

The Doctrine of the Trinity (THEO6318)
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
Division of Theological and Historical Studies
Fall, 2021 Fridays, 8:00-10:50 a.m. (TBD)

Tyler R. Wittman

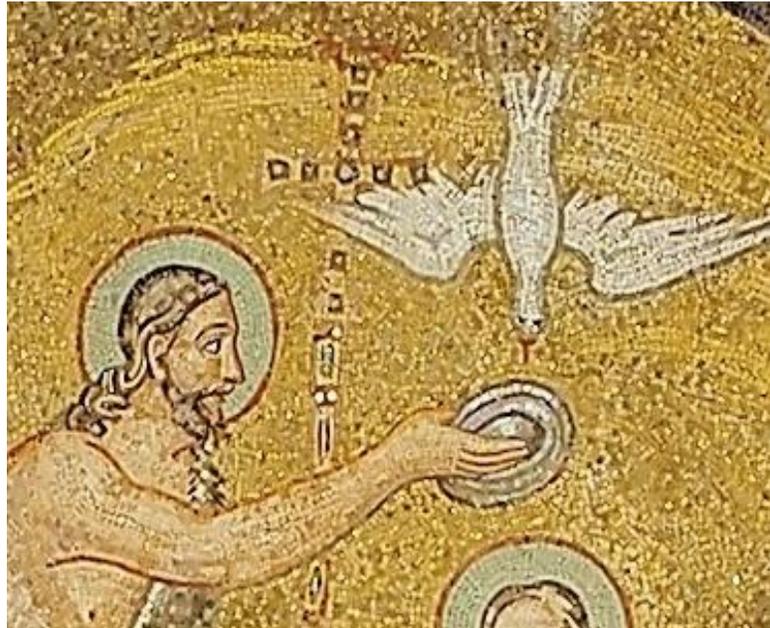
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Mosaic in the Baptistry of the Orthodox, Ravenna, Italy (late 4th century)

'...the whole knowledge of faith involves these two things, namely, the divinity of the Trinity and the humanity of Christ' - Thomas Aquinas

I. MISSION STATEMENT

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Leavell College prepare servants to walk with Christ, proclaim His truth, and fulfill His mission.

II. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the distinctively Christian doctrine of the Trinity and its implications for belief and practice. Students will explore the biblical foundations of the issue, become familiar the historical development of trinitarian doctrine, interact with the thought of past and present Christian theologians, and construct their own understanding of this crucial doctrine. This course also has an apologetic focus, equipping students to respond to religious sects that deny or misrepresent this central tenet of historic Christianity.¹

¹ The professor recommends either Scott Swain, *The Trinity: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2020) or Gilles Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to the Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God* (Catholic University of America Press, 2011) as an introduction to the course contents.

III. COURSE TEACHING METHODOLOGY

As an elective course, class time will consist primarily of seminar discussions of the week's reading led by the professor. Select lectures on various topics will supplement these discussions throughout the term. A critical portion of our time will be spent digesting half of Augustine's classic text, *De trinitate*, together. This course requires students to read the assigned texts carefully, take notes, and participate in critical discussion during class. As always, effort and learning go hand in hand.

IV. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. *Understanding*

- Demonstrate understanding of the biblical bases, historical development, and systematic significance of trinitarian theology.
- Students should be able to communicate this doctrine in their particular ministry calling and context.

2. *Transferable skills*

- Students should show a capacity for attentive and reflective reading of ancient and modern texts.
- Students should demonstrate a capacity to analyze concepts and arguments.
- Students should demonstrate an ability to formulate arguments and articulate critical judgments, both orally and in writing.
- Students should demonstrate an ability to engage in and profit from group discussion.

V. COURSE GUIDELINES

1. ***Academic Misconduct.*** NOBTS has a no tolerance policy for plagiarism. Plagiarism in certain cases may result in expulsion from the seminary. See the NOBTS Student Handbook for definition, penalties, and policies associated with plagiarism.
2. ***Technical Assistance.*** For assistance with any matters related to technology, please consult the Information Technology Center (504-816-8180; itcsupport@nobts.edu; <https://www.nobts.edu/itc>) or the following email addresses, where relevant:
 - a. Selfserve@nobts.edu - Email for technical questions/support requests with the Selfserve.nobts.edu site (Access to online registration, financial account, online transcript, etc.)
 - b. BlackboardHelpDesk@nobts.edu - Email for technical questions/support requests with the Blackboard Learning Management System.
3. ***Assignments and Attendance.*** Assignments are not optional: to pass, students must complete all assignments and watch all the uploaded lectures. *These are minimum expectations, and do not guarantee a passing grade* - but no one has ever failed one of my classes who has turned in all their assignments and done their best.
4. ***Writing.*** NOBTS maintains a [Writing Center](#) designed to improve English writing at the graduate level. Students can receive writing guides, tips, and valuable information to help in

becoming a better writer. A copy of the approved NOBTS Style Guide can be found online at [the Writing Center's page on the seminary website](#).

5. **Technology.**² Digital devices are prohibited in the classroom (laptops, tablets, phones of any sort, recording devices, etc). This guideline might appear draconian, but it exists strictly for the benefit of everyone involved. Though many may feel that their use of technology makes them better, more efficient scholars, the [best research](#) says that [it does not](#). In fact, studies show that it significantly impairs your learning and [the learning of others around you](#). Taking notes by hand [improves recall](#) and apprehension, as does [reading on paper and not on screens](#). During class, phones will be completely silenced. Even then, if you are dependent on your smartphone, its mere presence – even if powered off – [has been proven to diminish your cognitive capacities](#). All that to say, we will use our short time together to practice a little technological asceticism. Computers are obviously allowed for students attending class remotely, but only to connect to class.
 - a. In accordance with this stipulation, you are required to have physical copies of the course texts; e-books are not allowed.
 - b. Students should use standard tools (pen and paper) for notetaking, even when attending lectures remotely through a computer.
 - c. Recording is prohibited, as is sharing course content through any platform (like social media).

VI. TEXTBOOKS

1. Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2010).
2. Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, vol. 2, *Faith in the Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019).
3. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering, *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
You will read about half of this (excellent) resource, so you may wish to purchase it. However, it will be on course reserve in the library.
4. Student Choice (select only *one*):
 - a. Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*, 2nd edition (Crossway, 2017).
Sanders is one of the most capable trinitarian theologians among evangelicals. This introductory-level book offers a fulsome account of why the Trinity matters to Christian life and faith, and how it connects to basic practices like prayer and biblical study.
 - b. Fred Sanders, *Fountain of Salvation: Trinity and Soteriology* (Eerdmans, 2021).
This volume is the most advanced of the three options, but remains very accessible. It consists of several essays on how the Trinity is the bedrock of the Christian doctrine of salvation and the realities it embraces, such as, atonement, ecclesiology, and the Christian life.

² I have adapted and expanded this section mostly from Prof. Alan Jacobs at Baylor University.

5. Additional readings (many of which will be provided either as PDFs on Blackboard, handouts in class, or course reserves in the library).
 - a. Tertullian, [*Against Praxeas*](#), trans. Ernest Evans (London: SPCK, 1948), §§1-30.
Follow link to online transcription. Also available in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3.
 - b. Yeago, David S. "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma: A Contribution to the Recovery of Theological Exegesis," *Pro Ecclesia* 3.2 (1994): 152-64.
 - c. Rowe, C. Kavin. "Biblical Pressure and Trinitarian Hermeneutics," *Pro Ecclesia* 3 11.3 (2002): 295-312.
 - d. Text of the Fourth Lateran Council, from Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals* (Latin-English). Edited by Peter Hünermann. 43rd edition (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012).
 - e. Thomas Aquinas, [*Summa theologiae*](#), prima pars (very short selections from his treatment of trinitarian doctrine).
 - f. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 3 vols., trans. Fabian Larcher and James A. Weisheipl (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), Chapter 1, lecture 1 (vol. 1, pp. 12-30).
 - g. DiNoia, J. A. "Knowing and Naming the Triune God: The Grammar of Christian Confession," in *Speaking the Christian God: The Holy Trinity and the Challenge of Feminism*, ed. Alvin Kimel, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 162-87.
 - h. Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), chapter 5 (pp. 259-336).

VII. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

You may earn up to 100 points in this class through the following assignments:

- a. Reading and Participation: 20 %
 - b. Notes: (pass/fail)
 - c. Analytical Outline: 30%
 - d. Research Paper: 50% (proposal: 5%; final draft: 45%)
1. **Reading & Participation.** At the end of the term, you will submit a statement on Blackboard detailing what reading you have and have not finished reading attentively. This will be combined with an overall assessment of your participation in our seminar discussions. Your overall reading and participation grade will also take account of your notes.
 2. **Notes.** You must take notes of some kind on the assigned primary source readings (Tertullian, Augustine, Aquinas, Maastricht, Pannenberg). I do not anticipate they will always be adequate, much less perfect or exhaustive, or even how your professor takes notes. But unless you take notes, our collective seminar discussions will become very quiet and dull. Take notes, write down questions that come to mind about things you don't understand, things that excite you, or things with which you disagree. These will help us create lively discussion. Generally, notes should focus on the author's main argument, looking at how they are justifying their stances theologically and exegetically,

identifying the main features of the text in question. Or notes may simply be a running commentary on the text that helps you engage in class discussion. You may be asked for some of these notes in lieu of a final exam.

3. **Analytical outline** (due Sept 27) You will write an analytical outline of the assigned readings from Augustine's *De trinitate*, books I through IV (not V-VII). This is one of the most influential and important works written on the doctrine, so it deserves and repays your most careful attentions. The assignment will be somewhat large (anywhere from 8k-20k words), in Times New Roman, 12pt font, single spacing, and in accordance with the Manual of Style. *You should write this assignment gradually while reading the book; if not, you will find yourself drowning.* Ask yourself the following questions as you construct your analytical outline, and prepare for class discussion.³ Be aware that not all these questions will be pertinent to your analytical outline, but they are crucial to have in mind more generally when doing research.
 - a. **Argument.**
 - i. What is the chief argument and how is it constructed? How many discrete sections are there within the text, what's the relation between these, and how do they all add up?
 - ii. What is/are the question(s) to which the argument is an answer?
 - iii. Are there highlights in the argument, moments of particular weight, insight, or weakness?
 - iv. What objections could be raised against it, and how might the author respond?
 - b. **Interpretation.**
 - i. Are there aspects of the argument, or sections of it, that are difficult to understand? If so, what is the most charitable way of reading them?
 - ii. Considering when this was written, are there background arguments or events that might be relevant to understanding the argument's context?
 - c. **Claims.**
 - i. In what ways is the argument successful, and in what ways is it unsuccessful?
 - ii. Are there consequences of the argument that are unexplored or underdeveloped? Why might that be?

In particular, as you construct your outline I want you to show me that you understand how Augustine weaves together the theological, exegetical, and moral dimensions of his inquiry. What are the stakes, in his mind, of a particular line of thought? How does he approach Scripture and how does he gradually build his case for the doctrine of the Trinity? What functions does the trinitarian theology have for discipleship? Such topics will make great fodder for in-class discussion.

4. **Research paper.** The primary assignment in this class, and half your grade. Papers may be either historical-theological (focusing on a particular figure) or systematic-theological

³ I have adapted these criteria from Prof. Kevin Hector at the University of Chicago.

(focusing on a particular topic), or even exegetical (applying what you learn to an exegetical question). But all papers must be well-researched, set forth a clearly defined thesis, substantiate it, and defend it against objections. All topics *must* be approved by your professor.

- a. **Proposal (due Oct 18)**. Before writing your essay, you will submit a proposal that includes a first draft of the following:
 - i. A narrowed-down proposed topic, and the reason you would like to explore this issue.
 - ii. An outline with headings, subheadings, and brief descriptions of what materials/discussions you suspect they will include.
 - iii. A working bibliography of at least eight sources. Choose your sources carefully and ensure that you have enough primary sources to prevent your paper from being a distillation of or commentary on other people's thoughts.
- b. **Final Draft (due Dec 6)**. Building off of your preliminary research for your proposal, and the feedback you receive from me and your classmates, you will write a full dress version of your argument. The final draft will be graded according to criteria discussed in class and the documents distributed on Canvas. The expectation is that it is a *final*, not *first* draft. That is, you must write it with sufficient time to review it, iron out grammatical and argumentative infelicities, and edit it for submission as a final draft.
- c. **Additional Instructions:**
 - i. You should use between 8-15 sources (which you've actually read carefully) for your paper. No more, no less. You won't need more than that if you select the right sources and engage them deeply. I am happy to recommend a book/article or two here and there when I can see that you are working hard, but *I will not do your research for you*.
 - ii. Your paper should be: 2500 to 3000 words (include word count on title page), double-spaced, Times New Roman font in 12-pt, and (more or less) in accordance with the Style Guide. Footnotes contribute to your total word count.
 - iii. You may ***not*** recycle anything you've previously written and put it into your paper. Papers must be entirely new, written from the ground up, and *specifically for this class*.
 - iv. Every paper must have an abstract of 100-150 words, presented on a separate page between your title page and the beginning of your essay. If you find yourself unable to present the point of your paper concisely, then you don't know your own argument (indeed, you might not have one).

VIII. EVALUATION OF GRADE

1. The grading scale will follow institutional guidelines.

2. Late submissions will be docked five percent every day they are late. Please submit assignments on time. Mysterious ‘problems’ with an internet connection, busyness with outside responsibilities and assignments in other courses, a penchant for perfectionism, and so on, are not excuses.
3. There will not be any extra credit. Neither will there be any extension of paper length/due date, save for truly extenuating circumstances.
4. I typically err in your favor when assigning grades. If, nevertheless, you feel that I have erred entirely in assigning your grade, please take the following steps: (a) wait at least one week before taking action, and give your paper a careful re-read to see if you feel the same way; (b) keep in mind that if I reconsider your grade, that can cut both ways (I may discover that I was *too* generous the first time around); (c) as specifically as possible, set down an argument in writing as to why your grade merits reconsideration.

IX. ESTIMATED COURSE OUTLINE AND READING SCHEDULE

Key

DT: Augustine, *De trinitate* (DT I = *De trinitate*, book I)

STh: Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (STh Ia.29 = First part, question 29; Ia.38.7 = question 38, article 7).

PVM: Peter Van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology* (PVM 25 = chapter 25).

OHT: *The Oxford Handbook of The Trinity* (OHT 5 = chapter 5; OHT 16-20 = chapters 16-20)

* Assigned readings marked by an asterisk require the completion of a précis.

Date	Topic	Assignment(s) Due
Week 1 (Aug 20)	Introduction Lecture: The One God of Israel ⁴	a. PVM 8 b. OHT 2-3
Week 2 (Aug 27)	Biblical Foundations Lecture: Biblical Reasoning	a. Rowe, Yeago b. OHT 4-5
Week 3 (Sept 3)	Pre-Nicene Trinitarianism	a. Tertullian b. OHT, 7
Week 4 (Sept 10)	Augustine I: Twofold Form of the Son The Trinity’s Inseparable Operations	a. DT I (65-96)* b. Sermon 52 PDF
Week 5 (Sept 17)	Augustine II: The Question of Inequality The Question of Christophanies	a. DT II (97-126)* b. DT III (127-51)*

⁴ Optional, recommended reading PVM 6.

Week 6 (Sept 24)	Augustine III: Missions, Processions, and the Question of Order	a. <i>DT</i> IV (152-85)*
Week 7 (Oct 1)	Augustine IV: Absolute and Relative Predication	a. <i>DT</i> V-VIII (189-236)
Week 8 (Oct 8)	Fall Break (No class)	a. <i>OHT</i> , 7-11 b. <i>OHT</i> , 12-16
Week 9 (Oct 15)	Scholastic Trinitarianism I: Processions, Relations, and Persons	a. <i>STh</i> Ia.27.1,3,5 b. <i>STh</i> Ia.28.3-4 c. <i>STh</i> Ia.29.4 d. <i>OHT</i> 26
Week 10 (Oct 22)	Scholastic Trinitarianism II: Essentialism and Personalism	a. Lateran IV b. <i>STh</i> Ia.39.1 c. <i>PVM</i> 24
Week 11 (Oct 29)	Scholastic Trinitarianism III: Patrology & Filiology	a. Aquinas, <i>John</i> 1:1 b. <i>PVM</i> , 25-26 c. <i>OHT</i> 27-28
Week 12 (Nov 5)	Scholastic Trinitarianism IV: Pneumatology	a. <i>STh</i> Ia.36.2-3 b. <i>PVM</i> 27 c. <i>OHT</i> 29
Week 13 (Nov 12)	Modern Trinitarianism	a. Pannenberg
Week 14 (Nov 19)	Research Day (Professor at Conference)	a. <i>OHT</i> , 18-23 b. <i>OHT</i> , 32
Week 15 (Dec 3)	Contemporary Issues Lecture: Modern Misuses of the Trinity	a. <i>OHT</i> , chs. 38-39 b. DiNoia

X. SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY

In addition to the required texts and readings listed above, the following are recommended sources.

Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003-2008.

Beckwith, Carl L. *The Holy Trinity*. Vol. 3 of *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics*. Ft. Wayne, IN: The Luther Academy, 2016.

Cambridge Companion to the Trinity, edited by Peter C. Phan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic, edited by Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain. Baker Academic, 2016.

Emery, Gilles. *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011.

_____. *The Trinitarian Theology of St Thomas Aquinas*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

Holmes, Stephen R. *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2012.

Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction, edited by Kelly M. Kapic and Bruce L. McCormack. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012.

Margerie, Bertrand de. *The Christian Trinity in History*. Still River, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1982.

New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic, 2nd ed. Edited by Martin Davie, et al. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016.

The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology, edited by John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Religion Past and Present, edited by Hans Dieter Betz, Don Browning, Bernd Janowski, and Eberhard Jüngel. 14 volumes. Leiden: Brill, 2006-2013.

Sanders, Fred. *The Triune God*. Zondervan, 2016.