



St. Stephen's Course of Study In Orthodox Theology

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“Patristics I: The Fathers of the Church during the First Five Hundred Years.”

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Course Description:

The purpose of this unit's reading is to help the learner appreciate the formulation of the doctrine of the Church as it progressed from the post-New Testament period through the 5th century; and to appreciate theological formulation as a gradual process.

Objectives:

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

1. Explain the role of Neo-Platonism, Roman religious thought, Judaism, and Greco-Roman philosophy in relation to early Christianity.
2. Describe - mentioning specific dates - the formation of the New Testament canon.
3. Explain the various schools of Biblical exegesis in the first 400 years.
4. Discuss the development of different opinions in Trinitarian theology in the 3rd century.
5. Describe the beginnings of Christology in the East and the West.
6. List all the major Christological heresies between I Nicea and Chalcedon.
7. Discuss the major elements in the “nature/grace” controversy and the people involved.
8. State a definition of Christian doctrine.

Requirements:

- A. Keep a notebook of important dates, doctrinal developments, and names.
- B. Carefully read the Kelly text.
- C. Pass the final examination consisting of three questions, essay format, on any topic covered by Kelly text.

Readings:

Kelly, J. N. D. Early Christian Doctrines (New York : Harper and Row, 1978)

ISBN: 0-06-064334-X

REQUIRED. Perhaps the best introductory volume available on Christian doctrine and the Fathers involved in its development between the Apostolic period and the Council of Chalcedon. There are more thorough books and more specific ones, but Kelly has the virtue of offering the teaching of the Fathers in a narrative format. Nevertheless, it is difficult reading. Take your time and keep good notes of the various theological strains of development. Take special note of geographical factors.

Focus Questions:

1. How was the word “ousia” utilized from Aristotle through the Cappadocian Fathers?
2. How was Judaism related to the development of early Christianity?
3. How was Gnosticism related to Christianity? What were its major tenets?
4. What is an Apologist? Who were three of them?
5. How do written and oral tradition compare? How did St. Irenaeus define “Tradition”?
6. How do "typology" and "allegory" compare? Which Fathers used which approach?
7. What were the three main characteristics of the so-called “Antiochian School”?
8. What was the main concern of pre-Nicene theology? Against which opponents was this theology formulated?
9. Who were the Apostolic Fathers? (List them)
10. What is "dynamic monarchianism”?
11. What is "modalistic monarchianism”? In what sense is modalism also a modern approach to Trinitarian theology?
12. What influence did Origen have on theological thought? (See Kelly, pp. 126-137; 158-161). What philosophy did he employ?
13. What is the essential problem of Christology? What is one example of Kelly's reference to a "one-sided" solution?
14. Who were the so-called Apologists? (List three) What were their main theological points?
15. What is the theory of “recapitulation”? Who was its leading exponent?
16. What were the major institutional developments of the 1st through the 3rd centuries? (Take special note of Eucharistic and Baptismal trends.)
17. What, in outline, were the main historical events in the Arian controversy before Nicea? What were Arius' teaching?
18. How were the words “hypostasis” and “physis” used from the late third through the late fourth century?
19. In what sense was the term “homoousios” a problem for the Council of Nicea?
20. What was the role of St. Athanasius after the Council of Nicea? Why was this a confusing period?
21. What was the role of the Cappadocian Fathers in the development of Christian doctrine?
22. What was the role of the Council of Constantinople?
23. How was the doctrine of the Holy Spirit formulated at the end of the 4th century?
24. What is St. Augustine's contribution to Trinitarian theology, and does it differ from the Eastern treatment?
25. What is “Apollinarianism”? How did the Orthodox react to it? How would you characterize “Antiochian Christology”?
26. What is “Nestorianism”? What was the role of the Council of Ephesus in dealing with Nestorianism?
27. What did the Council of Chalcedon do? What was Pope Leo's role in the final definition of faith that it produced?
28. What was St. Augustine's doctrine of "Original Sin”?
29. What was Pelagius' doctrine of works and free will?
30. What various theories exist concerning Christ's saving work? (Kelly, Chapt. 14).
31. What was the place of the See of Rome in the early Church? What were the highlights in the development of a sense of papal primacy?

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