TH611 - Theories of the Atonement
Spring Semester 2011

Instructor: Dr. Adonis Vidu
Office: Library, 109 [Office hours posted on door]
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
- 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)

VI. SUGGESTED READING

- Jeffery, Ovey, Sach, Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution (IVP 2007)
- 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)
- 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)

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.