moreover, we will evaluate some of our own personal and interpersonal experiences of shame and forgiveness. Throughout the course we will be asking ourselves whether we can make more cogent sense out of the struggle to be truly human, to be the persons God created by using the framework of sin, shame, and forgiveness. We will also be inquiring what role and function shame and forgiveness have in our psychological and spiritual makeup, in our interpersonal relationships, and in our pastoral and clinical interactions.

If shame is our dilemma, shame as understood primarily as alienation from God, others, and self, what is our hope? In spite of Michael P. Nichols' assertion (1995) that "shame cannot be forgiven, only concealed," I will contend that the grace of forgiveness, God's and human forgiveness, is our hope. But what is forgiveness? Robert D. Enright asserts, "When unjustly hurt by another, we forgive when we overcome the resentment toward the offender, not by denying our right to the resentment, but instead by trying to offer the wrongdoer compassion, benevolence, and love; as we give these, we as forgivers realize that the offender does not necessarily have a right to such gifts." (FORGIVENESS AS CHOICE, p. 25) The Russian writer, Solzhenitsyn, said, "It is not our capacity to think that makes us different [from animals] but our capacity to repent, and to forgive." This is, I believe, an astonishing assertion. To be fully human we have to practice daily the craft of forgiveness in a way analogous to one's daily practice of ceramics or painting, for example (L. Gregory Jones). This course is an invitation to become more fully human, to become more whole as we learn and practice the process of forgiving those who have injured and humiliated us. This course will also concentrate upon the psychology and spirituality of interpersonal forgiveness. We will discover that forgiveness, a very complex concept involving complicated emotional dynamics and ethical issues, is as difficult to define and apply as shame.

In exploring forgiveness, we have several goals. First, we will define what forgiveness is and differentiate it from what it is not. Forgiveness is often confused with other concepts such as condoning and reconciling, to name only a few. Second, we will learn the similarities and differences between the Jewish and Christian understanding of forgiveness. Third, we will investigate several major models of forgiveness with primary attention to the

one created by Robert Enright. In other words, you will learn at least one process model of forgiveness which you can use in your ministry with others and even with yourself. In this regard, we will be asking several questions. How does someone forgive? Can we choose to forgive immediately by a sheer act of will power? Is the act of forgiveness a gift of God's grace? Is forgiveness the result of a long, arduous process or a decision that can be made immediately? How do we develop the spiritual discipline of forgiveness? Fourth, we will consider the effects of forgiving and not forgiving upon our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being?

Here are the WRITTEN REQUIREMENTS for the course. Please note that I will evaluate your written work on the basis of how **cogently** you are able to integrate psychological and theological insights with the material you will be reading and about which you will be writing. In other words, I'll assess your ability to apply the ideas, concepts, and theories you will learn to the literature you will read in order to illumine the dynamics of shame and forgiveness in that literature. ALL PAPERS MUST BE TYPED AND DOUBLE SPACED. USE NO SMALLER THAN 12 POINT TYPE ON YOUR COMPUTER AND LEAVE ME ADEQUATE MARGINS TO WRITE NOTES AND REFLECTIONS TO YOU.

IF YOU WANT ME TO RETURN YOUR PAPERS WITH MY COMMENTS, ENCLOSE A **SELF-ADDRESSED, STAMPED ENVELOPE** WITH EVERY PAPER.

First, you will read Leo Tolstoy's short story, THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYICH and analyze the dynamics of shame in the story. This paper is to be no more six (6) pages long and is to be mailed (postmarked) to me no later than October 6, 2008.

Second, you will read Eugene O'Neill's play A TOUCH OF THE POET. Analyze the dynamics of shame **and** forgiveness in the story giving close to **equal** attention to both shame and forgiveness in the play. This paper is to be no more than eight (8) pages in length and is to be postmarked no later than November 3, 2008.

Third, you are to apply Enright's model of forgiveness to a situation where you have been hurt or betrayed. NOTE: You do **not** have to choose a situation where you have already forgiven the person. Indeed, the exercise may be more beneficial to you to choose a situation where you have not forgiven the person. The purpose of this exercise is to give you a chance to work through the process of forgiveness. By all means, change the names of the person(s) about whom you write and do not include anything which will make you uncomfortable or ashamed. The groundwork for this paper will be prepared in online discussions (to be explained further later). The length of this paper will vary from person to person but should not be any longer than eight (8) to ten (10) pages. This paper should be postmarked no later than December 9, 2008.

Fourth, you will read Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel THE SCARLET LETTER. (The introduction on the Custom House is optional.) Analyze the dynamics of shame and forgiveness in this book with **primary** but not exclusive attention to forgiveness. This paper is to be no more than eight (8) to ten (10) pages in length. It is to be postmarked no later than December 9, 2008.

I strongly recommend to those of you who aspire to go into some form of professional ministry to read THE SCARLET LETTER (a book probably wasted on most high school students). If, for whatever reason, you don't want to read this novel, here are some alternatives you can substitute for it (choose only one).

J. M. Coetzee, DISGRACE

Pat Conroy, MY LOSING SEASON (Those of you who want to read a novel by Conroy, a master of shame and forgiveness, and who have no interest in basketball, could read either Conroy's THE PRINCE OF TIDES or BEACH MUSIC.)

Stephen Crane, RED BADGE OF COURAGE

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, THE SORROWS OF YOUNG WERTHER

Ursula Hegi, THE VISION OF EMMA BLAU

Khaled Hosseini, A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

Franz Kafka, THE TRIAL

Ian McEwan, ATONEMENT

Toni Morrison, THE BLUEST EYE

Anne Tyler, SAINT MAYBE

Edith Wharton, ETHAN FROME

FIFTH, I EXPECT EVERYONE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ONLINE DISCUSSION THAT I WILL INITIATE. AFTER ALL, THIS IS AN ONLINE COURSE. From my perspective, the most significant part of this assignment is that you take part in ways that are appropriate to you, not that you contribute imaginative or profound remarks and responses every time you participate. I expect participation, not breathtaking brilliance, although I welcome the latter!

GRADING:

Online Participation: 20%

Tolstoy: 15%

O'Neill: 15%

Processing a Situation Inviting Forgiveness: 25 %

Hawthorne (or alternative novel): 25%

REQUIRED READING:

I. SHAME (Read One)

James Gilligan, VIOLENCE: REFLECTIONS ON A NATIONAL EPIDEMIC

Jill McNish, TRANSFORMING SHAME: A PASTORAL RESPONSE

Stephen Pattison, SHAME: THEORY, THERAPY, THEOLOGY (Highly Recommended for D. Min. Students)

Jane Taney and Ronda Dearing, SHAME AND GUILT

II. THEOLOGY OF FORGIVENESS (Read One)

Robert L. Browning and Roy A. Reed, FORGIVENESS, RECONCILIATION, AND MORAL COURAGE (Highly Recommended for D. Min. Students)

Miroslav Volf, FREE OF CHARGE: GIVING AND FORGIVING IN A CULTURE STRIPPED OF GRACE

III. PSYCHOLOGY OF FORGIVENESS

REQUIRED READING:

Solomon Schimmel, WOUNDS NOT HEALED BY TIME: THE POWER OF REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS

In Addition to Schimmel's Book, Read One:

Robert Enright and Joanna North, eds., EXPLORING FORGIVENESS

Robert Enright, FORGIVENESS IS A CHOICE

John W. de Gruchy, RECONCILIATION: RESTORING JUSTICE

Aaron Lazare, ON APOLOGY

Lewis Smedes, THE ART OF FORGIVING

Everett Worthington, Jr., FORGIVING AND RECONCILING: BRIDGES TO WHOLENESS AND HOPE

For each week of the course, there will be one or more lectures online introducing or accompanying the subject of the week. The purpose of these lectures is to introduce you to the theme or reading(s) of the week and to compensate for the fact that you won't have time during the semester to read everything! I have put an additional reading list at the end of this syllabus. This list is meant to help some of you follow up on my lectures either during the course or in the future. I don't expect you to read any of these books and articles for the course. The assigned readings are spelled out above. There may come a time, however, when you might want to read something from this list.

WEEK ONE—September 8, 2008: Reasons for a Course on the Psychology and Theology of Forgiveness

WEEK TWO—September 15: The Lure of Revenge

When we have been hurt, betrayed, and humiliated, the most natural response is to even the score, to exact revenge. There are basic appeals and advantages of revenge but also disadvantages and even dire consequences. We need to assess if and when revenge is ever appropriate. If so, why is it?

WEEK THREE—September 22: Shame, An Introduction

I have chosen to introduce the subject of shame through the lens of Thomas Scheff and Suzanne Retzinger whose approach combines microsociology and family theory. There are numerous explanations of the dynamics of shame (see additional readings at the end of the syllabus). I'll acquaint you with some of them through mini-lectures.

WEEK FOUR—September 29: Pastoral and Clinical Implications of Shame

WEEK FIVE—October 6: Forgiveness: An Introduction. Definitions, Confusions, and Misunderstandings

In my experience inside and outside of the church, I have discovered very few people who understand what forgiveness really is. In this session we will draw important distinctions between forgiveness and related and different concepts such as condoning, excusing, and reconciling. One overarching question for this session (and indeed for the course) is: What is forgiveness?

WEEK SIX—October 13: Forgiveness, a Jewish Perspective

In this session we will confront the critical question which divides many Jewish and Christian thinkers on the subject of forgiveness: Are repentance and making amends for the wrongdoing by the offender necessary for the offender to be forgiven? In other words, is forgiveness conditional or unconditional?

WEEK Seven—October 20—Christianity and Forgiveness

Is there something distinctive or even unique about Christianity's understanding of forgiveness? We will pay special attention to Jesus' teachings about forgiveness as recorded in the synoptic gospels.

WEEK EIGHT--October 27: Apology

An apology is an art which is far more complex and difficult than meets the eye and which can prepare the way to forgiveness. Do we know what an authentic apology is? Do we know what blunts or undercuts an authentic apology?

WEEK NINE—November 3: Forgiveness—Robert D. Enright

There is no widespread agreement among scholars about the meaning of forgiveness or about the steps one can take to be able to forgive. In this session we will explore what I consider one of the most compelling process models of forgiveness developed by Robert D. Enright and his students at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

WEEK TEN—November 10—Forgiveness—Everett L. Worthington, Jr. and Terry Hargrave

Worthington is a cognitive behavioral psychologist who has his own distinctive process model of forgiveness, less complex than Enright's, which stresses the centrality of empathy in the process of forgiveness. Hargrave is a family therapist who conflates forgiveness and reconciliation that some will find perplexing but others will find persuasive.

Week Eleven—November 17—Reconciliation

We will seek to make clear the differences between forgiveness and reconciliation and a process which can lead to reconciliation.

Week Twelve—December 1—Forgiveness—Pastoral and Clinical Applications

ADDITIONAL READINGS:

I. Books on Shame

Francis Broucek, SHAME AND THE SELF (This is a psychodynamic object relations approach to shame.)

Donald Capps, THE DEPLETED SELF: SIN IN A NARCISSISTIC AGE (This is a pastoral theological approach to shame.)

James Fowler, FAITHFUL CHANGE, Chap. 5 (Fowler follows the tradition of affect psychology in understanding shame. The chapter is an excellent introduction to the subject.)

Gershen Kaufman, SHAME: THE POWER OF CARING (Kaufman is an affect psychologist.)

Gershen Kaufman, THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SHAME

Michael Lewis, **THE EXPOSED SELF** (Lewis is a cognitive behavioral psychologist. Many students in the past have found his approach to be especially illuminating and comprehensive in beginning to explore the subject of shame.)

Andrew Morrison, **THE CULTURE OF SHAME** (This book, written in the tradition of self-psychology, is a good introduction to the subject of shame.)

Donald Nathanson, **SHAME AND PRIDE** (Nathanson is an affect psychologist. This is one of the best books written on the psychology of shame.)

J. Earl Thompson, Jr., "Shame in Pastoral Psychology," in **PASTORAL PSYCHOLOGY**, Vol. 44, May 1996, 311-320

II. BOOKS ON FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

David Augsburger, **HATE-WORK: WORKING THROUGH THE PAIN AND PLEASURES OF HATE** (This profound treatment of the psychology of hate and is very appropriate for D. Min. students. Augsburger is a Mennonite pastoral theologian with comprehensive and brilliant insights.)

David Augsburger, **HELPING PEOPLE FORGIVE** (This creative and comprehensive treatment of forgiveness is very suitable for D. Min. students.)

Elliott N. Dorff, "The Elements of Forgiveness: A Jewish Approach," in **DIMENSIONS OF FORGIVENESS: PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**, ed., by Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Chap. 2

Robert d. Enright and Richard P. Fitzgibbons, **HELPING CLIENTS FORGIVE: AN EMPIRICAL GUIDE FOR RESOLVING ANGER AND RESTORING HOPE** (This book falls in the field of the psychotherapy of forgiveness. It would be appropriate for D. Min. students.)

Robert Enright and Catherine T. Coyle, "Researching the Process Model of Forgiveness within Psychological Interventions," in **DIMENSIONS OF FORGIVENESS**, ed., by Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Chap. 6

Trudy Govier, **FORGIVENESS AND REVENGE** (This book is a fine treatment of the subject from the point of view of a Canadian philosopher.)

Terry Hargrave, **FAMILIES and FORGIVENESS: HEALING WOUNDS IN THE INTERGENERATIONAL FAMILY**

Fred Luskin, **FORGIVE FOR GOOD: A PROVEN PRESCRIPTION FOR HEALTH AND HAPPINESS** (A psychologist who teaches at Stanford University, Luskin has provided his own process of forgiveness which he

developed in research he did on Stanford students.)

John Patton, **IS HUMAN FORGIVENESS POSSIBLE? A PASTORAL CARE PERSPECTIVE** (A pastoral theologian, Patton wrote one of the earliest and most influential books on forgiveness integrating psychology and theology.)

John Patton, “Forgiveness in Pastoral Care and Counseling,” in **FORGIVENESS: THEORY, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE**, ed. by Michael El McCullough et al., Chap. 13

Lewis Smedes, **THE ART OF FORGIVING: WHEN YOU NEED TO FORGIVE AND DON’T KNOW HOW** (Another pastoral theologian, Smedes has provided his own practical process of forgiveness. This book could be used effectively with lay people and also has many sermon insights and aids.)

Lewis Smedes, “Stations on the Journey from Forgiveness to Hope,” in **DIMENSIONS OF FORGIVENESS: PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**, ed. by Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Chap. 10

Everett L. Worthington, Jr. **FIVE STEPS TO FORGIVENESS: THE HEART AND SCIENCE OF FORGIVING** (This was the first edition of what is now a revised version of Worthington’s **FORGIVING AND RECONCILING: BRIDGES TO WHOLENESS AND HOPE**.)

Everett L. Worthington, Jr., “The Pyramid Model of Forgiveness: Some Interdisciplinary Speculation about Unforgiveness and the Promotion of Forgiveness,” in **DIMENSIONS OF FORGIVENESS**, ed. by Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Chap. 5