

## Jesus Saves? Salvation Metaphors in Christian Thought

Rel 131 A and B; Fall 2007; T/TH ; Comenius 218

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**Course Description:** “Jesus Saves.” What does this phrase mean, beyond the bumpersticker? Is there more than one way to understand it? Christian understandings of “soteriology” have a fascinating, plural and complex history. This introductory course offers a window into Christian thought through focus on some of the variety of understandings of “atonement,” i.e., the ways Christians understand “redemption” or “salvation.” We will dig into this same variety, gain exposure to colorful and differently conceived images of salvation, explore theological expositions of these images, and along the way also investigate cultural assumptions that are embedded in this aspect of Christian thought, as well as the ways in which Christian understandings have impacted culture and societies. We will focus on New Testament materials, some classic Christian theological texts and diverse examples from contemporary writing on the theme of “atonement.” Utilizing examples from visual art and film which borrow from this religious language and imagery, we will reflect on the continuing cultural impact of atonement theories.

### Objectives:

- 1) Students will gain an introduction to Christianity through focus on a seminal theological locus, i.e., soteriology, and through this locus better understand Christianity’s development, change and response to changing historical, social and political contexts.
- 2) Students will deepen their ability to read and understand complex and challenging texts.
- 3) Students will gain a deeper appreciation for the ways religious images and rituals depend upon and express atonement metaphors; and will arrive also at a deeper understanding of how these same elements “work” in the real lives of people, including their own lives!
- 4) Students critical thinking, reading, analytical, speaking and writing skills all will be enhanced.

### Course Texts:

*The New Testament* (the Revised Standard Version is preferred, but you may use any version you wish or own)

Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*, Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000

Marit Trelstad, Ed., *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006

Other required resources on reserve, via handouts, and/or through library web-based resources

## Course Requirements:

- 1) *Attendance and preparation for alert, intelligent participation in class.* Students are expected to read with a **pencil (Not a highlighter!)** in hand, making notes in the margins of the texts we read so that you don't lose your own questions/ideas as you read. Work hard as you read to identify the main points and thread of the text's argument, identify those same main elements in your text's margins, and go back over your reading to make sure you have understood. You should plan on dedicating at least two to three hours of reading time in preparation for each class, and additional time in order to complete various assignments. This deliberate reading will prepare you for active participation in class. **Bring whatever text we are reading with you to class! 25% of your overall grade** will depend upon your prompt, engaged and regular attendance (the only excused absences are for family emergency, serious illness or religious observance, AND must be approved by professor BEFORE the given class). You should take notes during lectures and discussions, actively participate in discussions (plan on speaking up at least twice every class session), and demonstrate leadership in small group work. Please refrain from eating meals or snacks since this will impact our ability to concentrate our thought! (Beverages are o.k.) **Special Note:** *Active liberal arts learners stretch themselves to build their skills for intelligent, thoughtful, inquisitive, critical and empathetic listening AND public speaking in the classroom – I expect every member of our class to be working at the building of these skills in every class session. If this presents any worry to you, please come see me in my office early in the semester. I can help!*

The short assignments from early in the semester will account for a percentage of your attendance/preparation/participation grade.

- 2) *Short Papers:* you will complete two short 5-page papers, each worth **15% of your overall grade**, as we complete certain units of the course. More details will be given about these papers early in the semester.
- 3) *Midterm and Final:* each of these exams will be worth **15% of your total grade**. More details to follow!
- 4) *Class Presentation:* Students will sign up individually or in pairs to take no less than 10 and no more than 15 minutes of a given class time to in some way present the main ideas, questions and/or convictions expressed by a given author **and** CREATIVELY! connect the same with something in our contemporary milieu (be it an event, a work of art, a practice, or something else). In their presentations students are encouraged to make use of all varieties of media, print, music, and/or anything else they wish to bring into our classroom. Your presentation is worth **15% or your grade**.

*Students are advised to review the Academic Honesty Policy in the Student Handbook (available online) and required to follow the guidelines therein.*

**Important Note:** Various assignments and many course resources will be posted on Blackboard. Students are advised to become familiar with this Moravian online course resource. Let me know if you

need assistance. This syllabus will be posted on Blackboard, and updated with any changes we find we need to make as we progress through the semester. Please also note that your grades will be regularly posted on your Blackboard site, and you may consult them at any time during the semester if you wish to see your overall grade.

## **Schedule of Classes:**

### **Week One**

8/27 Course Introduction: Jesus Saves? Class exercise and Syllabus

8/29 Read: The Gospel of Mark, beginning with Chapter 14 to the end of the gospel

What do you think is the point, the meaning the writer wishes to draw about this story?

**Assignment:** Go to Reeve's library and in the reference area, find a theological dictionary/encyclopedia. Look up "soteriology." What words are associated with it? What do they mean? What do you make of this definition? Bring your double-spaced, 1 page responses to class (printed out in hard copy).

**In class:** Quiz 1 on reading material for this week (Mark, etc.)

--introduction to systematic theology, theological symbolism

### **Week Two**

9/4 Read: *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, Introduction, pp 11-34

In class: Selection from DVD, *From Jesus to Christ*

9/6 Read: from the NT, Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28; John 12:20-36; John 20:1-18; Luke 24:13-43; Romans 3:21-26; Romans 6:1-11; 1 Corinthians 15:1-28; Philippians 2:1-11

**Assignment:** 1) On a sheet of paper, *list* the different images of salvation (and brief definitions of each) that are depicted in these passages. 2) Free writing exercise: Write without stopping for 5 minutes: What do you make of these images? What stands out for you and why? Bring your list and your free writing to class to hand in.

**In class:** Quiz 2 on all the material for this week

Also in class: John Dominic Crossan on the historical development of passion narratives

### **Week Three**

9/11 Read: *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, pp 35-46; and 68-86. Have your NT by your side and look up the various NT references in the text.

**Assignment:** List the various images and write brief descriptions of them as they are discussed by Green and Baker. Bring your list with you to class.

9/13 Read: "Living in the Side Wound of Christ," by Craig Atwood, *Community of the Cross: Moravian Piety in Colonial Bethlehem*; and also read the selection from *Moravian Women's Memoirs*, Katherine M. Faull.

**In class:** Guest lecturer: Paul Peucker, Archivist of the Moravian Archives, "Art and Salvation in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Moravian Bethlehem."

#### **Week Four**

9/18 Midterm on our study thus far

9/20 Read: "The Gardner," by Rudyard Kipling

**Assignment:** Reflect on this story so that you are able to write in one or two sentences what its central "point" is. What does the story have to do with our study in this course? (Key: in order to figure this out, you will need to know the allusion on which this story is based. What is it?) Bring with you to class your one short paragraph that describes both the central allusion and "the point" of Kipling's story.

**In class:** Issues in soteriology: Question of sin, Subjective/Objective Poles, etc.

Introduction to Anselm

#### **Week Five**

9/25 Read: Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, Book I, Preface through Chapter XVIII

9/27 Read: Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, Book I, Chapter XIX –Book II, Chapter XIII

#### **Week Six**

10/2 Read: Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, Book II Chapter XIV to the end

#### **Week Seven**

10/9 (no class; fall recess) Read: *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, pp 116-136.

10/11 **Due in Class: Paper #1:** Anselm's vision of salvation (directions given in class)

**In Class:** *Cape Fear*: A Contemporary Anselmic vision of atonement/salvation?

**Also in class:** sign up for the chapter(s) from *Cross Examinations* you wish to be responsible for in the last unit of our study this semester.

### **Week Eight**

10/16 Read: *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, pp 136-152; and read: "A Faith that Loves the Earth," and "Beginning of Glory," in *Everyday Faith*, Karl Rahner

10/18 Read: "Suffering and Faith," "An Experiment in Love," in *A Testament of Hope*, Martin Luther King, Jr.

### **Week Nine**

10/23 Read: Excerpt from *Theology for the Social Gospel*, Walter Rauschenbusch (Exemplar)

10/25 **Due: Paper #2:** Comparison and contrast of Rahner, King and Rauschenbusch (details to be given)

**In class:** hymns, spirituals and popular music associated with salvation images

### **Week Eleven**

10/30 Read: *Cross Examinations*, Intro and Chapter 1

11/1 Read: *CE*, Chapters 2 and 3

### **Week Twelve**

11/6 Read: *CE*, Chapters 4 and 5

11/8 Read: *CE*, Chapters 6 and 7

### **Week Thirteen**

11/13 Read: *CE*, Chapters 8 and 9

11/15 Read: *CE*, Chapters 10, 11 and 12

### **Week Fourteen**

11/20 (no class; prof at conference) Read: *CE*, Chapters 13 and 14

11/22 (no class; Thanksgiving recess)

### **Week Fifteen**

11/27 Read: *CE*, Chapters 15 and 16

11/29 Read: *CE*, Chapters 17, 18 and 19

## **Week Sixteen**

12/4 Exam on *CE* along with everything we experienced through class presentations

12/6 Final musings and course evaluation