

**TH611 - Theories of the Atonement
Spring Semester 2011**

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978 646 4235**

SYLLABUS

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

The last few years have seen a revival of debates around the topic of atonement. The most significant development, however, is constituted by the increasing willingness of certain Evangelicals to surrender or drastically reformulate the penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement. Although this elective does not deal exclusively with penal substitution, it will discuss the variety of atonement theories in terms of their relationship with Evangelical theology.

I am approaching this course along the following lines of inquiry:

- What is the place of atonement theory in the larger field of systematic theology?
- What is the practical significance of the cross of Christ today and how does it relate to the practices of forgiveness and justice in our contemporary society?
- What has influenced the development of the church's reflection on the atonement throughout history? In particular, how has the doctrine of the atonement been influenced by historic conceptions of justice? How has reflection on the meaning of divine forgiveness in turn influenced emerging conceptions of human justice?

II. OBJECTIVES¹

- By the end of the class, the student will have familiarized himself or herself with the main theories and interpretations of the atonement, both traditional and contemporary. (Articles 2, 5)
- He or she will have grasped the logic of the debate, assimilated the conceptual apparatus, and understood the personal, socio-cultural, and ecclesial implications of the different positions. (Articles 2, 5)
- The student will also gain an appreciation for the way in which diverse Christian theologians drew on a variety of cultural and philosophical

¹ The various objectives are correlated with the Mission Statement of GCTS

- vocabularies, including conceptions of justice, in their attempt to explain the mystery of salvation. (Articles 2, 5)
- The student will also understand the logical place of the doctrine of atonement in systematic theology. (Articles 1, 3)
 - The student will understand the biblical foundations of the variety of theories presented. (Article 1)
 - To understand the implications of the doctrine of the atonement for Christian life, pastoral counseling, and evangelism (Article 6)

III. EVALUATION

- **30%: Reading report.** The student will provide a signed statement about the percentage of reading she has completed.
- **A choice between**
 - **50%: Final exam.** An online exam consisting of a combination of multiple-choice, short answer, and short essay.
 - **50%: Research paper** on a topic to be decided in conjunction with the instructor. Length: 3,000 words. To be submitted by the last day of written work.
- **20%: A sermon on the atonement:** A two page (single spaced) homiletic meditation about the significance of the cross of Christ for the Church today.

IV. COURSE STRUCTURE

1: Christus Victor: Dramatic Theories of the Atonement

Beilby/Eddy: 9-67
 Boersma: 181-201
 Schmiechen: 56-103, 123-169

2: Satisfaction

Boersma: 153-179
 Gunton: 83-115
 Schmiechen: 194-222

3: Moral influence

Boersma: 115-132
 Schmiechen: 222-255, 288-313

4: Penal substitution

McCormack
 Metzger
 Beilby/Eddy: 67-117
 Schmiechen: 103-123

5: Atonement and violence

Boersma: 25-99
Mouw
Weaver

6: Feminist criticism

Tanner
Ray: 93-114

7: Christ as Scapegoat

Boersma: 133-153
Heim, 'No More Scapegoats'

8: Eastern Orthodox Perspectives on the Cross

Boersma: 257-263
Heim, 'Salvation as Communion'

9: Atonement and consequences

Gunton: 173-205
Mathews

10: Balancing the metaphors

Blocher
Gunton: 27-53
Boersma: 99-115

V. REQUIRED READING

Books

- Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004)
- James Beilby, Paul R. Eddy, *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views* (IVP, 2006)
- Peter Schmiechen, *Saving Power: Theories of the Atonement and Forms of the Church* (Eerdmans, 2005)
- Colin Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement* (T&T Clark, 1988) – PDFs of select chapters to be provided via CAMS

Articles (Listed in the order of reading; an electronic copy will be provided)

- Shailer Mathews, 'The Functional Value of Doctrines of the Atonement', *The Journal of Religion* 1/2 (1921): 146-159
- Bruce McCormack, 'For Us and Our Salvation: Incarnation and Atonement in the Reformed Tradition', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 43 (1998): 281ff.
- Paul L. Metzger, 'Why Do the Nations Rage? An Analysis of the Atonement', *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 43/1 (2001): 75ff.

- Richard Mouw, 'Violence and the Atonement', *Books and Culture* Jan/Feb (2001)
- Denny J. Weaver, 'Violence in Christian Theology', *Cross Currents* 51/2 (2001): 150ff.
- Kathryn Tanner, 'Incarnation, Cross, and Sacrifice: A Feminist-Inspired Reappraisal', *Anglican Theological Review* 86/1 (2004): 35ff.
- Inna Jane Ray, 'The Atonement Muddle: An Historical Analysis and Clarification of a Salvation Theory', *Journal of Women and Religion* 15 (1997)
- S. Mark Heim, 'No More Scapegoats', *The Christian Century* 123/18 (2006)
- S. Mark Heim, 'Salvation as Communion: Partakers of the Divine Nature', *Theology Today* 61/3 (2004)
- Henri Blocher, 'Biblical Metaphors and the Doctrine of the Atonement', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47/4 (2004)

VI. SUGGESTED READING

- Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (P&R, 1978)
- Jeffery, Ovey, Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (IVP 2007)
- Holmes, Stephen, *The Wondrous Cross: Atonement and Penal Substitution in the Bible and History* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007)
- N. T. Wright, 'The Cross and the Caricatures' <http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/page.cfm?ID=205>
- Heim, Mark S., *Saved From Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006)
- Schmiechen, Peter, *Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005)
- Scot McKnight, *Jesus and His Death: Historiography, the Historical Jesus, and Atonement Theory* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2005)
- Brock, Rita Nakashima and Parker, Rebecca Ann, *Proverbs of Ashes: Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us* (Boston: Beacon, 2002)
- Mann, Alan, *Atonement for a Sinless Society* (Milton Keynes, Paternoster 2005)
- Green, Joel B. and Baker, Mark D., *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (IVP 2000)
- Finlan, Stephen, *Problems with Atonement: The Origins of, and Controversy About, the Atonement Doctrine* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2005)
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart, *Jesus – God and Man* (London: SCM, 1968)
- Brümmer, Vincent, *Atonement, Christology and the Trinity: Making Sense of Christian Doctrine* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005)
- J. I. Packer, 'What did the cross achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution', *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974), 3-46.

VII. PAPER TOPIC SUGGESTIONS

- Anselm Reconsidered: The New Interpretation
- N. T. Wright's Interpretation of Penal Substitution
- Can there be coherence in atonement theories?
- Did Jesus have an atonement theory?
- Atonement and 'shame society'
- Atonement and 'divine child abuse'
- Does the doctrine of penal substitution encourage domestic violence?

VIII. NOTE ON PLAGIARISM

Please refer to Indiana University's 'Plagiarism: What It is and How to Recognize and Avoid It' [<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>]. The document has the official recognition of Gordon-Conwell faculty.