

## Department of Theology

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### GRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTION

Term: **Spring 2009**

Instructor: Dr. Julian V. Hills

Course #: THEO 226

Course Title: Hellenistic Backgrounds to the New Testament

#### Content:

*Introduction to various Greco-Roman issues and movements which influenced the development of New Testament writings. Study of traditional religion, mystery cults, philosophical schools, astrology and magic, literary genres and tendencies, and other related topics. (from the Graduate School Bulletin.)*

This course is being taught in conjunction with THEO 225 Advanced Hellenistic Greek. As I envision our work together, students in THEO 226 will provide advanced analysis of and commentary on the religions and movements whose *texts* we shall be reading in THEO 225.

#### Format:

1. Initial readings in landmark literature on the Hellenistic world (Deissmann, Cumont, Reitzenstein, Nock, Peters, et al.).
2. Survey work on a broad range of religious and philosophical traditions.
3. Shortly before mid-semester, each student will choose to specialize in (1) *one* Hellenistic religion or philosophical movement and its influence on (2) *one* part of the New Testament or developing Christian tradition. Examples: Hellenistic biographical literature and the Gospels; "dying and rising gods" and the Christian *kerygma*; Philo's exegesis and Luke-Acts or Paul; the Mystery Religions and perceptions of early Christian worship; the Emperor cult and the book of Revelation.

#### Assignments and/or Examinations:

1. Several book reviews — 5-6 pp. each.
2. Several brief class presentations, especially on the vocabulary and idiom peculiar to the religions and philosophies being discussed.
3. The final project: A well-documented dossier, probably ca. 30 pages, including up-to-date bibliography of primary and secondary texts, demonstrating some of the *exegetical results* derived from the study of a specific range of NT or post-NT texts in light of one aspect of their Hellenistic background.

#### Language Pre-requisites:

- Those who have passed French and/or German will be expected to use them.

#### Required Texts:

The older "classic" texts will be on Reserve in the MU library. Much of a student's reading will be specific to his or her chosen specialties, but it is very desirably that every student obtain a copy of the following:

Boring, M. Eugene, et al., eds., *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995).