TH611 - Theories of the Atonement  
Spring Semester 2013

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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.

• **70%: 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.

IV. COURSE STRUCTURE AND READING

1: **Introduction and Patristic Ransom Theory**
   - Gregory of Nyssa, *Or. Cat.* Excerpt
   - Augustine, *De Trinitate*, excerpt
   - Irenaeus, excerpt.
   - Athanasius, exc.

2: **Christus Victor: Dramatic Theories of the Atonement**
   - Gregory A. Boyd, excerpt.
   - N. T. Wright, ‘The Cross and the Caricatures’

3: **Anselm: Satisfaction**
   - Patout Burns, ‘The Concept of Satisfaction in Medieval Redemption Theory’.
   - Robert Crouse, ‘The Augustinian Background of Anselm’s Concept of Justice’
   - Katherin A. Rogers, ‘Anselm on Forgiveness, Patience, and Free Will’.

4: **Moral influence**
   - Shailer Matthews, ‘The Social Function of Atonement’
   - F. Schleiermacher, excerpt
   - Abelard, excerpt from *The Epistle to the Romans*
   - A. Ritschl, excerpt from *The Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*

5: Penal substitution
   John Calvin, *Institutes* exc.
   N. Wolterstorff, ‘Does Forgiveness undermine Justice?’
   John Owen, excerpt from *A Treatise on Divine Justice*.

6: Atonement and violence
   Weaver, excerpt from *A Non-Violent Atonement*
   Thomas Talbott, ‘Punishment, Forgiveness, and Divine Justice.’
   Derrida, ‘Hospitality, Justice, and Responsibility’
   Christopher Marshall, *Beyond Retribution* exc.

7: Feminist criticism
   Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, ‘For God so Loved the World?’, in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, CAMS.
   Marion Grau, ‘Divine Commerce: A Postcolonial Christology for Times of Neocolonial Empire,’ in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, ed. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, Mayra Rivera. CAMS.

8: Christ as Scapegoat
   Heim, ‘No More Scapegoats’
   Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, excerpt.

9: Atonement in Global Perspective
   Andrew Sung Park, *Triune Atonement*, excerpt
   Michael Cook, ‘The African Experience of Jesus’
   Victor Ezigbo, ‘Rethinking the Sources of African Contextual Christology’

10: Balancing the metaphors
    Blocher, ‘Biblical Metaphors and the Doctrine of the Atonement’
    Willem J. van Asselt, ‘Christ’s Atonement: A Multi-Dimensional Approach’

V. NOTE ON REQUIRED READING
There are no required textbooks for this class. The intention is to focus on either single articles, or excerpts from a variety of seminal books on the atonement. The
student is required to read all the listed articles prior to each class. A significant portion of class time will be dedicated to discussing these texts.

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.