

Jesus Saves? Salvation Metaphors in Christian Thought

Rel 131; Monday/Wednesday 1:10 – 2:20; Comenius, 114

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Phone: 610-625-7104, Office Hours: Monday: 10:30 – 11:30; Tuesday: 4-5 pm; Wednesday: 2:30 – 3:30

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” (the study of salvation in Christianity) 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)

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*, Second Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012) **OR** James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Orbis, 2013).
You will read and study one of the books above, but will learn about both of them.

Other required resources available through our Blackboard Shell, on reserve, via handouts, and/or through library web-based resources. **Important Note! You are required to make your own hard copy of these resources (for the purpose of careful reading, and so that you can make your own**

underlines and notations); you ALSO are required to bring these to class on the days they are assigned reading!

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. Your reading assignments often will be accompanied by writing assignments that you are to complete thoughtfully and bring with you to class. These have been developed with the purpose of helping you to read and comprehend more deeply and fully.

Bring whatever text we are reading with you to class, and a hard copy of the day's writing assignment that you have completed! Your overall grade will depend upon your prompt, active, 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! 35% of your total 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. Every student should plan on taking a draft of their papers to the Writing Center before polishing for a final draft to hand in.
- 3) *Midterm and Final:* each of these exams will be worth **12.5% of your total grade**. More details to follow!
- 4) *Class Presentation:* Students are assigned to a group to present and lead class discussion of the material in the Ruether OR Cone book. More about this in class. *This will require you to work with others outside of class.* Your presentation is worth **10% of your grade**.

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

Students who require class and learning accommodations are advised to contact Learning Services asap and follow the procedures they outline. Our office is extremely helpful to many students. Accommodations cannot be provided to students outside of this process.

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:

Unit One: Introduction to Salvation Theology/Metaphors

8/26 Course Introduction: Jesus Saves? Class exercise and Syllabus

8/28 Read: The Gospel of Mark, beginning with Chapter 14 to the end of the gospel

Writing Assignment: What do you think is the point, the meaning the writer wishes to draw about this story? Bring your hard copy to class: 200 words. Submit to BB assignment link by 8/27 midnight.

9/4 **2nd Assignment:** Go to Reeve's library and in the reference area, find a theological dictionary/encyclopedia. Look up "soteriology." Make your own copy of the entry (and bring it also to class) 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; submit to BB assignment link by 9/3 midnight. 100 words). Submit to BB assignment link by 9/3 midnight.

In class: introduction to systematic theology, theological symbolism

9/9 Read: John Dominic Crossan, "Historical Jesus as Risen Lord," *The Jesus Controversy: Perspectives in Conflict*, John Dominic Crossan, Luke Timothy Johnson, Werner H. Kelber, pp 1-47 [available in Blackboard Course Documents]. For today's class, read pp 8 -- 16. Also: read the story of Jesus' crucifixion and death in Luke (chapters 22-24) and Matthew (chapters 27-28).

Assignment: What specifically are the questions that Crossan is debating? Read carefully, identify the main questions on a piece of paper, and bring it to class; submit also to BB assignment link by 9/8 midnight. 200 words

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

9/11 Read: Alister E. McGrath, "The Doctrine of Salvation in Christ," *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, pp 406-439 [available in Blackboard Course Documents].

Assignment: List as many different images of Christian salvation described by McGrath as you can. Follow each image with a one-sentence description. What sets this particular image apart

from all the others? Finally, write a paragraph about your own reaction and questions regarding your discoveries. 350 words. Bring your hard copy to class; submit assignment to BB link by 9/10 midnight.

9/16 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) Return to the images of salvation you outlined from McGrath from last week; connect those images to the NT passages above. Make a list. 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; submit to BB assignment link by 9/16 midnight.

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

9/18 Read: "Living in the Side Wound of Christ," by Craig Atwood, *Community of the Cross: Moravian Piety in Colonial Bethlehem*. Selection posted in BB. Complete BB written assignment and submit by 8/17 midnight; bring hard copy to class.

Assignment: What salvation metaphors were central in the lives of the early Moravians? What do you draw from Atwood's description/analysis of their religious life that helps you to understand why the early Moravian community stressed these particular image(s) of salvation. 350 words. Submit to the link by 9/17 midnight

9/23 read the selection from *Moravian Women's Memoirs*, Katherine M. Faull. (selection posted in BB; see BB Writing Assignment Instructions for this day)

Assignment: On one page, tell the life story of one of the Moravian women whose memoir you read. Then write one more solid paragraph in which you react to this life story. What stands out for you? What salvation images are paramount, and why? Submit by 9/22 midnight; bring hard copy to class.

Also in class: Preparation for Midterm Exam

9/25 **In class:** Guest lecturer: Paul Peucker, Archivist of the Moravian Archives, "Art and Salvation in 18th Century Moravian Bethlehem." No reading today – study for the midterm! Your learning from this guest lecture will be included in your exam.

9/30 **Midterm** on our study thus far

10/2 Read: "The Gardner," by Rudyard Kipling (handout); also review song by Johnny Cash, "Redemption" in class

Assignment: Reflect on this story from Kipling so that you are able to write in one or two sentences what its central "point" is. In other words, what is the meaning of the end of the story? 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 paragraph that describes both the central allusion and “the point” of Kipling’s story; submit to BB Writing Assignments by 10/1 midnight.

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

Introduction to Anselm

Unit Two: Anselm: Why Did God Become Human?

10/7 Read: Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, Book I, Preface through Chapter XVIII [available in Blackboard Course Documents]

Complete the requisite Anselm worksheet (found in BB), and bring it with you to class; make sure that you also have a virtual copy of this you are saving on your computer, so that you can turn it in to the Writing Assignment on the requisite date..

10/9 Read: Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, Book I, Chapter XIX –Book II, Chapter XIII [Blackboard Course Documents]

Complete the requisite Anselm worksheet, and bring it with you to class (found in BB). Submit to BB assignment link by midnight, 10/8.

October Recess: October 12, Saturday noon – Oct. 16, Wed., 7:30 am.

10/14 No Class.

10/16 Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, Book II Chapter XIV to the end [Blackboard Course Documents]

10/21 Read: Selection from *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*, Chris Hedges (BB assignments)
Important Note: No class today, since you are required to attend the Tues. Lecture!

“Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt” – Chris Hedges, 7th Peace and Justice Scholar in Residence

Prosser Auditorium, 7:30 pm, Tuesday, Oct. 22

All students will attend the lecture, make sure you sign the attendance sheet

10/23 Written Assignment: 350 words: What are “sacrifice zones” according to Hedges? Describe the one you read about in some detail. How does this relate and differ from the understanding of sacrifice you are exploring with respect to soteriology? 300 words. Bring your hard copy to class; submit to BB Writing Assignments by 10/23 11 am.

Note: We will have class today, but our professor may be a bit late, since she is one of the organizers of Hedges’ visit. Be prepared to share your written assignments with others, and talk about Hedges’ lecture!

10/28 Continuation: Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, Book II Chapter XIV to the end [Blackboard Course Documents]

Submit your worksheet to BB assignment link by midnight, Oct. 27.

10/30 **In Class:** Workshop on First Paper/ Contemporary examples of satisfaction

Friday, Nov. 1, by midnight: Due in Assignment Drop Box: Paper #1: Anselm's vision of salvation (paper guidelines in BB)

Unit Three: Comparison of Moral Exemplarists

11/4 Read: "A Faith that Loves the Earth," and "Beginning of Glory," in *Everyday Faith*, Karl Rahner (BB documents)

(see the Writing Assignment posted in BB for this day; bring to class with you and also submit by 11/3 midnight)

11/6 Read: "Suffering and Faith," "An Experiment in Love," in *A Testament of Hope*, Martin Luther King, Jr. (BB documents)

(see the Writing Assignment posted in BB for this day; bring to class with you and also submit by 11/5 midnight)

11/11 Read: Excerpt from *Theology for the Social Gospel*, Walter Rauschenbusch [available in Blackboard Course Documents]

(see the Writing Assignment posted in BB for this day; bring to class with you and also submit by 11/10 midnight)

11/13 In class: beginning your work for Unit Four

11/15 Submit to BB Assignment drop box by midnight: **Paper #2:** Comparison and contrast of Rahner, King and Rauschenbusch (see paper guidelines in BB Assignment)

Unit Four: Women and Redemption/Cross and the Lynching Tree

In this final unit of study, students will be divided into groups, with each group taking leadership to present one chapter and lead discussion. Each student is responsible for reading every assigned chapter in their particular book (whether Cone OR Ruether). Your final exam will require you to focus on your specific book, but will also invite you to comment more superficially on what you learn from presenters of the other book. Each leadership group will begin class with a "fishbowl", in which they form a circle of discussion among themselves, to address the questions listed in the BB assignment link, while the rest of the class observes in a larger outer circle. When the time is right, they will invite the outer circle to respond to the questions they have raised and join the discussion.

11/18 *Women and Redemption: A Theological History*, Introduction and Chapter One, "In Christ No More Male and Female?" OR Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Introduction and Chapter One, "Nobody Knows de Trouble I see: The Cross and the Lynching Tree in Black Experience"

11/20 *Women and Redemption*, Chapter 5, "Shakers and Feminist Abolitionists in 19th c North America"; Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Chapter Three, "Bearing the Cross and Staring Down the Lynching Tree: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Struggle to Redeem the Soul of America"

Thanksgiving Recess: Nov. 23, Saturday – Dec. 2, Monday, 7:30 am

12/2 Material from 11/20 continued

12/4 *Women and Redemption*, Chapter 7 "Feminist, Womanist and Mujerista Theologies in 20th Century North America"; Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, Chapter Five, "Oh Mary, Don't you Weep" and Conclusion.

Date: TBA: Final Exam on *Women and Redemption*, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, and the course as a whole.