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CH 650 John W. Fletcher: His Life and Theology

Patrick Streiff

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**CH 650**

*John W. Fletcher: His Life and Theology*

Seminar, 6:15-9pm Thursday
Professor: Dr. Patrick Ph. Streiff

**Description:**
The advanced seminar will search into the life and theology of John W. Fletcher (1729-85) who became as well the theologian as the saint of early Methodism. Participants will analyze source material according to historical and theological criteria and present their interpretation. Not yet published primary sources will be available.

**Objectives:**
Having successfully completed this course, students will be able to:
- Practice historical analysis of primary sources;
- Relate Fletcher’s writings to the larger picture of the Methodist revival, the English society in the 18th century and the Swiss background of Fletcher;
- Understand the doctrinal issues debated and Fletcher’s theological position;
- See Fletcher’s contribution to early Methodism;
- Compare Fletcher’s thoughts to later developments in the 19th century.

**Course Reading – Required:**

From the Works of John Fletcher (to be found in the printed editions of his works; pages according to the edition in 9 volumes of 1806-08):
- A Vindication of the Rev. Mr. Wesley’s Last minutes: In five letters to the Hon and Rev. Author of the circular letter. By a Lover of quietness and liberty of conscience. (later called: First Check to Antinomianism) (1771) (95 pages)
- The fictitious and the genuine creed; being ‘A creed for Arminians’ composed by Richard Hill, Esq; to which is opposed A creed for those who believe that Christ tasted Death for every man. (1775) (45 pages)
- The Last Check to Antinomianism. A polemical essay on the twin doctrines of Christian Imperfection and a Death Purgatory. (1775) (305 pages)
- The Doctrines of Grace and Justice. Equally essential to the pure Gospel. (1777) (39 pages)
- The Reconciliation: or, An easy method to unite the professing people of God … (containing: Bible Arminianism and Bible Calvinism, a twofold essay.) (1777) (130 pages)

From previously unpublished works:
Other primary sources will be distributed at the beginning of the seminar and be part of the required reading (about 100 pages). Each group will have to read additional secondary sources related to its topic (200-300 pages). (a total of approx. 1300 pages)

**Course Reading – Recommended:**
Additional secondary sources will be indicated for each topic of the seminar which will be prepared by a group. These sources will be among the recommended reading for the other participants.

**Course Requirements:**
1) Attendance:
The seminar requires preparation in reading, regular attendance and participation. (20%)

2) A written paper (4’000 words) on chosen pieces out of the required reading in primary sources: either on two “smaller” tracts or on the “Last Check” (for a total of 150 to 300 pages of primary sources). The paper shall present the historical context, summarize the argument and give a personal evaluation by the student. (20%)
To be submitted till October 15.

3) In small groups: oral presentation and discussion:
Each student participates in a small group which prepares an oral presentation on one of the topics listed below in the course schedule.
Oral presentation of approx. 45 min. per student and, as a group, organizing the discussion on the topic (together 30%);

4) Submit a written paper of about 7’000 to 8’000 words which includes the oral presentation. It takes into account the discussion and further develops the questions raised. (30%)
To be submitted till December 5 (for group 9: December 12).

**Course schedule (subject to minor changes):**
5 September: Orientation, introduction and organization of presentation groups
12 September: Past and present research on Fletcher; its contributions and open questions
19 September: From hagiography to a modern understanding of Fletcher’s Swiss background
26 September: Group 1: Fletcher’s conversion experience, covenant with God and remaining doubts (1754-59)
3 October: Group 2: Fletcher as an Anglican and a Methodist
10 October: Group 3: Early theological debates within Methodism on the experience of faith and of Christian perfection (end fifties and beginning sixties)
17 October: no seminar
(*I will be at the GBHEM Board meeting in Nashville during this week.)

24 October: Group 4: The first five Checks to Antinomianism (1770-74)

31 October: Group 5: The equal Checks to Pharisaism and Antinomianism and The Fictitious and the genuine Creed (1774-75)

7 November: Group 6: The doctrine of Christian perfection: The Last Check to Antinomianism (1775)

14 November: Group 7: The experience of Christian perfection: Fletcher’s last years

21 November: Group 8: The Doctrines of Grace and Justice (1777) and theological notes from Fletcher’s last years

28 November: no seminar (reading week)

5 December: Group 9: Fletcher’s influence in the 19th century

12 December: (reserve)