



St. Stephen's Course of Study In Orthodox Theology

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“Church History I: The Christian Church from its Foundation through the seventh century”

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Course Description:

The purpose of this unit is to develop in the learner an appreciation for the growth and expansion of the Church as an institution, with a clearly defined structure and a system of beliefs and practices. He/she should come to appreciate the growth of the Church through struggle in concrete historical situations.

Objectives:

At the end of this reading period, the learner will be able to:

1. List the main philosophical systems of thought which preceded, opposed and influenced early Christianity in the Greco-Roman world.
2. List the major institutional developments of the Christian Church during the first four hundred years.
3. Outline the events in Church-State relations from Nero to Leo III.
4. Define the major characteristics of the major heresies from the early 4th through the 7th centuries.
5. Outline the events of the major Christological controversies from the late 4th through the 7th centuries.
6. Compare and contrast the major theological and customary differences between the Churches of the East and the West.

Requirements:

- A. Keep a notebook (for your own use) of important dates, events, personalities, and definitions.
- B. Read the Walker text through p. 250.
- C. Pass a final examination consisting of three questions in essay format.

Readings:

Walker, Williston, A History of the Christian Church Rev. ed. (New York: Scribner,

1970)

ISBN: 0-684-18417-6

REQUIRED. Though by no means the best text covering the period, Walker's is a good general introduction and has proved to be a sound reference in introductory courses in Church History. Although it covers a substantial period of time from pre-Christianity to the present, the learner will be asked only to focus on those periods up to and including the coronation of Charlemagne. This will take him/her into the beginning of Byzantine canonical developments; the text however will not focus on these. For instance, it does not treat the canons of the Council of Trullo, which can be said to mark a specifically Eastern turning point in ecclesiastical development. Walker will, however, provide a sound background for Church History II. Although Walker is well written, it is sometimes tedious and boring reading, so the required selections are kept brief in order not to overwhelm the learner with detail and style. One would do well to read the entire text, but this is not required.

Required reading; pp. 5-250.

Focus Questions:

1. How did the major philosophical trends/schools of the Greco-Roman world influence the growth of Christian thought? What were the major philosophical trends/schools that surrounded the Church in the first and second centuries?
2. How did the Church relate to the Jewish communities in Palestine and the diaspora in the first century? What factors forced the Church and the synagogue to part ways? What happened to Jewish Christianity?
3. How did Christianity spread outside of Palestine? What, in brief, was the role of St. Paul in this growth?
4. How is Gnosticism related to Christianity? What were its major characteristics? What were three of its major groupings?
5. What were three heresies, in addition to Gnosticism, which afflicted the Christian Church prior to the 4th century?
6. What are the major sources for the first three hundred years of Church history? When are they dated?
7. How did the Christian sacramental rites and practices develop up to the Council of Nicea?
8. What was the background of Arius? What were his beliefs? What were the major theological and political events associated with Arianism between 325 and 381?
9. What were the origins of monasticism? What were its different varieties, and who were their main proponents?
10. What were the major stages of growth in the Church of Rome, leading to its ecclesiastical prominence during the Monothelite controversy?
11. What were the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian positions with the respect to the person and nature of Christ? What was the significance of St. Cyril of Alexandria in this dispute?
12. What were the causes and decisions of the Councils of Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), and Constantinople (553)?
13. What were some of the differences in the customs and practices of the Churches of the East and the West up to the end of the 7th century?

Incorporates changes through January 1, 2005