Contemporary Trinitarian Thought

Spring Term, 2015, 9-12 a.m. SAH Board Room TH 6/780
Instructor: The Rev. Dr. Richard Topping
Principal and Professor of Studies in the Reformed Tradition
Vancouver School of Theology

Office: St Andrew’s Hall, 3rd Floor
Email: richardt@vst.edu
Office Phone: 604-822-9808

Office Hours and Availability:
Please send me an email to make an appointment. Feel free to drop by; but if you need more than a few minutes, please email or phone me so that we can plan for the appropriate time. If you can’t reach me, please contact Kelly Lee (klee@vst.edu) who will arrange an appointment.

General Introduction and Purpose:
This course offers an in-depth exploration of the Christian doctrine of God, with particular attention to recent contributions to and developments in Trinitarian theology by Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox thinkers. While we make reference to the origins of the doctrine (teaching) of the Trinity in the biblical and early Church period, the primary focus of the course is on the meaning and significance of this central Christian teaching for the contemporary life of the church and the world. We will be especially interested in the implications of Trinitarian theology for scripture interpretation, liturgy and ecclesia, anthropology and sexuality, the meeting of religions, politics, economics - justice and ecology. The purpose of the course is to immerse students in the robust and delightful resources of contemporary ecumenical Trinitarian theology, which in turn draws students deeper into knowing, loving, and worshipping God.

Competence Objectives:
In completing this course a student will be able to:
(1) Demonstrate competent understanding of important contemporary Trinitarian texts and their historical pedigree.
(2) Critically assess the contemporary renaissance in Trinitarian theology, its sources, limitations and expressions.
(3) Deploy Trinitarian theology to interpret, construct, challenge and reform. Students will acquire fluency in contemporary Trinitarian thought with a view to interpreting (re-imagining, deliberately misreading the world) by means of it.

Format:
This class meets once a week for three hours for eleven classes. The primary format will be lecture followed by a discussion of questions raised on the basis of the students close reading of the required texts. This discussion will take place in small groups as well as in the group as a whole. Some meetings of the class will be conducted in seminar format with ThM students
leading the discussion. We will go on a field trip to The Church of the Holy Resurrection (Orthodox) on January 27, 9 a.m. where Archbishop Lazar Puhalowill speaks to us about how Orthodox liturgy is shaped by Trinitarian theology and sensibility.

Expectations/Evaluation:
(1) Class attendance and preparation of all required reading before class. Not every reading will be the topic of class discussion but the assumption is that students can contribute meaningfully to discussion because they have been funded by the readings.
(2) Oral presentation to the class of a book report (15 minutes) on an important contemporary monograph on the Trinity (see bibliography). It should be a book other than the course text book. A paper copy of the book report (10-12 pages) should be handed in at the end of the class presentation.

ThM students will be required to make a presentation of 20 minutes and to interact with at least five critical reviews of the book in their written and oral presentation. The paper copy of their presentation should be 12-14 pages and handed in at the end of the class presentation.
(3) A final paper (10 pages) which deploys the resources of Trinitarian Theology to re-imagine a contemporary problem, struggle, issue for the church and/or the world. I will give more background on this assignment in class. You should look at Placher, *The Triune God*, pp. 101-108 for significant help with this assignment. The assignment requires students to interpret the world through the lens of some aspect of Trinitarian theology. The whole course is essentially an exercise in the same interpretative approach. Due Date: **April 17, 2015 for graduating students other basic degree students, April 24.**

ThM students will do the same final assignment to a length of 15 pages. **Due Date: April 17, 2015 if you are graduating otherwise, June 27, 2015.**

Deadlines:
All assignments in this course are due on the dates indicated. Failure to submit assignments on time may affect the final grade for the course. A late assignment, without legitimate excuse, will result in the reduction of a letter grade.

Required Text:

Other Required Readings:
Other readings of chapters and articles can be found on moodle.

Working Bibliography for Contemporary Trinitarian Thought

Overview/Introductions
Declan Marmion and Rik van Nieuwenhove, *An Introduction to the Trinity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010).
Dirkie Smit, 'Trinity in the Reformed Tradition,' *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3 (2009), 57-76.

**Scripture Interpretation**
Christoph Schwobel, 'The Trinity: Between Athens and Jerusalem' *Journal of Reformed Theology* 2 (2009), 22-41.

**Retrieval of Sources**

David Bentley Hart, 'The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the Visti

Robert Letham, 'Trinity between East and West,' *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3 (2009), 42-56.


Peter C. Phan, Cambridge Companion to The Trinity, Part II - Retrieving the Sources (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), 33-86.


### 20th Century Renaissance


### Constructive and Systematic Treatments


**Community and Liturgy**


**Humanity and Desire**


Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010).


**Religions**


Christoph Schwöbel, 'The Trinity between Athens and Jerusalem,' Journal of Reformed Theology 2 (2009), 22-41.


Politics, Economy and Justice


Kathryn Tanner, Economy of Grace (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

Miroslav Volf, 'Being As God is Trinity and Generosity,' 2-12, God’s Life in Trinity, Volf and Welker, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Is there Justice in the Trinity?' 177-190, God’s Life in Trinity, Volf and Welker, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

Modernity and Global Perspectives


Colin Gunton, The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).


Peter J. Leithart, Deep Comedy: Trinity, Tragedy, and Hope in Western Literature


**Ecology**


Sallie McFague, *Blessed are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

**Multidisciplinary Reflection**


**Social-Communal-Relational Trinitarianism - Critical Material**


Stephen Holmes, 'Three vs. One? Some problems with Social Trinitarianism,' *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3 (2009), 77-89.


