



Grace Communion Seminary

Doctrine of the Trinity (TH505)

Short Syllabus

Instructor: Dr. Gary W. Deddo, PhD

Course Description

This course explores in depth the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity, with its biblical foundations in God's revelation, the nature of theology, the foundational historic creeds and controversies, key elements and current obstacles to a fully Christian faith in the Triune God. This course examines vital implications of the doctrine of the Trinity for ethics, worship, the church and proclamation of the Gospel of the Grace of God through Jesus Christ in the Spirit

Required Texts and Articles

To assist us in this endeavor we will make use of the writings of others to fund our own faithful understanding. Listed alphabetically starting with the complete texts that are required for this course. Then find listed required “on reserve” selected excerpts (but which are not required for purchase, as only selections will be read from these). Finally, required reading will also involve a number articles also made available “on reserve” through the course website.

Required Complete Texts

Johnson, Darrell. *Experiencing the Trinity*, Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 2002. ISBN 1-57383-216-2, \$10.66¹

Toon, Peter. *Our Triune God: A Biblical Portrayal of the Trinity*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996. ISBN 1-56476-553-9, \$14.99*

¹ prices based on “new” or “like new” books on Amazon.com. Prices may change without notice. In some cases cheaper books can be located with bookfinder.com

Torrance, Thomas F. *The Christian Doctrine of God*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996 and 2016 reprint. ISBN 9780567097415 (hardcover), ISBN [9780567658074](#) (paper), \$21.74*

Required “On Reserve” Selected Excerpts

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. New York: HarperOne, 1978. ISBN-13: 9780060608521

Torrance, James B. *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996. ISBN 0-8308-1895-2

Torrance, Thomas F. Ch. 5, “Atonement,” *The Mediation of Christ*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Helmers & Howard, 1992. ISBN 0-939443-50-3

Required Articles “On Reserve”

These are listed in the “Course Outline and Assignment Schedule” below.

Recommended Texts/Short Bibliography (for extra credit or supplementary reading)

Coppedge, Alan. *The God Who Is Triune*. InterVarsity Press, 2007

Fairbairn, Donald. *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the*

Church Fathers. InterVarsity Press, 2009

Karkkainen, Veli-Matti. *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.

Kimel, Alvin F., editor. *This Is My Name Forever: The Trinity and Gender Language for God*. InterVarsity Press, 2001

Letham, Robert. *The Holy Trinity*. P & R Publishing, 2004

Leupp, Roderick T. *The Renewal of Trinitarian Theology*. InterVarsity Press, 2008

Metzger, Paul Louis, editor. *Trinitarian Soundings*. T & T Clark, 2005

Olson, Roger E. and Christopher A. Hall. *The Trinity*. Eerdmans, 2002

Seamands, Stephen. *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service*. InterVarsity Press, 2005

Torrance, Thomas F. *The Trinitarian Faith*, T & T Clark, 1988

Grenz, Stanley, David Guretzki, Cherith Fee Nordling. *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, InterVarsity Press, 1999 (for reference)

Student Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- 1) be able to explain the topics noted in the Description a) in the light of Scripture, b) in the light of its expressions in the relevant ecumenical creeds, and c) in contemporary contexts. (Through readings and lectures accounted for in reading notebook)
- 2) explain the challenges of theological method and identify the important interplay of cultural-historical context. (Through readings and lectures accounted for in reading notebook)
- 3) critically analyze and evaluate a variety of theological formulations of the theological topics under consideration recognizing the interplay of ecumenical and contextual/intercultural perspectives. (Through written assignments and final exam)
- 4) critically evaluate competing theological formulations and bring to written articulation a faithful presentation of key theological themes that will inform their own ministry, preaching, teaching and personal lives as members of the Body of Christ in its local and global expressions. (Through written assignments and final exam)

Course Assignments

Autobiographical Sketch: No later than Wednesday of the first class week please be prepared to post a one-page autobiographical description of yourself, including church background, educational background (including any seminary courses taken previously), and present ministry situation. End with a one-paragraph description of what you are presently finding to be the greatest theological question/concern in

ministry or your own life related to this class. I and all course members will be able to read this so we can get to know each other at least a little bit.

Lectures: There will be a lecture for each week on a topic that will prepare for, explain or expand on the readings assigned for the week. These should help you digest and apply what you're learning from the readings. They are in written form at the moment and average about 20 pp. per lecture. Reading them should take about 1 to 1½ hours time. The first lecture, however, is a video tape of a session I gave for GCI.

Reading: Students will be expected to complete all required reading from complete textbooks, excerpts from texts and articles "on reserve." This will amount to approximately 650 pages. You will be expected to complete the reading before the lecture on most weeks. Some weeks have *a lot* of reading (especially weeks 2 and 4, sorry), a few not very much (weeks 5, 6, 7). While you must read what is assigned for any given week, you may read ahead, especially on the weeks where fewer pages are assigned. Also, the first week you are allowed the option of reading either Toon *or* Torrance. The second and third weeks you must read Toon, but can read Torrance *in addition* for *extra* credit. This allows those who haven't read much theology on the Trinity to ease into Torrance, who goes into significant depth and breadth to comprehensively cover the topic.

Reading Notebook: A notebook in which students outline all required reading and make judicious comments or offer significant reflections on important and meaningful points found in the readings. Completed reading and notebook entries will be recorded in the Reading Assignment Report List and will be submitted along with the Notebook. You will be given a mid-term grade week based on the midterm (5th week) submission of the Notebook and your online forum participation. The completed notebook will also be submitted the 12th week of the term for a final grade. (See further instructions at end of syllabus).

Forums: There will be two forums for you to participate in online. Add to the **Class Discussion Forum** one comment or one question per week on the current week's reading or lecture *and* contribute at least one response to one other comment or question added by members of the class or the instructor. Second, the instructor will contribute one question (or more) per week in a separate **Instructor Forum** that

students should also interact with or comment on. This adds up to a minimum of three entries, total, per week. These forums will constitute our class discussion. They will be graded on the basis of the number and the quality of the entries. The forums will be worth 25% of your final grade. For credit you must add your initial comments by 10 pm, Friday. You must submit your responses to others by 6 pm, Sunday. You will receive an interim grade based on your participation after Week 5 of the course.

Written Reflection Papers: Write *three* short papers of two to three pages length (500-750 words each) on different topics related to ministry selected from the *four* options listed below. These will be due in the 12th and 13th weeks of the term.

- 1) Theologically interact with the content of one hymn or chorus that presents some significant elements pertaining to the doctrine of the Trinity. Discuss strengths, weaknesses and make recommendations for improving it.
- 2) Theologically interact with an illustration, analogy, story or other explanation of the Trinity you've heard used trying to help Christians better understand their faith in the Triune God. Discuss strengths, weaknesses and make recommendations for improving it.
- 3) Make substantive suggestions indicating in various ways how you might highlight or signal in a service of worship that we worship the Triune God.
- 4) Offer reflections and suggestions as to how you might best present or introduce people to the essential Gospel but do so in a way that indicates that God is Triune and why this is important, even central to Christian faith and life. You may do this by choosing to critically interact with an evangelistic "tool" that you are familiar with.

Final Exam: A final exam of four hours length, involving short identification questions and two essays on major themes of the doctrine of the Trinity. This is due no later than Monday of the 14th week.

Course Outline and Assignment Schedule (Tentative)

(Be sure to consult the final and complete TH505 Syllabus only available if you register for the course.)

Completion of the reading assignments are due before the lecture for that week is read, or viewed, except for the first week when the video lecture should be watched

first. The forums assignments should be done after the reading and lecture assignments are completed.

WEEK 1 –

Topic: What is Theology?: The Who Question

Lecture: Deddo video, GCI, Who are you, Lord?

(Watch this first before doing the reading for this week. Most other weeks, do the text reading before the lecture.)

Reading: Toon, *Triune*, Chaps 1-3 p. 9-69, (60 pp.) *or* Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God*, pp. 1-31, chs. 1 and 2 (30 pp.) Read one of these two texts after viewing the video lecture. (The Torrance reading will be more in depth and also more demanding reading geared for those who have already completed a

significant amount of theological study.)

-Respond to the question posed on the Instructor Forum, by Friday, 10 pm -Add to the Class Discussion Forum by Friday 10 pm, and make at least one response to another posting by Sunday, 6 pm, on the topic of this week's video lecture and reading, "What is Theology?" Handouts:

The Creeds of the Church

Submit online Autobiographical Sketch by Wednesday of this week for all class participants to read.

WEEK 2 –

Topic: Biblical Foundations, OT

Reading: Toon, *Triune*, Chaps 4-6, pp. 73-130 (57 pp.)

For those wanting advanced level reading and extra credit (2 pts of 100), *also* read Torrance, T. F., *The Christian Doctrine of God*, first half of Chapter 3, pp. 32-50 this week and the second half of that chapter, pp. 50-72, next week.

Lecture: Doing Faithful Theology

Add to the Forums your Question or Comments by Friday 10 pm, responses by Sunday, 6 pm.

Handouts: See two Diagrams for lecture

WEEK 3 –

Topic: Biblical Foundations, NT

Reading: Toon, *Triune*. Chaps 7-9, pp. 133-194 (61 pp.)

For advanced reading and extra credit, continue reading TFT, *CDG*, Ch. 3 as noted above.

Lecture: The Matrix of God's Self-Revelation according to Scripture Add to the Forums your Question or Comments by Friday 10 pm, responses by Sunday, 6 pm.

Handout: Co-Identity of the Triune Persons in Scripture

WEEK 4 –

Topic: Overview of the Doctrine of the Trinity, Councils and Heresies:

Reading: Johnson, *Experiencing*, Chaps. 1-6, pp. 13-107 (87 pp.)

and Torrance, *CDG*. Ch 4. "Trinitarian Mind," pp. 73-111 (38 pp.)

Lecture: Obstacles, Ancient and Modern, to Understanding What We Believe Add to the Forums your Question or Comments by Friday 10 pm, responses by Sunday, 6 pm.

Handouts: Creeds of the Church: The Councils' Answer the Who Question

WEEK 5 –

Topic: The Unity of God in Relationship

Reading: T. F. Torrance, *CDG*, Ch. 5, pp. 112-135 (24 pp.)

Lecture: Transformation in our Understanding of our Faith in One God Add to the Forums your Question or Comments by Friday 10 pm, responses by Sunday, 6 pm.

Submit Notebooks via course website for mid-term grading, by Saturday, 10 pm. You will also receive grades at the end of this week for your online forum interaction so far.

WEEK 6 –

Topic: The Divine Persons in Triune Relations

Reading: Deddo, "Karl Barth's Theology of Relations" (on reserve)

T. F. Torrance, *CDG*, Chap. 6 "Three Persons, One Being," pp. 136-167 (31 pp.)

Optional reading excerpt: Deddo, G.W. 'The Difference of the Divine Persons' (You can read this excerpt *this* week from the whole article, "The Trinity and Gender: Theological Reflections on the

Differences of Divine and Human Persons” that you’ll be *required* to read in Wk 9. The excerpt will be available for download online from the course website.) The excerpt will be available for download online from the course website.

Lecture: Divine Persons in Relation, Human Persons in Relation

Add to the Forums your Question or Comments by Friday 10 pm, responses by Sunday, 6 pm.

WEEK 7 –

Topic: Unity in Trinity, Trinity in Unity

Reading: T. F. Torrance, *CDG*, Ch 7 “Trinity in Unity” (Perichoresis), pp. 168-202 (34 pp.)

Lecture: Issues in Trinitarian Theology

Handout: “The Agreed Statement on the Trinity between the Orthodox Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches”

Add to the Forums your Question or Comments by Friday 10 pm, responses by Sunday, 6 pm.

Handouts

WEEK 8 –

Topic: Trinity, Creation, Atonement and Our Salvation

Reading: T. F. Torrance, *Mediation*, Ch 5, “Trinity and Atonement,” pp. 99-126 (on reserve, 27 pp.)

Torrance, *CDG*, Chaps 8, 9, pp. 203-256 (53 pp.)

Lecture: Creation, Revelation, Atonement, and Salvation

Add to the Forums your Question or Comments by Friday 10 pm, responses by Sunday, 6 pm.

Handouts: “God’s Wrath and Compassion,” and Deddo, G.W. “Cry of Dereliction: An Easter Meditation” (optional, on reserve)

WEEK 9 –

Topic: Trinitarian Ethics: Gender, Neighbors, Language

Reading: Deddo, Gary W. “The Trinity and Gender: Theological Reflections on the Differences of Divine and Human Persons” (on reserve) 20 pp.

Deddo, “Neighbors in Racial Reconciliation” (on reserve) 19 pp.

Deddo, Gary W. "Jesus' Paradigm for Relating Experience to Language About God." (on reserve) 19 pp.

Roland Frye, "Language for God and Feminist Language: Problems and Principles" (on reserve) 28 pp.

Lecture: Trinitarian Ethics

Add to the Forums your Question or Comments by Friday 10 pm, responses by Sunday, 6 pm.

WEEK 10 –

Topic: Worship, the Church and the Trinity

Reading: (90 pp. total)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life*, Chap. 1, (on reserve, 32 pp.)

J. B. Torrance, *Worship Community*, Chaps 1 & 2, (on reserve, 58 pp.)

Lecture: The Trinity, Church and Worship and Two Diagrams

Add to the Forums your Question or Comments by Friday 10 pm, responses by Sunday, 6 pm.

WEEK 11 – Easter Week, nothing due

WEEK 12 –

Submit Reading Notebook by Wednesday, 11:59 pm

Complete Reflection Assignment 1 by Saturday, 11:59 pm

Prepare for Exam

WEEK 13 –

Complete Reflection Assignment 2 by Wednesday, 11:59 pm

Complete Reflection Assignment 3 and submit by Saturday, 11:59 pm

Prepare for Exam

Final Exam available first thing on Friday morning of this week.

WEEK 14 –

The Exam will be available, on Friday of the previous week. It must be submitted by 11:59 pm on Monday of this week.

Assignments, estimated hours, and grade weighting

Assignment	Hours *	Percentage of grade
Watching video and listening to audio	2	
Reading the syllabus and lectures (180 pp. @ 12 pp. / hr)	15	
Reading the textbooks (650 pp. @ 10 pp. / hr.)	65	
Reading additional website “on reserve” documents	6-8	
Completing Reading Notebook (on <i>all</i> reading, inclu. extra)	20	30
Reading Discussion/Posting responses (Forums)	15	25
Studying for the exam	8	
Taking the final exam (on lectures & reading)	3	30
Writing reflection papers (2-3 hrs. x 3)	6-9	15
Total – about 10.5-11 hours each week	140- 145	100

* Please note that this is a *rough* estimate. A student who reads quickly may be slow in writing papers, and vice versa. Some students will complete the course requirements in less total time, and some will take more time. These are estimates for the hypothetical “average” student.