

## Holy, Holy, Holy!: The Doctrine of the Trinity

TH680/TH780 – Fall 2023  
Wednesdays, 9:00am – 12:00pm  
Online via Zoom

### Vancouver School of Theology

**Instructor:** Morgan D. Bell (he/him)  
**Phone:** 416-929-0811 ext. 8  
**Email:** morgan.bell@mail.utoronto.ca



### Purposes and Design

Christians confess that the God of the Gospel is no inert deity. Rather, God is the Holy Trinity: utterly One, yet One precisely in being Three; explosive with majesty and extravagant in mercy. It's no wonder the Anglican divine John Donne described the mystery of the Triune God as "bones to philosophy, but milk to faith." In this course, we will explore the doctrine of the Trinity in its historical development and in the life and practice of the Church. Course readings draw from across the Christian tradition – Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant; classical and contemporary; formative and reformatory.

The course begins with the doctrine's scriptural foundations and its development through the Christian tradition. This course places special emphasis on contemporary treatments of the Trinity, considering how the Trinity impacts and is impacted by understandings and experiences of race, sex/gender, political life, liturgy and prayer, or human relationships. By the end of this course, students should be able to articulate with some degree of confidence the central convictions of Nicene trinitarianism, some major expressions thereof, and describe what is at stake in trinitarian doctrine. Students will also be encouraged to articulate their own theological convictions with reference or in contrast to that framework. Pedagogical methods include lectures, three one-page reflection papers, class discussions, a mid-term book analysis, and a final research paper OR (for 600-level students) a sermon on the Trinity with an accompanying essay.

**Prerequisite Courses:** Students will have already successfully completed TH500 (Introduction to Christian Theology).

<b>Course Goals and Outcomes</b> “At the end of this course, students should be able to...”	<b>Means of Measurement</b> “I will assess your progress toward this goal by means of your...”
1. explain the central convictions of Nicene trinitarian doctrine;	Reflection Papers Final Paper/Sermon Study
2. recognize and describe some of Nicene trinitarianism’s major expressions in the Christian tradition;	Class Presentation Reflection Papers Participation Final Paper/Sermon Study Book Analysis
3. interpret and assess contemporary trinitarian theologies considering specific issues arising out of diverse contexts and various experiences of oppressed and marginalized peoples;	Reflection Papers Participation Final Paper/Sermon Study Book Analysis
4. identify how the doctrine of the Trinity relates to and impacts understandings of other theological foci (such as ecclesiology, soteriology, sex/gender, social politics, etc.)	Class Presentation Participation Final Paper/Sermon Study Book Analysis
5. articulate their own emerging views on the doctrine of the Trinity with some confidence and in respectful dialogue with other views;	Reflection Papers Participation Book Analysis Final Paper/Sermon Study
6. identify lingering questions and areas of personal interest that invite further inquiry.	Reflection Papers Participation

## Assignments

### Participation

Regular attendance and informed participation are important modes of learning. Because discussion is a central means we will use to engage readings and themes, your participation is valued and will factor in your final grade. It is thus expected that you will have completed weekly readings and be prepared to contribute. The value of that contribution, however, is not determined by the amount a student speaks. Rather, evaluation will consider how student participation contributes to the classroom culture. Have you read the texts and engage them closely, generously, and critically? Do you listen to and respect your colleagues? Are you willing to admit what you do not understand and look to colleagues for help?

### Reflection Papers

Careful and critical reading is an elemental skill for theologians. To help cultivate this skill, you are asked to submit three (3) written reflections that engage weekly readings, examining some of the major themes with reference to your own theological judgments. The objective of these papers is to engage the readings generously and critically, appraising their Christian coherence, credibility, and contextual relevance. Reflection papers should be typed in single-space format and be no more than one (1) page in length. Assignments will be collected at the beginning of class each week.

### Class Presentations

At each session, a pre-arranged group of students will summarize and evaluate the weekly readings and initiate a discussion thereupon, raising two or three questions to generate conversation over the most important issues/themes in the readings. 600-level students should address the class for approximately 5-10 minutes. 700-level students should address the class for 10-15 minutes (for 700-level students). All presentations will be followed by a moderated discussion.

### Midterm Book Analysis

Students will analyze and comment upon a book chosen from a provided list or chosen in consultation with the instructor. This analysis will be approximately 6-7 pages in length (for 600-level students) or 8-10 pages in length (for 700-level students). The book analysis is designed to foster charitable and critical engagement with a work of trinitarian theology in light of course materials and themes and your own experiences and perspectives.

## Final Research Paper **OR** Sermon Study

Students will be given the choice between writing a research paper on a thinker or topic related to the course (decided in consultation with the instructor) **OR** (for 600-level students only) writing a sermon on the Trinity with an explanatory essay. For 600-level students, either assignment will be approximately 12-15 pages in length. For 700-level students, research papers will be 18-20 pages in length.

## Format and Content

This course will be offered **online via Zoom** during the **fall semester**. We will meet on **Wednesday mornings** from **9:00am – 12:00pm**. (Be not afraid: there will be breaks!) Sessions will include lectures by the instructor, student presentations, break-out groups, and plenary discussions.

## Required Texts

The following books can be purchased online or accessed through the VST library.

- A Bible (preferably the NRSV/NRSVue, RSV, or New Jerusalem translation)
- Marmion, Declan & Rik Van Nieuwenhove. *An Introduction to the Trinity*. Cambridge: CUP, 2011. (~\$35-40 CAD)
- All other readings will be available on the Populi site

## Selected Bibliography

First things first: **Breathe. These are not required texts. We will not read all these books.** Some we will, most we will not. This bibliography gives you a sense of the **kinds** of thinkers we will encounter this semester. We will engage a wide range of trinitarian thought and – like the effulgent life of the Triune God! – there is a wealth of theology we simply cannot address. But that’s part of the adventure of thinking after a living God and being part of a communion of saints across time and space! Below, you will discover an array of thinkers. Perhaps you will cite them in your papers. Maybe you’ll whet your appetite with their work during the summer. Who knows? Possibly you’ll even read them for pleasure!

Althaus-Reid, Marcella. *The Queer God*. London: Routledge, 2003. Especially chapter 3.

Anatolios, Khaled, ed. *The Holy Trinity in the Life of the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014.

Augustine of Hippo. “On the Trinity,” Book 4, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, *St. Augustine: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*. Edinburgh and Grand Rapids: T & T Clark and Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993.

Baker-Fletcher, Karen. *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006.

- Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics* II/1. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957.  
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- Bates, Matthew W. *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament & Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Boff, Leonardo. *Trinity and Society*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988.
- Bobrinskoy, Boris. *The Mystery of the Trinity*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1999.
- Coakley, Sarah. *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Green, Gene L. et. al., eds. *The Trinity among the Nations: The Doctrine of God in the Majority World*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015.
- Gunton, Colin E. *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991.
- Jenson, Robert W. *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Johnson, Elizabeth A. *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. New York: Crossroad, 1992.
- Jüngel, Eberhard. *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976.
- Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.
- Kombo, James Owino. *The Doctrine of God in African Christian Thought: The Holy Trinity, Theological Hermeneutics, and the African Intellectual Culture*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. New York: HarperCollins, 1991.
- Lee, Jung Young. *The Trinity in Asian Perspective*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1996.
- Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Cambridge: James Clark & Co., 1968.
- McFague, Sallie. *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*. Translated by John Bowden. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1992.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Ogbonnaya, A. Okechukwu. *On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the Trinity*. St. Paul: Paragon, 1998.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1. Translated by G.W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991.
- Pannikar, Raimundo. *The Trinity and World Religions: Icon-Person-Mystery*. Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1970.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. 5 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971–1989.
- Rahner, Karl. *The Trinity*. New York: Crossroad, 1997.
- Rogers, Eugene F. *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999.
- Soulen, R. Kendall. *The Divine Name(s) and the Holy Trinity*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.

- Sonderegger, Katherine. *Systematic Theology, vol. 2: The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: Processions and Persons*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020.
- Tanner, Kathryn. *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Torrance, T.F. *The Trinitarian Faith*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988.
- Tonstad, Linn Marie. *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Vetö, Étienne. *The Breath of God: An Essay on the Holy Spirit in the Trinity*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019.
- Volf, Miroslav. *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997.
- Zizioulas, John. *Being As Communion*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997.