



Call for Applications

How emotions inform religion: integrating Christian theology with cognitive and affective neuroscience

Cross-Training Scholarships

March, 2023 - December, 2025

The purpose of this grant is to provide 20 Latin-American Christian theologians and philosophers of religion from different academic levels an opportunity to develop research of theological relevance on how emotions inform religion. Scholarship recipients will follow a course of studies specially designed for the cross-training of theologians in neuropsychology. The cross-training scholarship will last 33 months and consist of tuition fees, course materials, and a stipend. The stipend amount will equal the best values in practice by Brazilian funding agencies. All the cross-training activities will take part at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (PUC-Rio). Recipients from other Latin-American countries will receive funding for travel and accommodation costs. Scholarship recipients will be enrolled as Masters students, PhD students, or post-doc researchers in the Department of Theology, Philosophy, or Psychology according to the nature of their research projects, academic background, and familiarity with neuropsychology. By the end of the cross-training, successful scholarship recipients will have received a degree in Philosophy, Theology or Psychology with an academic certificate in neuropsychology.

Research Topics

(1) How do emotions influence our engagement with the divine? Theology traditionally defines emotions as abstract, cross-cultural universals. Conceived as primary elements of religion, emotions have been regularly used to qualify humans' engagement with the divine. Nonetheless, not much effort has been made to reach a precise and theologically relevant definition of this feeling. Recently, a scholarly debate about the nature of emotions emerged, with neuropsychological thinkers defending a universalistic approach to emotions and culturally focused theorists adopting a more relativistic understanding of its nature. Some research questions related to this topic are: What is the theological importance of this debate? Is fear of God the same for a 17th-century Puritan and a 20th-century evangelical? If not, then what are the consequences of this difference? Can we offer a regulative or criteriological analysis of emotions that specifies when they are authentically religious? Does emotion play a role in the acceptance of a theological argument or doctrine?

(2) In what sense do emotions relate human and divine nature? To accurately appreciate a religious tradition's understanding of the divine, we need to utilize two types of approaches: one theological and metaphysical and one emotional and experiential. Neither perspective is reducible to the other, but they are also not distinct from each other. Christian theology, for example, defines God in terms of personhood. God is the Person who creates, and we are the persons He has created. As the prototype for personhood and personality, He is often described by means of His emotions. Conversely, Christians describe their relationship with God as highly emotional. God is love, and it is through His love that Christians have understood themselves to stand in some relation to God. In this and similar cases, what is stated in theological terms about God's nature in some measure informs and constrains what is said in emotional terms, and vice-versa. Each vantage point extends its own distinctive appreciation of the nature of the divine. Therefore, each enlarges the perspective of the other. Some research questions related to this topic are: How can we understand this complex interplay between theological teaching and records of emotional experience? How do people apprehend divine love? Can a theological argument make us feel God's presence in a different way? Are our emotional experiences in prayer or rituals determined by theological thinking?

(3) What role do emotions play in human flourishing and the practice of virtues?

Scientific investigation, especially neuroscience, suggests that emotions are absolutely necessary for successful practical and ethical decisions. This scientific position aligns with the theological tradition that was issued from Aquinas' reflection on the morality of passions. According to this tradition, emotions and affections have the value of motivating appropriate actions. It is through emotions that virtues are particularised to the concrete circumstances of daily life. As stated by Aquinas, some emotions like gratitude and compassion can actually increase the moral value of an act. Some research questions related to this topic are: How does religion shape our emotions in light of a shared ideal of human flourishing? How is emotional change constitutive of spiritual growth and the development of a virtuous character? How can people develop religious emotions, such as genuine love for their enemies or genuine humility before God?

Application Process

Applicants must be Latin-American graduate students, and early-to-mid career scholars who are within 10 years of having received their PhDs. The eligibility criteria for applicants are (a) have basic linguistic competence in both English and either Portuguese or Spanish, and (b) be affiliated with a Latin-American academic institution within the last 4 years. Familiarity with neuropsychology or psychology will be generally preferred but not strictly required.

John Templeton Foundation's Trustees or employees, as well as the spouse, child, sibling, or parent of such Trustees or employees will not be allowed to receive the cross-training scholarship.

Applicants must submit the following by **November 1, 2022**: (a) cover letter, (b) reference letter, (c) writing sample, (d) research statement, (e) curriculum vitae, and (f) proof of affiliation with a Latin-American academic institution within the last 4 years.

The cover letters should be no longer than 2 pages and should comment on (a) the applicant's interest and current work (if any) in the field of studying the relationship between emotions and Christian theology, (b) how receiving cross-training in neuropsychology will foster the applicant's future academic plans, (c) the applicant's familiarity (if any) with neuropsychology or psychology in general, and (d) the applicant's experience and competence with the English and Portuguese languages.

Reference letters should be no longer than 2 pages (single spaced) and should be requested from current or former professors, colleagues, or anyone who has had an academic relationship to the applicant. Letters from relatives, friends, and non-academic acquaintances will not be accepted. Reference letters must at least answer the following questions: (a) How long have you known the applicant? (b) In what capacity did you interact with the applicant? (c) How does the applicant compare to your other students/colleagues? (d) How would cross-training in neuropsychology help the applicant's work? (e) Is the applicant fluent in English?

Writing Samples (in either English, Portuguese, or Spanish) should be a published or unpublished paper that is no longer than 25 pages (double spaced).

Research statements should be no longer than 5 pages (single spaced) and must be related to one of the following big questions: (a) How do emotions influence our engagement with the divine? (b) In what sense do emotions relate to human and divine nature? (c) What role do emotions have in human flourishing and the practice of virtues? Research statements should include (a) specific research topics of theological relevance that will be investigated, (d) the manner in which critical engagement with neuropsychology will help elucidate the proposed research topics.

We will accept as proof of affiliation with Latin-American institutions official dated transcripts from the applicant's previous or current home university, an official academic degree, or an official academic certificate.

Selection Criteria

The project co-leaders will judge the applications based on the following criteria: (a) evidence of a serious and feasible research project, (b) evidence of serious interest in topics that are related to emotions and Christian theology, (c) record of academic achievement, (d) potential for future work in neuroscience-engaged Christian theology, (e) English proficiency, and (f) familiarity with neuropsychology or psychology in general. The most promising applicants will receive an invitation for a Zoom interview. Winners will be announced by **February 10, 2023**.

Application should be submitted no later than **November 1, 2022** via email to actpucurio@gmail.com, indicating "Cross-Training Scholarship Application - Name of the candidate" in the subject line of the email.

All inquiries about the process of application (or the project in general) should be sent to actpucurio@gmail.com.

