GRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTION

Term: Fall 2015
Instructor: Dr. Michel Barnes
Course #: THEO 8419-701
Course Title: The Greek Fathers of the Fourth Century

Content:

A study of Greek Christian thought and doctrine in the fourth century. One of the most important centuries in the history of Christian doctrine, developments (particularly in trinitarian theology) in the fourth century have functioned as a “canon” of Christian belief. Of the many developments and issues in the fourth century, the course will focus heavily on the trinitarian controversies and, as a second but related issue, moral psychology and theological anthropology. The development of doctrine in a polemical context will be emphasized: e.g., the inner-Church controversies over the Trinity, culture-wide debates over the unity of the soul in moral and epistemological controversies, and the relationship between anthropology and Christology. A basic knowledge of Church history prior to the fourth century would be useful to allow the student to participate fully. Some background in classical Greek or hellenistic philosophy is helpful (ditto for a reading knowledge of Attic Greek) but not necessary (ditto). Primary source readings will include the letters of both Alexander and Arius, Athanasius’ First Oration Against the Arians, selections from Eusebius of Caesarea and Marcellus of Ancyra, Eunomius’ Apology and, especially, significant amounts of writings by Gregory of Nyssa, all in translation. One of my specific goals is for us to read Eunomius’s Apology, Basil’s Against Eunomius, Eunomius’s Apology for my Apology, and Gregory’s Against Eunomius in an intertextual manner. As always, the subject of the course is not only “facts” about Greek Christian thought and doctrine in the fourth century, but the methodology distinctive to historical theology. Students are expected to develop a working knowledge of both subjects. Significant emphasis will be placed on the acquisition of historical method.

Please note: one peculiar and (for me) unprecedented feature of the course is that we will attempt a “research experiment” on the relationship between anthropology and Christology (following out the axiom that “Christology follows anthropology”). This “experiment” will consist of careful reading of Gregory of Nyssa’s anthropology/moral psychology and his Christology – the former as represented in On Virginity, The Soul and Resurrection, and On Human Nature, the latter principally in his Antirhetoricus (Against Apollinarius).

Format:

The heart of the class will be close and common readings of selected primary source and secondary source texts. The over-arching “narrative” for the Trinitarian/Christological material is provided by the required assigned monograph, by Lewis Ayres. All students are expected to do the readings and to participate in class discussion; all students are expected to bring to class their own copies of the reading assignments. The breakdown of grade (in terms of percentages) for doctoral students is such that If you do not talk you cannot get an A.
At the beginning of the term class time will two or three times be given over to orienting lectures by me (open to “the public”) on the major topics in 4th Century Greek Theology (e.g., Trinitarian theology). First class meets as normal. The class time will not be adjusted to a once-a-week meeting schedule.

Assignments and/or Examinations:
Required written work for doctoral students will include:

- Rotating responsibility for recording (and distributing) class notes
- Preparation of an assigned reading "Introduction"
- A five-to-eight page [4,000 words max.] “dense reading” of a short passage of three to five lines (pre-approved by me) in a work by one of the texts we read for the class (due by midterm).*
- A five-to-eight page [4,000 words max.] “Argument” paper suitable for presentation as a core communication at a conference such as NAPS.* Due at the end of the semester.

*More detailed specifications will be given in class.
Instructions and exemplars for all assignments will be provided in class.