

T 2030: Sin, Grace, and Atonement

Working Syllabus
Episcopal Divinity School
Spring 2012
Wednesdays, 10:00 a.m. to noon
Sherrill 250

Instructor: Rev. Dr. Patrick S. Cheng
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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

How might the doctrines of sin, grace, and atonement speak to progressive people of faith today? This course will examine the biblical, historical, and theological foundations of these doctrines. Specific topics to be covered will include original sin, structural sin, various atonement theories (for example, the ransom, satisfaction, and moral influence theories), and interfaith notions of sin. The course will also assess critiques and reconstructions of these doctrines by feminist, womanist, queer, and other contemporary theologians.

Specific Learning Goals

1. Understand the basic issues and themes relating to the classical theological doctrines of sin, grace, and atonement.
2. Explore contemporary critiques and reconstructions of such doctrines.
3. Read biblical texts as well as primary texts from different periods of the Christian theological tradition.
4. Reflect upon how the assigned theological texts relate to one's own social context and vocation.
5. Construct and articulate a coherent theology of sin, grace, and atonement for one's own social location.
6. This course will honor multicultural worldviews, respect the contributions by multiple voices, and be taught with a commitment to anti-racism.

Course Requirements

This course will be both a lecture and discussion-based class. All students are expected to come prepared to participate actively in class discussions and in weekly online postings. Please note that this syllabus is a work-in-progress, and the instructor reserves the right to change the content of the course during the term. Any student who requires reasonable accommodation with respect to the course requirements as a result of disability must notify the instructor and academic dean, and also provide written documentation of such disability. Specific requirements for full course credit include:

30% Attendance and active participation in class;

- 30% Weekly online posts no later than midnight on the Tuesday before each class meeting;
- 15% Short reflection paper (2-3 pages), due via email to the instructor prior to class on March 21, 2012.
- 25% Final paper (6-8 pages), due via email to the instructor no later than 5:00 p.m. ET on May 9, 2012.

Weekly Online Posts

By midnight on the Tuesday before each class meeting, post one paragraph for each of the following three questions on the Power Campus course home page:

- What in the readings surprised and/or excited you the most and why?
- What in the readings troubled and/or upset you the most and why?
- What in the readings would you like to covered in class for clarification or further discussion and why?

Short Reflection Paper

A short reflection paper (2-3 pages) will be due via email to the instructor prior to class on March 21. For the paper, select one of the assigned readings from the classes before Spring Break (other than the biblical texts) that intrigued you the most. Explain why you selected this reading, how it relates to your own social location and current life, and how it might influence your vocation and/or occupation going forward.

Final Paper

A final paper (6-8 pages) will be due via email to the instructor by 5:00 p.m. ET on May 9, 2012. For the paper, articulate a coherent theology of what sin, grace, and atonement means to you after taking this class. Use at least one assigned reading from each topic (that is, sin, grace, and atonement) to illustrate your thesis. You will be asked to present briefly on your paper topic during the final class meeting, which will be held on May 2, 2012.

Note for D.Min. and Other Advanced Students

Course work for all Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) students must demonstrate an advanced understanding of the nature and purposes of ministry, enhanced competencies in pastoral analysis and ministerial skills, and the integration of these dimensions into the theologically reflective practice of ministry. D.Min. students are encouraged to focus their course work on a particular subject germane to their anticipated thesis/project. D.Min. students are expected to do a significant research paper on a topic of their program goals in addition to other course requirements. Please discuss the topic of your paper with the instructors.

Course Grading Criteria

A level – Submits work on time; proposes creative ideas in class sessions and online posts; demonstrates critical and creative thinking in the papers. No unexcused absences.

B level – Submits work on time; shows enthusiasm in class session and online posts; demonstrates cogent thinking in the papers. No more than one unexcused absence.

C level – Does not submit work on time; shows minimal engagement with the class sessions, online posts, and/or papers; or more than one unexcused absence.

Pass/Fail Option

Student must let the instructor know about this option by the end of the first week of classes, Friday, February 3, 2012. Grading for this option will be as follows:

- Pass: B or better (required of D.Min. students)
- Marginal Pass: B-
- Fail: Lower than B-

Extensions

Students who cannot finish their final papers on time must send a petition for an extension to Cecelia Cull in the Registrar's Office. She can be reached via email at ccull@eds.edu.

Required Texts

The following required texts may be purchased at the Harvard Coop or online. The texts are also available on reserve at the Sherrill Library. Note: *From Sin to Amazing Grace* will not be available until March 2012.

- Mark E. Biddle, *Missing the Mark: Sin and Its Consequences in Biblical Theology*, ISBN: 978-0687494620 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005).
- Patrick S. Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ*, ISBN: 978-1596272385 (New York: Seabury Books, 2012) (available in March 2012).
- Harold Coward, *Sin and Salvation in the World Religions: A Short Introduction*, ISBN: 978-1851683192 (Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications, 2003).
- Peter Schmiechen, *Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church*, ISBN: 978-0802829856 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005).
- Barbara Brown Taylor, *Speaking of Sin: The Lost Language of Salvation*, ISBN: 978-1561011896 (Lanham, MD: Cowley Publications, 2000).
- Paul F.M. Zahl, *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life*, ISBN: 978-0802828972 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007).

Other Texts

The following texts are available on reserve at the Sherrill Library or online:

- Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn, eds., *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1989).
- Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011).
- Eugene R. Fairweather, *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1956).
- Langdon Gilkey, *On Niebuhr: A Theological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
- Valerie Saiving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *Journal of Religion* 40, no. 2 (April 1960), 100-112.

- William Harmless, ed., *Augustine in His Own Words* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010).
- Susan Henking, “A Feminine Complaint Against Theologians,” *Religion Dispatches* (June 25, 2010), at http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/atheologies/2859/%E2%80%9Ca_feminine_complaint_against_theologians%E2%80%9D/
- Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price, eds., *Handbook of Christian Theology*, new and enlarged ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003).
- William C. Placher, ed., *Essentials of Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).
- John Portman, *A History of Sin: Its Evolution to Today and Beyond* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007).
- Mary J. Streufert, ed., *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).
- Emilie M. Townes, ed., *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

Weekly Class Schedule

Classes will meet from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon on Wednesday mornings during the EDS Spring 2012 session.

Class 1 – February 1

Introduction

Readings:

- Taylor, pp. 1-73
- “Atonement,” in Musser and Price, pp. 44-46
- “Grace,” in Musser and Price, pp. 225-27
- “Sin,” in Musser and Price, pp. 463-68

Class 2 – February 7

Sin

Readings:

- “What’s Wrong with Us?: Human Nature and Human Sin,” in Placher, pp. 133-81
- Delores S. Williams, “A Womanist Perspective on Sin,” in Townes, pp. 130-49
- Mary E. Lowe, “Sin from a Queer, Lutheran Perspective,” in Streufert, pp. 71-86
- Portman, pp. 121-53

Class 3 – February 15

Sin and the Bible

Readings:

- Genesis, chapter 3
- Romans, chapters 1-8
- Biddle, pp. vii-168

Quiet Day – February 22

Class 4 – February 29

Original Sin and Grace

Readings:

- Augustine of Hippo, “Controversies (IV): Against the Pelagians,” in Harmless, pp. 373-436
- Gilkey, 102-41
- Goldstein, 100-112
- Henking, “A Feminine Complaint Against Theologians”

Class 5 – March 7

Grace in Practice

Readings:

- Zahl, pp. 1-260

Spring Break – March 14

Class 6 – March 21

Atonement

Readings:

- Hebrews, chapters 4-10
- Placher, pp. 205-219
- Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, in Fairweather, pp. 118-46
- Peter Abelard, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, in Fairweather, pp. 276-87
- Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, “For God So Loved the World?,” in Brown and Bohn, pp. 1-30
- Cheng, *Radical Love*, pp. 94-98

Class 7 – March 28

Atonement, Models 1-4

Readings:

- Schmiechen, pp. 1-166

Class 8 – April 4

Atonement, Models 5-10

Readings:

- Schmiechen, pp. 167-365

Class 9 – April 11

Queering Sin and Grace

Readings:

- Cheng, *Radical Love*, pp. 70-78
- Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace*

Class 10 – April 18

Interfaith Sin and Salvation: Abrahamic Traditions

Readings:

- Coward, pp. 1-88

Class 11 – April 25

Interfaith Sin and Salvation: Hinduism and Buddhism

Readings:

- Coward, pp. 89-185

Class 12 – May 2

Conclusion and Paper Presentations

No Readings

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