
REFORMED  THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
GLOBAL



TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

DR. D. BLAIR SMITH



Course Overview

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Course Description:

00ST6100 Trinitarian Theology, 2 hours
Lecturing Professor and Professor of Record: Dr. D. Blair Smith

Trinitarian faith is vital to the life and health of the church. In this course, we will explore the biblical and theological foundations, historical development, and contemporary approaches to the doctrine of the Trinity. After exploring the exegetical roots of Trinitarian doctrine, we will give special attention to tracing the development of Trinitarian doctrine from the second through fifth centuries. We will then briefly go over developments within the Medieval and Reformation periods, before turning our focus to the variety of approaches revealed in the recent Trinitarian revival.

Course Objectives:

- For the student to grow in love and adoration for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- To become persuaded that Trinitarian faith is vital to the life and health of the Church.
- To better understand the biblical and theological foundations for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.
- To gain a deeper understanding of the historical development of Trinitarian doctrine through an engagement with primary texts (especially from mid-second to early-fifth centuries).
- To become familiar with contemporary approaches to the doctrine of the Trinity.
- To reflect critically on the proper use of Trinitarian doctrine in the life of the Church.
- To better understand the integrative nature of this doctrine and how it relates other key doctrines of our Faith.

Required Textbooks:

Basil the Great. *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. By Stephen Hildebrand. Popular Patristics Series; Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011.

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

Fred Sanders. *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.

Scott R. Swain. *The Trinity: An Introduction*. Short Studies in Systematic Theology; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.

Class Packet on the Trinity (Available on Canvas)

[These books may also be available in ebook format through various retailers]

Online Student Handbook:

The [Online Student Handbook](#) has been designed to assist you in successfully navigating the Distance Education experience, whether you are taking a single course or pursuing a certificate or degree program. In it you will find valuable information, step-by-step instructions, study helps, and essential forms to guide you through every aspect of your distance education opportunity from registration to graduation. Please use this resource as your first-stop reference manual.

Summary of Requirements:

1. Listen to all recorded Lectures
2. Complete all Required Readings
3. Participate in Forum Discussions (with other students and the professor)
4. Complete all 5 Application Assignments (three recorded presentations and two written assignments)
5. Take the Final Exam
6. Submit the Research Paper
7. Submit Reading Report
8. Submit Mentor Report/Course Application Paper

Meet the Professor

Lecturing Professor: and Professor of Record:



Dr. D. Blair Smith is the Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at RTS Charlotte. Blair earned his Th.M. in Theology from Harvard Divinity School, where he wrote his thesis on “Athanasius’s Trinitarian Theology of Redemption, with Special Reference to the Holy Spirit.” He holds a Ph.D. in Historical Theology (Patristics) from Durham University in England under Professor Lewis Ayres, one of the world’s leading patristic scholars. During a portion of his doctoral studies, Blair served as a Research Visitor at The University of Notre Dame. Blair is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America and served for more than seven years as the Pastor of Adult Education at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Bethesda, MD. He also served as a part-time associate Pastor at Michiana Covenant Presbyterian Church near South Bend, IN, preaching throughout the Great Lakes Presbytery of the PCA and ministering to graduate students at Notre Dame. Blair is married to his wife, Lisa, and they have 5 children.



Grades

Forum Discussions (15%):

The student is required to interact in two (2) forums:

1. Student-Professor Posts (15 total posts)
 - A. Personal Introduction Forum: The student is required to post a brief personal introduction to the professor/class. Suggested details include your vocation, where you live, your church background, why you chose RTS, and what you hope to gain through the course (1 required post).
 - B. 5 Topical Discussion Q&A Forums: The student is required to answer each topical discussion question with one (1) response. The professor will acknowledge the student's answer and will follow up with a subsequent question to which the student must also answer with one (1) response. Each topical discussion question, therefore, requires two (2) total posts/responses from the student (Total of 5 forums x 2 posts = 10 total posts).
 - C. Student-Professor Forum: The student is required to post four (4) times in this forum. Posts in this forum should focus on course-related content such as research paper topics, lectures and reading assignments, or other academic issues related to the course.
2. Student-Student Forum (5 total posts)

A post may be either a new topic or a response to an already existing topic.

Examination (Final 20%):

There is one examination for this course. It will cover material from all of the course lectures. Students should use the Lesson Review Questions to assist in studying for the exam. The exam will include identification, short-answer, and essay sections.

The exam for this course is to be taken online in the Learning Management System (LMS). After clicking on the exam link you, will be given detailed instructions about the exam. Please read these instructions carefully before entering the exam. Please note that you are required to have a proctor for all exams. Please see the proctor policy in the Global Student Handbook.

Research Paper (30%):

Students will write a 10-to-15 page double-spaced essay exploring an aspect of Trinitarian theology with proper footnoting and bibliography. See section titled "[Research Paper Instructions](#)" in this syllabus for more detailed instructions on planning and writing your research paper.

Application Assignments (15%):

For this course you are required to submit three recorded presentations and two written assignments.

Presentations:

1. Record yourself giving a 3-5 minute explanation of the trinitarian contour of an old hymn (not one used in the course worship guide). Tailor your presentation toward the

layperson and try to balance exposition with application. You need not read through the entire hymn during your presentation but should reference or quote specific lines/stanzas.

1. Record yourself giving a 3-5 minute explanation of the trinitarian contour of a contemporary hymn/worship song (not one used in the course worship guide). Tailor your presentation toward the layperson and try to balance exposition with application. You need not read through the entire hymn during your presentation but should reference or quote specific lines/stanzas.
1. Record yourself giving a 3-5 minute explanation of the trinitarian contour of a NT passage. Tailor your presentation toward the layperson and try to balance exposition with application. You need not read through the entire passage during your presentation.

*Detailed instructions for uploading your recordings can be found on Canvas.

Written Assignments:

1. Write a 250-350 word reading brief. You may select one of the following options:
 - Pick one reading from the Cappadocian Fathers and select an idea or quote that struck you. Summarize the idea, explain its significance, and offer some critique, if necessary.
 - Consider Gregory of Nazianzus' Third Theological Oration: In sections 19-20 Gregory presses on the need for seemingly paradoxical language about Christ. Why is this necessary? How does this shape how we think of Christ, how we read Scripture, and how we understand God?
2. Write a 250-350 word prayer of invocation for public worship or opening prayer for private worship (please specify which is your aim). We should assume that we, as disciples, need to be taught how to pray (cf. Luke 11:1). Therefore you are encouraged to draw heavily from Scripture in writing your prayer.

Reading Report (15%):

The student must complete all of the required reading. Reading assignments are broken down week by week within the LMS. The Reading Report will indicate the amount of required reading that has been completed during the semester and must be filled out and submitted at the end of the course with your final exam and Research Paper. .

Mentor Report OR Course Application Paper (5%):

If you are enrolled in an **RTS Global** degree or certificate program submit a mentor report. Every portion of the form (goals, summaries, assessments, and signatures) should be filled out completely by both the student and the mentor to receive full credit. You can download the Mentor Report form in your Canvas classroom. See specific instructions for this assignment in Canvas.

If you are receiving your degree through another **RTS campus** (Orlando, Jackson, Charlotte, et. al.), or special student (e.g. from another seminary), submit a 250-word summary of how you perceive what you have learned in this course will fit into the objectives you have for your ministry, your educational goals, or other objectives you wish to achieve in life. Course

Application Papers (CAP) that fall well-short of 250 words will receive a grade deduction. See specific instructions for this assignment in Canvas.

Assignments:

Best practice for your time management is for you to submit all assignments at the end of the week in which they fall, using the upload links provided in the LMS. All work must be submitted by midnight of the course end date, per your course start letter. You are responsible for turning in all assignments on time; no late submissions are permitted. Any student who needs an extension must get approval from the Registrar prior to that time.

Contact Information:

Reformed Theological Seminary, Global Education

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Charlotte, NC 28226

Campus: (704) 366-4853

Toll Free: (800) 227-2013

E-mail: dess@rts.edu

Web site: rts.edu/campuses/online/



Lessons

Lesson One

The Importance of Trinitarian Theology

Lesson Two

Trinitarian Revival?

Lesson Three

The Doctrine of the Trinity in Scripture

Lesson Four

Pre-Nicene Trinitarian Theology, Part I

Lesson Five

Pre-Nicene Trinitarian Theology, Part II

Lesson Six

Fourth Century Trinitarian Theology,
Part I

Lesson Seven

Fourth Century Trinitarian Theology, Part II

Lesson Eight

Augustine's Trinitarian Theology

Lesson Nine

Medieval and Reformation Trinitarian
Theology

Lesson Ten

Trinitarian Theology and Modern
Theology

Lesson Eleven

The Trinity and Salvation

Lesson Twelve

The Trinity, the World, and Society

Research Paper Instructions

Students will write a 10-to-15 page double-spaced essay exploring an aspect of Trinitarian theology with appropriate footnoting and bibliography. Make sure you (1) present a clear thesis; (2) have a proper introduction and conclusion and a clear structure for your essay; (3) deal with the relevant information competently and fairly to all sides; (4) where necessary, engage primary-sources; (5) offer critical analysis (and not merely summary) of the positions and views you engage; (6) where relevant, consider the implications and significance of your investigation for the life of the church; (7) use Turabian formatting; and (8) use at least 10 sources. Students can pick one of the topics below or write on a topic of their choosing as long as it is agreed upon beforehand with the professor:

1. Trinity and the Old Testament
2. Trinity in the Gospel of John, the writings of Paul, or the Book of Revelation
3. Trinity in pre-Nicene Christianity
4. The Holy Spirit in Athanasius' Letters to Serapion and/or Didymus the Blind's On the Holy Spirit
5. The Deity of Christ in Athanasius' Contra Arianos
6. Trinity in Gregory Nazianzus's Theological Orations
7. Trinity in St. Hilary's De Trinitate
8. Trinity in Basil the Great's Against Eunomius
9. The Holy Spirit as 'the bond of charity' in St. Augustine's De Trinitate
10. Trinity in Richard of St. Victor
11. Trinity in Thomas Aquinas
12. Trinity in John Calvin, John Owen, or Jonathan Edwards
13. Trinity in Moltmann, Pannenberg, Robert Jenson, or Catherine LaCugna.
14. The Holy Spirit and Missions
15. Trinitarian versus Unitarian Worship
16. Trinitarian spirituality and Campus Ministry
17. An evaluation of 20th and 21st century "social trinitarianisms"
18. An evaluation of the relationship between a non-Trinitarian Faith (e.g., Judaism, Islam,

Hinduism, etc.) or a heretical offshoot of Christianity (e.g., Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, Oneness Pentecostals, etc.) and the orthodox Trinitarian Faith

s. An evaluation of the recent and ongoing debate within evangelicalism over the supposed "eternal subordination of the Son". See professor for sources.

Doctrine of the Trinity

D. Blair Smith

<u>MDiv Student Learning Outcomes</u>		<u>Rubric</u> ➤ Strong ➤ Moderate ➤ Minimal ➤ None	<u>Mini-Justification</u>
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks.	Strong	Discussions, application assignments, and a research paper will all enable students to articulate their understanding of Christian teaching on the Trinity.
Scripture	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Strong	Students will learn the biblical basis for the doctrine of the Trinity, be equipped to read Scripture theologically, and learn how the doctrine of the Trinity helps is rightly read Scripture.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	The focus of the course will be on the early development of Trinitarian theology as well as the recent “revival” of interest, but we will examine developments and articulations from the Reformation era and within Reformed theology more generally.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student’s sanctification.	Strong	Students will understand the Trinitarian context for our sanctification and how vital the Trinitarian faith is to the life of the church. They will also learn how Trinitarian theology is abused in spiritually harmful ways.
Desire for Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God.	Moderate	The doctrine of the Trinity is essential to a Christian worldview and this course will motivate students to see all of life and theology in light of the Trinity.
Winsomely Reformed/ Evangelistic	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Strong	Students will read widely in this course and gain an appreciation for the breadth and depth of teaching on the Trinity within the Christian tradition, as well as appreciate areas where Christians have had disagreements.
Preach	Ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Minimal	There will be opportunities for students to explore how preaching can be more Trinitarian.
Worship	Knowledgeable of historic and modern Christian-worship forms; and ability to construct and skill to lead a worship service.	Moderate	Students will learn of creeds, forms, and hymnody used in worship that draw attention to the Triune God.
Shepherd	Ability to shepherd the local congregation: aiding in spiritual maturity; promoting use of gifts and callings; and encouraging a concern for non-Christians, both in America and worldwide.	None	