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NT 805 The Early Church Fathers and the Formation of the Canon

Ben Witherington

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**Syllabus for NT 805—**
**THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS AND THE FORMATION OF THE CANON**
**(DOCTORAL SEMINAR)**
**July 8-17 2008**

Dr. J. Warren Smith, Associate Professor of Historical Theology, Duke University  
(Before the seminar, call 919-401-2461; during seminar, 919-270-6739)  
Dr. Ben Witherington, III, Professor of NT, Asbury Theological Seminary

**Required Textbooks:**


**Primary Source Reading and Discussion**

THE STUDENT WILL NEED TO HAVE A COPY OF R. A. Whitacre, *A Patristic Greek Reader.* (Peabody: Hendrickson Press, 2007). We will begin each class with assigned readings from this textbook, including selections from the Didache up through the section on Chrysostom.
COURSE PROCEDURE

This is an intensive class (four hours a day, for two weeks) and will include the following components:
1) 50 minutes of introductory lecture followed by 15 min. Q&A;

2) 30 minutes of translation of primary source texts, by the students;

3) 45 minutes of short reports on assignments from the required reading. Each student will sign up for at least one short report before July 1. The reports should include a summary of the thesis of the text and a summary of the author’s main arguments and supporting evidence. At the end the student should give some evaluation of the author’s thesis and argument and how useful it is for our study of early Christianity and the interpretation of Scripture and the formation of the canon. Although a written copy of the report should be given to each member of the class, the oral presentation (15-20 min) should take the form of a mini-lecture, just as if one were teaching the text to a class of students.

4) 1 hour and 30 min discussion of the text assigned as “Common Reading for Discussion” together with the primary sources assigned as “Common Reading for Lecture” by the class and the professors. Each student is responsible for presenting an introduction to the “Common Reading for Discussion” once during the two weeks. The introduction (15 min.) should provide a) summary of the thesis of the text, b) summary of the key arguments that the author uses to support his thesis, and c) 5 questions about the author’s argument to jump start our discussion of the text. The questions would be in the following form: “On pages 72-3, McMullen claims X, Y, and Z. However, the textual evidence for claim Y is doubtful because of A and B. If we reject claim Y, do we also have to reject claims X and Z?” Sign up for the presentation by July 1.

5) During the second week of the class, instead of short papers on the assigned readings, each student will be responsible for presenting a major paper (15 pages) on some topic germane to the persons and issues covered in this class, followed by discussion. Papers as presented are not expected to be the final product, but an advanced draft. Then in the week following the class, the student should revise the paper in light of our conversation about the paper in class. Email the final copy to me (wsmith@div.duke.edu) by July 25.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

The assignments for this course are as follows: 1) translation and discussion of primary source texts in the seminar—30%; 2) short papers presented the first week of class—30%; 3) major paper on topics TBA—40%

Weekly Schedule

Monday, July 7
Lecture: A Question of Identity: Israel and The Church
Common Reading for Lecture:
1) Epistle of Barnabas
2) Epistle to Flora (Gnostic Scriptures)
3) Hymn of the Pearl (Gnostic Scriptures)
Common Reading for Discussion:
   R. Stark, Cities of God
Short Reports:
   1) Hurtado, Larry W. Lord Jesus Christ, Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity (Intro, Ch.1, 7-9)
   2) Babcock, William S. Paul and the Legacies of Paul (pp.265-307)
Translation:
   Didache 7, 8, 9-10, 11-13

Tuesday, July 8
Lecture: A Question of Identity: Christians and A Non-Christian Empire
Common Reading for Lecture:
   1) Ignatius of Antioch, Epistles
   2) Justin Martyr, Second Apology
Common Reading for Discussion:
   1) A.J. Malherbe, Paul among the Philosophers
   2) H. Chadwick, Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition
Short Reports:
   1) Hauser, Alan J. and Watson, Duane F. A History of Biblical Interpretation Volume 1 The Ancient Period (ch. 11, 15-16)
   2) Blowers, Paul M. The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity. The Bible Through the Ages (ch. 2-4)
Translation: Ignatius, To the Romans Salutation-par. 5 (pp. 37-42)

Wednesday, July 9
Lecture: Hyper-Hellenized Christianity: Marcion and the Gnostics
Common Reading for Lecture:
   1) Apocryphon of John, Bentley Layton, Gnostic Scriptures
   2) Gospel of Truth
   3) Gospel acc. to Thomas
Common Reading for Discussion:
   Ehrman, Bart D. Lost Christianities. The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew
Short Reports:
   1) Babcock, William S. Paul and the Legacies of Paul (pp.3-77)
   2) Robert M. Grant, Heresy and Criticism (ch. 1-4,7)
Translation: Martyrdom of Polycarp, 8.1-12.3

Thursday, 10 July
Lecture: Irenaeus and the Rule of Faith
Common Reading for Lecture:
   Against Heresies in Robert Grant, Irenaeus of Lyons (Books II-III)

Common Reading for Discussion:
   Lee MacDonald, The Biblical Canon

Short Reports:
   1) Babcock, William S. Paul and the Legacies of Paul (pp.79-98)
   2) Eric Osborn, Irenaeus of Lyons (ch. 7-8)
   3) John Behr, The Way to Nicaea (ch. 1, 3-5)

Translation: Justin Martyr, First Apology 61

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Friday, 11 July
Lecture: Origen and Alexandrian Exegesis
Common Reading for Lecture:
   Origen, Prologue to Commentary on Song of Songs in R. Greer Origen
   Origen, Homily 27 on Numbers, in Greer

Common Reading for Discussion:
   Young, Frances. Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture

Short Reports:
   1) Blowers, Paul M. The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity. The Bible Through the Ages (Ch. 6-7)
   2) Rowan Greer, Captain of Our Salvation: Patristic Exegesis of Hebrews (ch.1)
   3) John Behr, The Way to Nicaea (ch. 7-8)

Translation: Justin Martyr, First Apology 65-67

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Monday, 14 July
Lecture: Origen and Early Views of the Trinity
Common Reading for Lecture:
   Origen, Commentary on John Books I-II

Common Reading for Discussion:
Translation: Clement of Alexandria, Miscellanies 1.5, 1.20, 6.13

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Tuesday, 15 July
Lecture: Nicaea and Athanasius
Common Reading for Lecture:
   Athanasius, On the Incarnation (in Hardy’s Christology of the Later Fathers)

Common Reading for Discussion:
   1) R. MacMullen, Voting about God
   2) John Behr, The Nicene Faith (ch. 1, 3, 4)

Translation: Athanasius, On the Incarnation, 3, 8-9, 13, and 20
**Wednesday, 16 July**
Lecture: The Cappadocian Triumph
Common Reading for Lecture:
  - Gregory of Nazianzus, First and Fourth Theological Oration (in Hardy’s Christology of the Later Fathers)
Common Reading for Discussion: On the Incarnation, 3, 8-9, and 13 con’t
  - M. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet. John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation*
Translation: On the Incarnation, 3, 8-9, 13, and 20 con’t

**Thursday, 17 July**
Lecture: Christological Controversy: Cyril and Nestorius
Common Reading for Lecture:
  - Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria* (pp.96-129)
Common Reading for Discussion:
  - Paul Gavrilyuk, *The Sufferings of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*
Translation: Chrysostom, Homilae in Matthaeum 50.2-4

**Friday, July 18**
Lecture: Augustine, Pelagius, and Free Will
Common Reading for Lecture:
  - Augustine, *Spirit and the Letter*
Common Reading for Discussion:
  - Gorday, Peter J. *Principles of Patristic Exegesis: Romans 9-11 in Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine.*
Translation: Chrysostom, Homilae in Matthaeum 50.2-4 con’t

**SELECT COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY** (supplementing the already listed items)


Gorday, Peter J. *Principles of Patristic Exegesis: Romans 9-11 in Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine.*


