222 Theological Heritage: Early Church

Critical reflection upon significant individuals, decisive events, and fundamental tenets of the Christian faith as found in the early church. Utilizing the categories of grace and faith as focusing lens, the student appropriates the Christian heritage and enters into the church’s ongoing task of interpreting, articulating, and enacting the gospel for contemporary life.

Course Objectives
1. Examination of an emerging Christian orthodoxy in dialogue and debate with Gnosticism, Montanism, Marcionism, and Greek philosophy.
2. Study of major theologians and church leaders whose writings focus key doctrinal issues (e.g., Origen, Tertullian, Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, etc.)
3. Engagement with pivotal theological concerns in their historical context.
4. Focus upon the distinctive aspects of Eastern Orthodox theologies in comparison with Roman Catholicism.
5. Appreciation and appropriation of the relevance of historical theology for pastoral ministry.

A. Books


B. Assignments
Answer the following questions.

1. Describe the rise of orthodoxy in terms of the heresies it opposed. Given the old adage, “there are no new heresies, only new forms of old ones,” where do you see the Church still encountering these “old” heresies today? (4 pages)

2. Explain, using the Placher and Gonzalez books, how “the salvation accomplished through Jesus Christ for humanity” was the guiding principle of discernment for the development of the orthodox position through the Trinitarian and Christological controversies. How is the Church today still struggling to describe the Trinity and the Incarnation? (6 pages)

3. Describe from Augustine’s Confessions his early struggles between his will and God’s will. How does this compare to Paul’s struggles with the human will as found in Romans 7-8. In light of Augustine’s attempt, what are the benefits and limitations of reason in confronting the mystery of the human will? How could you use Augustine’s example to help “seekers” today that you encounter in your ministry? (6 pages)

4. How does eastern theology differ and maintain similarities to western theology? How is the eastern emphasis on the mystery of God important for worship in the Church today? (3 pages)

5. Discuss how Basil of Caesarea tried to embody Jesus’ teachings in Mt. 25: 31-46. Using especially the sermon, “To the Rich,” what temptations did his congregation face during the famine? What was Basil’s solution? (4 pages)

6. John Wesley was greatly influenced by Macarius. Discuss in his homilies how Macarius deals with the rooting out of inward sin and the going on to perfection, both of which later became so important for Wesley. (4 pages)

[Handouts from Mark the Monk, Isaac of Ninevah, Gregory of Narek, and John the Solitary will be given on the first weekend for discussion on the second weekend]

C. Homework Due Date

Assignments 1 - 6 are due Aug.21st at the start of the first session.

D. Course Outline

I. Spread of the Apostles

II. The Relationship between the Old Law and the New Law
III. Persecution and Martyrdom

IV. Impact of Culture on Christian Theology

V. Theological Controversies within the Church

VI. Impact of Constantine

VII. Rise of the Cult of Saints and Relics

VIII. The Exaltation of the Ideal of Virginity and Chastity

IX. The Rise of Monasticism

XI. Eastern Orthodoxy after Chalcedon

XII The Christian Orient

Please include your ID# on all assignments.

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