

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary
THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF JESUS

TS-720 3 Units
Fall 2008
Thursdays 6:00-9:00

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Office Hours: Tuesday 10:00-12:00
Wed. 1:30-3:30

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course studies various theological understandings of Jesus as expressed in biblical, historical, and contemporary texts. Attention will be given to exploring the pastoral and missional implications arising from different ways of understanding the person and work of Jesus, especially the atonement.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Through this course students will be able:

1. Analyze and evaluate the different ways of explaining both the person of Christ (i.e., relationship between humanity and divinity) and the work of Christ (i.e., atonement metaphors and theories).
2. Proclaim the saving significance of the cross and resurrection through using theologically and contextually appropriate metaphors.
3. Articulate an appropriate theological understanding of Jesus that is: (a) grounded in the prophetic and apostolic witness of Scripture, (b) instructive for developing healthy and effective Christian communities, and (c) consistent with the mission of God to gather a people for the transformation of all creation.

RELATED DEGREE OBJECTIVES

Within the larger curriculum goals of the Seminary this course will facilitate growth in ability to:

- Witness persuasively to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a postmodern secular context (1.5)
- Explain the central themes/doctrines of the Christian faith (2.2.2)
- Consistently demonstrate capacity to connect with and confront a cultural context in papers, presentations, and/or sermons (3.2.3)
- Develop skills in evaluating theological methodology (4.3.3.2)

TEXTBOOKS

Baker, Mark D., ed. *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross*. Baker Academic, 2006.*

Gordon, Ernest. *To End All Wars*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.**

Green, Joel B. and Mark D. Baker. *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.*

Schwager, Raymund. *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation: Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption*. New York: Crossroad, 1999.*

Course Pack (CP) - a collection of photocopied articles and chapters will be distributed the first

class session. You will be billed for the cost of copies and copyright fees.

*On reserve in the library.

** An earlier edition on reserve: *Through the Valley of the Kwai*

COURSE SCHEDULE

1 – Aug. 28 Introduction to the Course and Person of Jesus: Humanity

2 – Sept. 4 Person of Jesus: Humanity and Human and Divine

Before class read: Migliore, Daniel (CP), *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 2nd Ed, pp. 174-77

Wright, N. T. (CP), *The Challenge of Jesus*, pp.96-125.

González, Justo (CP), *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*, pp.139-55 (see reflection questions in appendix).

3 – Sept.11 Person of Jesus: Human and Divine

Before class read: Kraus, C. Norman (CP), *Jesus Christ our Lord*, pp 102-121

Kraus, C. Norman (CP), “A Reply to Interpretations & Criticisms,” pp. 85-89

Migliore, Daniel (CP), *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 2nd Edition, pp. 178-182

4 – Sept. 18 Person of Jesus: Divinity

Migliore, Daniel (CP), *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 2nd Edition, pp. 177-178

Pedraja, Luis (CP), *Jesus is My Uncle: Christology From a Hispanic Perspective*, pp. 85- 106

Placher, William (CP), *Narratives of a Vulnerable God*, pp. 3-26

Essays Due Sept. 22

5 – Sept. 25 The Work of Jesus: Introduction & Common Theories of the Atonement

Before class read: Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, pp. 11-34, and revised version of chapter five in course pack; (see reflection questions in appendix).

6 – Oct. 2 The Work of Jesus: New Testament Writers and the Atonement

Before class read: Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, pp 35-86

Gundry-Volf, Judith (CP), “Expiation, Propitiation, Mercy Seat,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, pp. 279-83

Oct 9 - No Class, Intensive Course Week -

7 – Oct. 16 The Work of Jesus: New Testament and the Articulation of the Atonement

Before class read: Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, pp 87-115

Baker, Sharon (CP), “The Repetition of Reconciliation: Satisfying Justice, Mercy and Forgiveness,” pp. 220-40

Blue, Debbie, “A Different Story” in *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross*, pp. 62-72

Research project proposal due

8 – Oct. 23 The Work of Jesus: The Drama of Salvation Part I

Before class read: Schwager, Raymund, *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, pp. 1-158 (you may skim the following pages: 44-52, 69-79, 96-112, 119-135)
(see reflection questions in appendix).

9- Oct. 30 The Work of Jesus: The Drama of Salvation Part II

Before class read: Schwager, Raymund. *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*, pp. 159-230
(read pages 191-201 carefully)
Alternative interpretation exercise due.

10 – Nov. 6 The Work of Jesus: Liberation from Shame

Before class read: Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, pp. 153-170
Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross, pp. 122-159
(see reflection questions in appendix).

Nov. 10 Research Paper Due

11 – Nov.13 The Work of Jesus: Metaphors of the Atonement for Today

Before class read: Baker and Green, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, pp. 171-221
Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross, pp. 37-61; 73-83; 96-121; 160-189
(see reflection questions in appendix).

12 – Nov. 20 The Work of Jesus: Metaphors of the Atonement for Today

“Best draft” of metaphors presentation and evaluation due

Nov. 27 No Class – Thanksgiving Day

13 - Dec. 4 The Person and Work of Jesus Today: Central and Transformative

Before class read: Gordon, Ernest, *To End All Wars*, pp. 1-231
(see reflection questions in appendix).

14 – Dec. 11 The Person and Work of Jesus Today: Final Thoughts

Come to class prepared to share a response to the following questions: how has your thinking developed/changed over the semester as you interacted with the readings, your tradition/background, and your context? What will you do with these new thoughts? How can you communicate them to others?

Final draft of metaphors presentation and evaluation due

Reflection Paper due

ASSIGNMENTS

Attendance, Reading and Class Participation - Significant class time will be given to the discussion of assigned readings. Therefore it is imperative that students read carefully and share

their reflections and questions during class discussion. To get an “A” in this category you must have perfect attendance, give evidence of having done the reading, and make significant contributions to class discussion. An “A-“ will be given to those with one absence and significant participation or to those with perfect attendance and good participation. Two absences will place a student in the “B” range; participation and evidence of reading will determine whether it is a high or low “B.” Three absences could move the student in to the “C” range. Four or more absences place the student at risk of receiving an “F” in class participation, but also at risk of having their course grade lowered a full letter grade or of automatically failing the class. Students may talk to the professor about ways to partially make up for absences. Note that “significant participation” refers to quality of participation not just quantity.

Essays on the Humanity and Divinity of Jesus - You will write two essays based on the reading and the first four class sessions. **Due Mon. Sept. 22**

In **the first essay** contrast the rational ontological mode with historical relational modes of christological description. Based on your reading and material from class display how the two approaches lead to different conceptualizations of the humanity and divinity of Jesus. Include analysis and evaluation of benefits and drawbacks of the approaches (3 to 4 pages single-spaced).

The second essay will be written in the form of a magazine article for lay Christians (such as a denominational magazine like *The Christian Leader*), or you may write it in the form of a talk for a Sunday School class. The purpose is to invite reflection on the humanity and divinity of Jesus. You should display some of the common ways that the humanity and divinity of Jesus are often misinterpreted and help the reader/listener see the potential consequences of those misinterpretations. The article/talk, however, should have at least as much, if not more, emphasis on helpful ways of understanding Jesus humanity and divinity and implications and benefits of that sound christological thinking. It should give evidence of your having thought carefully about how to articulate that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine (3-4 page single-spaced). You will be graded both on content—do you cover the points listed, but also on how well you do at communicating this information in the way a lay audience would understand.

Research Paper - Write a 12 to 15 page, double-spaced research paper that explores an issue of Christology. See the *Appendix* for examples of general research areas. A written research project proposal that clearly specifies a proposed research area and central question or problem statement and a bibliography must be discussed with me before October 16. Please make an appointment. Your bibliography should include dictionary and journal articles. Unacceptable proposals will be returned for reworking.

This paper should contain a thesis statement, description that reflects careful research, and analysis that reflects thoughtful interaction with the content of your research. Finally it should also include reflection on theological and missional and/or pastoral implications.

You will be graded on quality of research and ability to select and communicate important

aspects of your research, use of appropriate academic form and citations, clarity of writing and presentation of the problem, and the logic and depth of your analysis. **Due Monday Nov. 10.**

Alternative Interpretation Exercise - Since the penal satisfaction theory of the atonement is often taught as *the* explanation of the atonement, many of us have a hard time seeing anything else in some scripture passages. To imagine an alternative interpretation of a passage does not necessarily mean penal satisfaction is wrong, but it at least opens space for discussion and evaluation. This assignment seeks to create that space.

Each student will write a paraphrase of Romans 3:24 & 25 that clearly communicates a non penal satisfaction interpretation of the text (specifically a non-penal satisfaction interpretation of words like: justified, redemption, sacrifice of atonement, justice, righteousness). You will substantiate that paraphrase with commentary on the principle themes of Romans 3:21-26 and notes on key translation and exegetical issues in verses 24 & 25 (one page single-spaced). You obviously will not be able to write fully developed arguments. What you write on this page should, however, point to the decisions you have made and give a sense of how you are substantiating that decision. You of course may not agree with or be convinced by your own paraphrase and commentary. If that is the case you may note where you disagree with the interpretation you offer, and why, or you may note where you still have questions. Use footnotes to acknowledge sources of ideas you borrow from others. **Due Oct. 30.**

Metaphor of Atonement - each student will develop an original metaphor that communicates the saving significance of the cross and resurrection in a particular context today. In other words, take up the invitation in the last paragraph of the book I co-authored with Joel Green.

As you work at proclaiming the atonement afresh for a contemporary context you should seek to have it be biblical by following the four theological guidelines on pages 112-114 (Green & Baker). Your presentations should both connect with and challenge the context (page 115). Your metaphor should not just communicate that salvation is needed and available, but, like the metaphors in *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross*, should communicate something about how the cross and resurrection provide salvation. The actual metaphor should be three to four pages (double-spaced). It should begin with a very brief description of the context/audience you envision. I encourage you to imagine this as a tract, evangelistic presentation, or part of a discussion about the meaning of the cross. It is likely that thinking of it as an actual presentation or article will lead you to include some type of invitation for the reader or listener to respond.

No single image or metaphor communicates fully the saving significance of the cross and resurrection. Therefore, you will not be graded down for failing to do so. You should, however, be self-aware of what is missing. Write an one-to-two page evaluation of your presentation stating what are aspects of the atonement it communicates and those it does not, and what are ways you perceive it as connecting with and challenging the context. (You can model this on the evaluations at the end of each chapter in *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross*.)

You will read your atonement presentation to the class during the 12th class session and turn in a

“best draft” of the presentation and evaluation on that date. Based on feedback from peers and my comments on your “best draft” you will improve your presentation, and turn in a final version by the last class session. (Hand in the copy of the “best draft” with my comments on it with your final version.)

Reflection paper - Write a three to four page, single-spaced personal reflection paper on Jesus. What is the significance of Jesus (person and work) for my life, the Christian community and the world? This is your opportunity to reflect personally on the issues that have occupied us all semester, and why they matter. For instance, please reflect on the importance of one’s atonement theology and how it affects other areas of theology, life and ministry. How might you today talk differently about the humanity and divinity of Jesus and the atonement?

This is not a research paper, no new sources need to be consulted. I am especially interested in hearing how your thinking has developed/changed over the semester as you interacted with your readings, your tradition/background, and your context. **Due by the last class session.**

Assignment policies:

1. Students are expected to submit assignments on time; if they are late they will be graded down one grade level (a B+ becomes a B), and after four days another grade level.
2. All written work should have one inch margins and Times Roman 12pt font.
3. Confidentiality: If you wish to have your assignment results be more confidential you may submit the assignments in an envelope.
4. All assignments may be printed on scrap paper.

Grading Scheme

Attendance and class participation 10%; essays 25%; alternative interpretation exercise 10% atonement metaphor 20%; research paper 25%; reflection paper 10%.

As stated in the *Academic Handbook* a “B” is the baseline grade. A “B” means the student is doing satisfactory work. The “B+” or higher grade indicates that the student has exceeded the baseline performance standard. The “C” grade indicates that the student has not achieved the baseline level. I will write a letter grade on your assignments. In my grade book each letter grade will be given a numerical equivalent (B+ = 3.33; A- = 3.67). At the end of the semester your numerical average will determine your final letter grade based on the following scale:

- 4.00 to 3.83 = A
- 3.82 to 3.5 = A-
- 3.49 to 3.17 = B+
- 3.16 to 2.83 = B etc.

Academic Policies:

MBBS academic policies (as well as other school policies) are described at <http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies/>. These policies provide guidance on academic integrity and plagiarism, accommodations for disability, incomplete course work, extensions, dates for changing registration, non-discriminatory and inclusive language, appeals, grading

templates, etc. Students are expected to be familiar with these policies and will be held responsible for adhering to them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to you or to a situation that you face in your studies, please speak to your professor or consult the Registrar. Course evaluations are to be completed online and are due one week after the completion of the course. Official grades will not be posted until the student's evaluation of the course is completed.

APPENDIX

Comments and reflection questions for reading, week 2:

Gonzalez reviews the christological controversies and debates of the first centuries of the Church. Many Christians today, and certainly most non-Christians, do not know the meanings of terms like docetism, Constantinization, adoptionism, gnosticism, Apollinarism, etc., yet those or similar forms of thinking about the humanity and divinity of Jesus persist. What are christological errors you see around you—in church and outside of the church? What are the consequences of that thinking?

(Note: The “Constantinization” of God is something González explained earlier in the book. It refers to making the emperor God-like and God emperor-like, see page 108 of González's book.)

Both González and Wright strongly critique the tendency to begin working at questions about Jesus' divinity and the unity of his divinity and humanity with concepts of what divinity and humanity mean already in place, and borrowed from places outside of Christian revelation. How are their critiques of mistaken starting places and frameworks similar and different?

What alternatives to they pursue? How do those alternatives affect both the question and the answers?

Reflection questions for reading, week 5:

1. As you read note questions you would like to ask the co-author of the book.
2. What questions does the first chapter raise for you? What does it leave you thinking about? What are issues you want to work on in the weeks ahead?
3. What are lessons you learned from chapter five that will help you as you seek to think theologically about the atonement and proclaim it to others?

Reading Raymund Schwager's *Jesus in the Drama of Salvation*

In part one of the book Schwager describes the drama/narrative approach he will take. He sets up his positions by first describing other approaches. Be careful to distinguish when he is describing his position and when he is describing other positions. Schwager's scripture interpretation and theological reflection engaged me. On the other hand parts of his book where he addresses more liberal biblical scholars and seeks to legitimate his readings were un-engaging. I have noted those pages as ones you can skim. If, however, you are interested in that sort of discussion between Bible scholars you may find those pages engaging as well.

As you read please note insights that you find especially illuminating and helpful, and places

where you have questions or would like to discuss further. In response to the reading try to write a brief description, or outline of the drama that Schwager describes.

Class Ten – For the chapters from *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross*

What new insights about shame did you gain from this chapter?

How does author proclaim freedom from shame?

- imagery used

- what does salvation look like? How described?

- mechanics/explanation [how does Jesus' life, the cross, resurrection provide freedom from shame?]

- what is the reader/listener invited to do?

Class Eleven

Please come to class prepared to share with others your answers to these questions:

Which two presentations in *Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross* did you most appreciate, why? (You may include chapters we read previously as well as images from chapters 7 & 8 in *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*.)

What are new insights you gained from this week's reading? (whether from explanations or through contemplating images themselves).

Class Thirteen - *To End All Wars* by Ernest Gordon

1. Be prepared to share with the class a general response to or reflection on the book.

2. As you read please take note of how the book relates to themes we have focused on in this class: humanity and divinity of Jesus and saving significance of the cross and resurrection. What new insights have you gained?

3. How does this book contribute to your understanding of Jesus and the significance of Jesus for your life, your faith community and the world today?

4. How do we bring their experience of Jesus in the POW camp to our lives, and light to our darkness?

Selected Bibliography

NT Christologies

Cullmann, Oscar. *The Christology of the New Testament*, revised ed. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959, 1963.

Dunn, James D.G. *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980.

Fuller, Reginald H. *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965.

Moule, C.F.D. *The Origin of Christology*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Neill, Stephen. *Jesus Through Many Eyes*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976.

Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Augsburg Fortress, 1996.

_____. *The Challenge of Jesus*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999.

_____. *Evil of the Justice of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006.

Patristic and Historical Christology

- Abelard, Peter, *Exposition of Romans*. In *Readings in the History of Christian Thought*. Ed., Robert L. Ferm. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1964.
- Allison, C.F. *The Cruelty of Heresy*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1994.
- Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*. In *Readings in the History of Christian Thought*. Ed., Robert L. Ferm. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1964.
- Aulen, Gustaf, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*. New York: MacMillan, 1966.
- González, Justo, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1990.
- Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*. In *Readings in the History of Christian Thought*. Ed., Robert L. Ferm. New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1964.
- Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*. In *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*. Vol. 16. Trans. J.P. Smith. New York: Newman Press, 1952.
- Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 3. In *Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers*, vol. 5. Eds., A. Roberts and J. Donaldson. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1880.
- Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 5. In *Library of Christian Classics*, vol. 1, *Early Christian Fathers*. Trans. and ed. C.C. Richardson. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953.
- Livingston, E.A., ed. "Christology." In *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, third ed. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Norris, Richard A. *The Christological Controversy*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.
- Norris, Richard A. "Christology," *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, second ed., vol. 1. New York: Garland Publishing, 1997.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.
- Young, F. *From Nicea to Chalcedon: A guide to the Literature and its Background*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983.

Contemporary Christologies

- Alison, James. *Raising Able: A Recovery of Eschatological Imagination*. New York: Herder & Herder, 1996.
- Boff, Leonardo. *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for our Time*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978.
- Bartlett, Anthony W. *Cross Purposes: The Violent Grammar of Christian Atonement*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2001.
- Boersma, Hans. *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition*. Grand Rapids; Baker, 2004.
- Borg, Marcus and N.T. Wright. *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999.
- Dillistone, F.W. *The Christian Understanding of the Atonement*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968.

- Driver, John. *Understanding Atonement for the Mission of the Church*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1986.
- Green, Joel and Mark Baker. *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000.
- Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1952.
- Kraus, C. Norman. *Jesus Christ our Lord: Christology from a Disciple's Perspective*, revised ed. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987, 1990.
- McKnight, Scot. *A Community Called Atonement*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2007.
- Mann, Alan. *Atonement for a "Sinless" Society*. Bucks, England: Paternoster, 2005.
- Moltmann, Jurgen. *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*. New York: HarperCollins, 1990.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Jesus Christ God and Man*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968.
- Pope-Levinson, Priscilla and John R. Levinson. *Jesus in Global Contexts*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992.
- Placher, William. *Jesus the Savior: The Meaning of Jesus Christ for Christian Faith*. Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- Ray, Darby Kathleen. *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Ransom*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1998.
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- Shelton, Larry. *Cross and Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for the 21st Century*. Paternoster:2006.
- Song, C.S. *Jesus & the Reign of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Sobrino, Jon. *Christology at the Crossroads*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978.
- Sobrino, Jon. *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*: Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.
- Stott, John. *The Cross of Christ*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986.
- Thompson, Deanna. *Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism and the Cross*. Augsburg/Fortress. 2004
- Weaver, J. Denny. *The Non-Violent Atonement*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Weaver, J. Denny. *Keeping Salvation Ethical: Mennonite and Amish Atonement Theology in the Late Nineteenth Century*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997.
- Wilson, Jonathan R. *God So Loved the World: A Christology for Disciples*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.

RESEARCH AREAS - These are general areas. You will need to formulate a more specific topic for research within one of these, or another, general area.

Biblical Christology (Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, Paul, Hebrews, etc.)
etc.

History (areas related to historical formulations) such as: Christological debates (Arian, Athanasias, Sabellius, etc.); Atonement models (Anselm, Abelard, etc.); Calvin and Calvinism; Luther and Lutheranism; 16th Century Anabaptists; etc.

Theology (areas related to contemporary Christology)

The work of individual theologians – compare two theologians, or investigate a specific aspect on one theologian's work

Girardian approaches to atonement

Postmodernity and Christology

Atonement and the myth of redemptive violence

Relationship between concept of atonement and criminal justice system or family or school discipline (Gorringe, Zehr, Paul Redekop)

Resurrection and Atonement (both issue of its absence in some and importance in others)

Liberation Christology (Feminist, Black, Latin American, etc.)

Non-Western Christology

Christology and Mission

Christology and the Powers

Christology and Social Justice

Christology and Pastoral ministry

Christology and spirituality

etc..