

❁ THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY ❁

CT 254
Fall 2009

FORMAT OF COURSE:

We will discuss the formation of the doctrine and then examine contemporary issues and options in its interpretation, including its impact on faith. Gender issues, community, and world religions will be some of our foci. The course will also include consideration of the Trinity in imagery and liturgy, in order to encourage students to reflect upon the doctrine as spiritual resource. Students will work on creative projects as well as conceptual theology.

CONTACTING THE INSTRUCTOR

I am happy to talk with you any time this semester if there is an issue involving our course which you would like to discuss. Since, given the complexity of people's schedules today, we cannot always count on meeting each other informally on campus, please email me to set up an appointment. Let me know when you are available and we will find a convenient place and time to meet. If you are ill or have an emergency that causes you to miss class, please email or telephone me (home 614-848-3455 or office 740-362-3442). Remember that missing 20% of sessions will jeopardize your grade.

REQUIREMENTS:

1. **ATTENDANCE** at class sessions, preparation of questions, participation in discussions, brief written assignments. **[15%]**

2. **CREATIVE PROJECT: [25%]**

Each student will prepare a creative project that is expressive of Trinitarian imagery and which could be shared with a congregation or small group. Students may write a parable or story, compose a poem or song, draw or paint, sculpt or woodwork, use the textile arts, pottery, photography, film or PowerPoint, or explore other creative options. If someone is especially good with computer design, they are encouraged to volunteer to create an online display of the class work as their project or for extra credit.

The goal is not only to share your progress with fellow students but, more important, to help yourself and others explore creative, enlivening ways that God as Trinity can be a vital spiritual resource. A proposal for the project must be submitted ahead of time. When the project is done, you must submit a 2-3 page theological rationale along with it, explaining the theories and thinking behind the creative work. Also, please create a placard with a one-paragraph explanation of your project to be displayed alongside. We will culminate our course with a Trinitarian worship service, to which you may invite other

students, friends and family. We need one person to volunteer to set up the service as their creative project or for extra credit.

Proposal Due: 3/10 -- Project and Rational Due: 4/14 -- Service: 4/28

3. One In-Class PRESENTATION: [20%]

Note: Since there are more presentations available, any student can choose to do additional one(s) for extra credit.

Lead class discussion as listed under **Oral Assignment**. Present your designated topic, with a 1-2 page summary and 1-2 page outline for everyone. Your outline is to aid students in note-taking and understanding your presentation.

This is key: *Please make your presentation as vital and engaging as possible! Work to keep your presentation under the stated time limit. In addition to your content, you will be graded on how well you keep to the time limit and make the presentation succinct, clear, and efficient, without rambling! Practice making theological ideas come alive and relate to Christian experience and behavior.*

To Reiterate: *Please work to make your oral presentations engaging, interesting, and profitable for the rest of the class. Use this opportunity to hone your oral presentation, ability to organize material, and teaching skills.*

4. Final Research Paper: [40%]

Write a 12 page maximum (double-spaced, 12 pt type) research paper demonstrating your understanding and integration of the doctrine of the Trinity into a theological framework. See last pages of syllabus for guidelines.

Due: Seniors must turn in papers on 5/12. Others due 5/19.

All Students Please Note:

For all required work during the course, late submissions will result in a grade reduction. No informal extensions will be given. If extraordinary circumstances arise, the student can avail her/himself of the regular extension process. See the registrar for further information.

SEQUENCE OF THE COURSE

I THE FORMATION OF THE DOCTRINE

2/3 Introduction to the course

What are your initial questions about the doctrine of the Trinity? What preconceptions have you held about it? How much have you heard it taught in the church? What was the content? What problems and possibilities do you see with this particular aspect of

Christian theology? What metaphors, hymns, prayers or other symbolic representations do you think of in connection with this doctrine. [Use hymnals, Bible, other texts, possible internet searching for pictures or symbols, etc.]

2/10 Peters, chap. 1 (pp. 13-26); LaCugna, Intro. (pp.1-17); Boff, Preface and Intro., plus pp.111-125.

✍️ **ALL STUDENTS -- Answer the reflection questions to aid class discussion** (collected, not graded).

Which of Peters' "misleading assumptions" are familiar to you? Explain how they were presented to you. What does LaCugna mean when she says the Trinity is a "practical doctrine?" Have you ever thought of it that way? For what theological, practical, and/or political reasons do you think Boff wrote this book?

☞ **Oral Assignment: (one student per reading – half hour each)**

Read and Present

- Intro. in O'Collins The Tripersonal God
- Intro. in D'Costa, The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity.

Give an informative, brief summary of these readings to the class. What are the key issues, problems and opportunities that they outline? See above for assignment format, including summary and outline.

2/17 Rusch, Intro. (pp.1-27); chaps. 2-6, 9 (approx. 20 pgs)

✍️ **All Write for Class Discussion (collected, not graded):**

- a) Briefly summarize Arius' position on God, and that of Alexander of Alexandria. Show references to Arius' different letters and note any changes in his position. What is your analysis of Arius' position?
- b) Knowing that politics entered into these theological debates, how do you feel, as a Christian, about the ultimate doctrinal resolution, and about its validity for today?

☞ **Oral Assignment: (all students)**

- a) We will divide up into Arius and Alexander teams
- b) We will role play Arius and Alexander.
- c) Then each team will transpose this argument into contemporary terms such as you might hear in church and culture, giving specific examples if possible (from actual sermons, popular religious songs, televangelists, radio preachers, etc.
- d) Role play or debate these positions

2/24 LaCugna, chap. 1 (pp.21-44) and 2 (pp.53-73)

✍️ **All Students - Write for Class Discussion (collected, not graded):**

What's the difference between ontological subordinationism and economic subordinationism? Why does it matter? What was the question put by Arius? What happened after Nicaea, regarding the doctrine? List the key Greek terms presented so far (especially in these chapters) and define them. Find at least one thing that is a new idea for you, regarding the Trinity, and explain why.

Oral Assignment: (one student per reading – half hour each)

- a) Read and present La Due, chaps 1-2 (pp. 1-30)
- b) Read and present La Due, chaps. 3-4 (pp.31-60)

Please Note:

Begin thinking about your creative project.

It is recommended that you glance ahead to future course readings (or supplementary material) in order to stimulate your creative processes.

3/3 LaCugna, chap. 3 (pp.81-104); chap. 4 (pp.111-135)

ALL STUDENTS -- Write for class discussion (collected, not graded):

What theological insights on the Trinity have you gained thus far? Have they made the Trinity more meaningful for you? In what ways? How would you communicate this to others?

Oral Assignment: (one student per reading – half hour each)

Classical Issues and Gender Imagery for God

- Elizabeth Johnson, She Who Is, chap. 5, 6 (pp.76-120)
- Duck, chap. 3 (pp.59-83) [*Note: this is out of print so you must obtain reserve copy at library; or order a used copy from Amazon or other bookseller*]

II. CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN THE DOCTRINE

3/10 Overview

Ted Peters, God as Trinity, chap. 2 (pp.27-80)

Written Assignment for All: (collected, not graded)

Very briefly summarize the content of the doctrine of the Trinity as it developed. What are the key aspects? Consider the content given in both the lectures and the readings. Use any other sources that are helpful. You may also find LaCugna's chapters 5 and 6 useful in rounding out the historical picture. Then reflect upon which aspects in the traditional doctrine may be context-specific and which are foundational to the contemporary Christian understanding of God.

Proposal for Creative Project Due Today:

Prepare a one-page proposal for your creative project. Be specific about 1) the medium you will be using, 2) the audience for whom this is intended (and how it might be presented to them), 3) the theological content you are trying to convey, and how your chosen images facilitate that.

Remember that we need one worship leader and would also benefit from one computer designer.

Please be looking ahead in required readings in order to create imagery that takes advantage of new developments in Trinitarian theology. This is very important!

Oral Assignment: (one student per reading – half hour each)

1. Read and present La Due, chaps. 6-7 (pp.71-94)
2. Read and present La Due, chaps. 8 (pp.95-119)
3. Read and present La Due, chaps. 9 (pp.125-158)

3/17 Gender Issues

O'Collins, chaps. 11 and 12 (pp. 183-201)

ALL STUDENTS -- Written Assignment (collected, not graded):

Besides the O'Collins reading above, skim some of the readings below. Then, given what we have learned so far, write a short benediction or prayer, which preserves the key aspects of the doctrine of the Trinity, but explores gender-inclusive imagery. Be prepared to explain your theological reasoning to the class. Photocopy and hand out to entire class. Review each student's work for next week. Worship leader: consider some of these for inclusion in worship service.

To do this properly, you will need to peruse resources on gender imagery, such as the ones listed, ones on the bibliography, and/or other resources available in library. The goal is not to fall into any "theological traps" while also crafting something liturgically appropriate and aesthetic.

Oral Assignment (one student per reading – half hour each – may be extended into next class if necessary)

1) Duck, Gender and the Name of God, chaps. 1, 2 (pp. 11-57); chap. 3 (pp.139-158) [Note: This is out of print, so you must use reserve copy in library or order a used copy from a bookseller such as Amazon]

2) Duck, chaps. 7 and 8; Johnson, chaps. 2, 3 (pp.17-57)

3) Johnson, chap. 10 (pp.191-223); chap. 12, (pp. 246-272); Wren pp. 208-15

4) Brian Wren, What Language Shall I Borrow, 130-194 [Note: This is out of print, so you must use reserve copy in library or order a used copy from a bookseller such as Amazon]

All presenters: Read your selection and briefly summarize this for the class, using an outline which includes some short quotes.

Presenter of 3 and 4: Include examples drawn from Wren's liturgical pieces in the book.

All presenters: Brainstorm with class about liturgical possibilities that use content from this course. Continue to lead the discussion, focusing on the theological adequacy and advantages of the various ideas proposed.

2/24 Temporality and Eternity

Read Peters, chap. 4 (pp.146-187)

- 1) Prepare one question based on this reading.
- 2) Review the student creations from last week and make written comments on them based on our readings, presentations, and your own insights. Discuss and return work, with your comments, to author.

☞Oral Assignment: (one student – 30 minute time limit)

Read Peters, pp. 81-90, 96-103 and summarize his explanation of Welch, Barth and Rahner for the class. For extra help, see William La Due's summaries of Barth's and Rahner's thoughts. Then lead the class in understanding and exploring the implications of these ideas.

☞Oral Assignment – Worship Leader (one student - ongoing)

Using the materials that have been developed by the students, as well as other resources and creative projects you will have [see instructor for proposals], organize the class to create a Trinitarian liturgy for a worship service. Consult with instructor. Use students from the class to conduct the service. Lead a discussion of our liturgical assignments from last week.

III Re-Conceiving the Doctrine

3/31 In Light of Salvation

Peters, (pp. 122-128)

LaCugna, chap. 7 (pp.209-232) part of chap. 8 (pp.243-278)

☞Oral Assignment (one student – half hour):

- Read and report on chaps. 8 (pp. 152-164) "Our Modern Setting" and 9 (pp.165-173) "The Personal Existence of the Holy Spirit" in O'Collins.
- Lead the class in understanding and exploring the implications of these ideas. Focus especially on our understanding of the Spirit and how modern influences affect this.

4/7 Holy Week Break

4/14 Communitarian Divinity

Boff, Holy Trinity, Perfect Community, 1-10 (pp.1-110)

Prepare one question.

☞Oral Assignment (one student – half hour):

Read and report on Ogonnaya, chaps. 1 and 2 (1--30); 4 and 5 (51-90).

Lead the class in understanding and exploring the implications of these ideas.

Creative project and rationale due today.

Students who have written or composed things as their creative project must bring in completed work. Prepare a copy for the instructor and one for the worship leader. Students working in the material arts should bring in their creative project [even if not completely finished] or at least a picture of it, so we can see how it might be integrated into the chapel. Include your theological discussion sheet(s) and one-paragraph placard.

Worship Leader: Class discussion and preparation of Trinitarian service. With instructor and class input, help facilitate the discussion and planning.

4/21 LaCugna, rest of chap. 8 (278-305); chap. 9 (pp.319-368)

Prepare one question from the reading.

Oral Assignment (one student – half hour):

- Read and report on chap. 4 (about the Trinity in relationship to other religions, particularly the presence of the Spirit) in D'Costa The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity (pp.99-142)
- Lead the class in understanding and exploring the implications of these ideas. Focus especially on our understanding of world religions and the Spirit.

4/28 *Worship Service and Display of Creative Projects*

Give the worship leader your creative project on 4/27 if possible in order to facilitate preparation of the service. Worship participants come in early to help set up.

Please invite your friends and family, including other students, to take part in our Trinitarian worship service and see the results of your creative efforts.

5/5 LaCugna, chap. 10 (pp.378-411)

1. *Come in with a question from our reading.*
2. *Discussion of final papers (All students bring a preliminary outline of your project and report to class on research and progress. Be prepared to help each other think through the research issues.)*

5/12 Celebration and Discussion of Course Learning

Senior papers due

5/19 **Final Papers Due**

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS USED IN COURSE

Leonardo Boff, Holy Trinity, Perfect Community
Catherine Mowry LaCugna, God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life
Gavin D'Costa The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity
Ruth C. Duck, Gender and the Name of God: The Trinitarian Baptismal Formula
Elizabeth Johnson, She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse
William La Due, The Trinity Guide to the Trinity
Gerald O'Collins The Tripersonal God
A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the Trinity
Ted Peters, God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life
William G. Rusch, The Trinitarian Controversy
Brian Wren, What Language Shall I Borrow: God-Talk in Worship: A Male Response to Feminist Theology

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics I/I
Leonardo Boff, Trinity and Society
Catherine of Siena, "Prayer 12", The Prayers of Catherine of Siena, 1983
James Cone, "The Meaning of God in the Black Spirituals", in Concilium: God as Father?, 1981
*Veli-Matti Karkkainen, The Trinity: Global Perspectives
J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines
Sallie McFague, Models of God
Jurgen Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom
Julian of Norwich, ch. 58-59, Showings
*William Placher, The Triune God: An Essay in Postliberal Theology
*Rebecca Button Prichard Sensing the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Feminist Perspective
Marjorie Proctor-Smith, In Her Own Rite: Constructing Feminist Liturgical Tradition
Gail Ramshaw-Schmidt, "Naming the Trinity: Orthodoxy and Inclusivity", in Worship 60, Nov.1986
Richard of St. Victor, Book Three of The Trinity, in Classics of Western Spirituality
*Tarmo Toom, Classical Trinitarian Theology
Miraslav Volk and Michael Welker, eds., God's Life in Trinity
John Wesley, "On the Trinity", Sermon LV (1775), in The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, 1860
Patricia Wilson-Kastner, "The Trinity", in Faith, Feminism and the Christ

Note: All the above books should be on library reserve the first week of term.

**Starred items are on order.*

Research Paper Instructions

- Choosing one of the following topics, create a research paper of **12 pages (double-spaced, 12 pt type)** maximum. Focus on quality of presentation, not length. Standard referencing is expected (i.e., end- or foot-notes, complete bibliography at the end of the paper for *all* sources consulted, proper bibliographic form, etc.) The use of both primary and secondary sources will greatly enhance the paper. However, choose secondary texts wisely, aiming for relevancy and specificity.

- Quoting is an effective and often necessary way to refer to an author's point, or to prove your case, but copious quotes can detract from an otherwise good paper. Therefore, choose only the most salient quotes that are clearly illustrative, especially arresting, or both. Paraphrasing is sometimes useful as well, as long as it is clearly footnoted.
- It is especially important that you keep the focus of your paper in sight at all times during your research and writing. The final draft should clearly state your premises or presuppositions, question(s) being considered, methods used, argument(s) you are offering, and conclusion(s) you have reached based on the research presented.
- Be sure to read the directions carefully for your chosen topic. Papers will be evaluated on: a) how well the paper meets the requirements set out in the topic description, b) the clarity, logical progression and sense of direction in the paper, c) the quality, depth, and proper citation of your research; and d) the student's demonstration of careful theological thinking in the paper, regarding the doctrine of the Trinity.

TOPICS

1. A Liberation/Community View of the Trinity

- a) Read Leonardo Boff's Trinity and Society and A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya's On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the Trinity. Summarize their respective themes briefly (two-three pages).
- b) Compare these works in some detail (two-three pages).
- c) Survey relevant secondary sources. You may explore, e.g., other books of liberation theology which discuss the doctrine of God/Trinity, reviews of Boff's or Ogbonnaya's work, relevant material indicated in endnotes, etc. Look especially at LaCugna's critique and Peter's critique. For other perspectives, see relevant articles in Volf and Welker, God's Life in Trinity [on reserve] and Karkkainen, The Trinity: Global Perspectives. Gain some understanding of the "social analogy of the Trinity" to guide you in this work. Discuss your findings briefly (two or three pages).
- d) Then use the rest of the paper to evaluate the liberation and/or community view of the Trinity and offer suggestions about the usefulness of this view for the contemporary church. (Remainder of paper up to 12 pages maximum).

Use proper referencing style, foot- or end-notes, and a bibliography of all works consulted (even if not cited in notes). Part of your grade will be based on demonstration of good research methods and the ability to state a thesis, defend it, and display thematic integrity in your work.

2. Gender Imagery and the Trinity

- a) Scan through Elizabeth Johnson's She Who Is, Brian Wren's What Language Shall I Borrow, Ruth Duck's Gender and the Name of God, and Rebecca Button Prichard, Sensing the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Feminist Perspective. See what perspectives and themes interest you most.

Choose two books and read fully. Summarize their respective arguments briefly (two to three pages). Then compare them with each other (two to three pages).

- b) As needed, survey the other selections above and/or in our bibliography that deal with the gender issue (e.g., Wilson-Kastner and Proctor-Smith) to fill in gaps, critique your chosen authors, or answer additional questions you have. Briefly summarize your findings (two-three pages).

- c) Then using these and other sources you find helpful, use the rest of the paper to either: 1. evaluate the authors' critiques and suggestions theologically, or 2. offer theologically informed and elaborated suggestions about the use of gender imagery for God in the contemporary church. (Remainder of paper up to 12 pages maximum)

Use proper referencing style, foot- or end-notes, and a bibliography of all works consulted (even if not cited in notes). Part of your grade will be based on demonstration of good research methods and the ability to state a thesis, defend it, and display thematic integrity in your work.

3. The Trinity in Light of World Religions

- a) Choose at least two other major religions (e.g. Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism) and elaborate on their concept of God (3-5 pgs depending on number of faiths chosen). Do not rely solely on internet sources, but consult the library for credible research books.

- b) Present their views on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Do these seem well-founded to you, given what you have learned in this course? (3-5 pgs)

- c) Answer their criticisms of the Christian doctrine from what we have learned in this class, and from other resources, including those in our bibliography, such as D'Costa, Karkkainen, Volf and Welker. ***Use at least 3-5 credible references.*** Do you see these faiths' points of view in some aspects? Why or why not? (rest of paper up to 12 pages maximum).

Use proper referencing style, foot- or end-notes, and a bibliography of all works consulted (even if not cited in notes). Part of your grade will be based on demonstration of good research methods and the ability to state a thesis, defend it, and display thematic integrity in your work.

4. Surveying in more depth the historical and theological options within the Doctrine.

- a) Choose two of these books and read them carefully
a. O'Collins The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity

- b. William La Due The Trinity Guide to the Trinity
- c. William Placher, The Triune God: An Essay in PostLiberal Theology
- d. Karkkainen, The Trinity: Global Perspectives
- e. Leonardo Boff, Trinity and Society
- f. Tarmo Toom, Classical Trinitarian Theology

b) Summarize the main theses of each book (2-3 pages) in a succinct and interesting manner.

c) Note the strengths and weaknesses of each author's approach (2-3 pages).

d) Compare the books to each other and to the texts we have used in the class, particularly Peters and LaCugna. Use selected other resources from our bibliography as needed to explain and defend your points. How do your two texts differ, how are they similar, where do they take on opposing or dissimilar tasks? (2-3 pages)

e) Reflect on how your own understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity has changed due to these two books and the other resources you have consulted. How will you pastor, teach, or preach now?? (Use remainder of paper up to 12 pages maximum.)

Use proper referencing style, foot- or end-notes, and a bibliography of all works consulted (even if not cited in notes). Part of your grade will be based on demonstration of good research methods and the ability to state a thesis, defend it, and display thematic integrity in your work.

4. Student-proposed topic in consultation with instructor.

In cases where the student has a specific theological issue that she or he wishes to investigate, arrangements should be made to present a proposal to the instructor on the topic. (12 pages maximum)

Use proper referencing style, foot- or end-notes, and a bibliography of all works consulted (even if not cited in notes). Part of your grade will be based on demonstration of good research methods and the ability to state a thesis, defend it, and display thematic integrity in your work.