

**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND ADVANCE READING ASSIGNMENT**

**ST 675**  
**“The Trinity: The Distinctive  
Christian Doctrine of God”**  
**(June 16 – 20, 2008)**

Instructor

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Credits

3 units

**I. Course Description**

This course outlines the biblical teaching on God as one and three and traces how the *doctrine* of the Trinity was formulated in subsequent history to ensure that fundamental biblical teaching was not eclipsed. Attention is also given to the rich discussion on the doctrine of the Trinity in the last forty years and to the practical outcomes that a right doctrine of God suggests. The course aims to explain and illustrate how Systematic Theology is ‘done’ by outlining the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, the most fundamental of all doctrines.

## II. Course Objectives

On completion of this subject students should be able to:

- a) Outline the rich Biblical foundation out of which the doctrine of the Trinity arises.
- b) Explain the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity.
- c) Appreciate the meaning and significance of key Trinitarian terms used by ancient and modern theologians.
- d) Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of major formulations of the doctrine.
- e) Understand how the doctrine of the Trinity informs and impacts on all other doctrines.
- f) Appreciate how the doctrine of the Trinity relates to the life, ministry and witness of the Church.

## III. Course Requirements.

### A. Pre-seminar work.

If your surname begins with any letter from A to L you are to read before the seminar begins Athanasius' "Against the Arians", books 1 and 2 and come with a precise/synopsis of 700 words, typed in double space.

If your surname begins with any letter from M to Z you are to read Augustine, *The Trinity*, Books 1 and 4 and come with a precise/synopsis of 750 words, typed in double space.

To get an overview of the doctrine of the Trinity students are to read before the seminar begins Olson, Roger and Hall, Christopher, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

B. B. Warfield, "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Biblical Foundations*, (London, Tyndale, 1958). This excellent essay can be found on the web.

Giles, Kevin. *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2006. (My earlier book, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IVP, 2002) is not set reading. It is in three roughly equal parts, one on the Trinity, one on the subordination of women and one on slavery. This gives my initial thinking on the Trinity and my case for the emancipation of women.)

Each book or article read is to be reviewed should include description (what does it say?), interpretation (what does it mean?), analysis (what its worth?) and application (How will I use it?). The review should be typed, double-spaced and no more than 700 words per book or 300 for the Warfield essay.

### B. In Seminar Course Outline

In the seminar the biblical and historical development of the doctrine will be outlined sequentially and modern developments explained. The course is heavy on content but there will be lots of opportunity for discussion and questions. Athanasius and

Augustine will be discussed in the light of the set reading and written reviews. The lectures will be as follows:

- a) An examination and assessment of the biblical evidence for the Trinity with special reference to triadic formulations; the pre-existence and deity of the Son, the deity and personhood of the Holy Spirit, the ordering of the divine three, the Son's obedience and divine unity.
- b) The development of the doctrine in history, focusing on the contribution of the Apologists, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, the Cappadocian Fathers, Augustine, and Calvin. As background to the fourth century contributions to this doctrine the teaching of Arius and the later Arians is given.
- c) Three key issues: Who or what is first in the Trinity? How are the divine persons to be distinguished? And is the Son eternally subordinated in authority?
- d) The Eastern Orthodox perspective and the *Filioque* clause, with special reference to the contribution of John Zizioulas.
- e) Modern presentations of the doctrine of the Trinity beginning with Karl Barth, and summed up for orthodoxy by T. F. Torrance.
- f) The immanent-economic Trinity debate with special reference to Karl Rahner.
- g) Social and communal doctrines of the Trinity with special reference to Jurgen Moltmann and Millard Erickson.
- h) The Trinity as a model for human liberation and for ecclesial communion with special reference to the work of Leonard Boff and Miroslav Volf.

Each day begins with Morning Prayer in the Chapel at 8.30, except Wednesday when there is a Eucharist. As a result, the morning session on Wednesday is likely to be 10am-1pm, and the afternoon session 2-3.30pm.

### **C. Post Seminar.**

Two essays, 8 – 10 pages each, one to be taken from each list.

1. Outline and critically evaluate either Athanasius' or Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity.
2. Why do some theologians insist that the Father is the *Monarche* (sole source) of the Son and the Spirit? What problems do this idea raise and what alternatives are there?
3. How may the divine three be differentiated without falling into the errors of modalism, tritheism or subordination?
4. What is Rahner's rule all about? What is he saying and is it important?
5. What is the "social doctrine" of the Trinity. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this "model" of the Trinity?

### **Questions with ecclesiological and missiological application.**

6. Is the Son of God eternally subordinated in function and authority? What difference does our answer to this question make to women, especially in relation to their ministry as church leaders?

7. Miroslav Volf in his work *After Our Likeness* says “Today, the thesis that the ecclesial communion should correspond to the trinitarian communion enjoys the status of an almost self-evident proposition.” Critically discuss how the doctrine of the Trinity can inform ecclesiology.
8. Leonardo Boff argues that the doctrine of the Trinity is a charter for human liberation in both the church and the world. Outline his case and critically assess it.

**Dates due:** Essay 1 25 July 2008  
Essay 2 25 July 2008

Please ensure the assignments are submitted on the dates specified. If illness or some family or personal emergency occurs that makes this impossible, please contact me as soon as possible. Otherwise, late submissions may be penalised with a reduced grade.

**Submission:** Essays are to be submitted on line to [kngiles@gmail.com](mailto:kngiles@gmail.com) as a Word attachment. They will be returned by email.  
Hard mail address if needed. Rev. Dr Kevin Giles, 7 Crossman Court, Box Hill South, Victoria, 3128, Australia. Phone 03 9888 8291

#### **IV. COURSE EVALUATION**

1. Punctual attendance in class and participation in class discussions will be expected. This will count for 20% of the final grade.
2. The pre-seminar book reviews will count for 20% of the final grade.
3. The two essays will count for 60% (30% each)

#### **Grades**

Grades will be given as follows.

- A (95+) Work in this category will show full and informed coverage of the topic. It reveals awareness of different views and interpretations and the ability to assess and evaluate them. There will be close familiarity with primary and secondary literature and detailed and accurate references. The structure will be clear and coherent and will show development of ideas. There will be mature comment and analysis and an awareness of how the subject fits into the wider picture. The style will show a ‘sparkle’ and lightness of touch, which reflects a genuine engagement with the material.
- A- (90-94) This is still excellent work, and will show many of the above qualities, but without the ‘sparkle’ which marks out scripts getting the top award.
- B+ (87-89) Work in this category will still show good coverage of the material and an awareness of different views. There will be a clear structure and evidence of the ability to assess viewpoints critically. Coverage will be adequate and comment competent without being outstanding.

- B (83-86) This kind of script will offer less incisive analysis of differing viewpoints and less full coverage. Comment and reflection will be adequate but lacking in the penetrating insights of more highly assessed work.
- B- (80-82) Like category B, this work will show reasonable competence. It is still good work, but it will lack sparkle and show the ability to summarise the opinions of others rather than display originality and unusual insight. It will be accurate and coherent in its structure.
- C+ (77-79) This category is marked by reasonable coverage, some awareness of differing views and some ability to comment. It will lack real analytical power and a wide awareness of the place of the subject in a wider context. There will be no serious inaccuracies or gross irrelevance but the abiding impression will be of adequacy rather than competence and of ability to summarise content rather than astuteness in analysis.
- C (73-76) Scripts in this category will show reasonable accuracy, basic knowledge of the material and an attempt to structure this, but beyond that will have few positive merits. Scripts will be relevant without imagination or real ability to analyse and comment on differing viewpoints.
- C- (70-72) This is the lowest category which is deemed a 'pass'. Work assessed at this grade will show just adequate knowledge of the material, some elementary structure but no comment or analysis.
- D (60-69) Work given this category falls short of the criteria outlined above. Both coverage and relevance will be unsatisfactory and there will be a lack of analysis and comment. Style will be pedestrian and the structure lacking in coherence.
- F (0-59) Work of this grade will show a complete failure. Scripts may be far too short, display complete irrelevance and gross inaccuracy, as well as complete ignorance of opposing viewpoints. Serious failures in grammar, spelling etc. might well be further evidence of work at this level.

This is intended only as a guide rather than as a set of rules. I trust, however, it will indicate what a particular grade means and suggest what steps might be taken to achieve higher grades.

## **V. Course Texts.**

### **Primary Sources**

Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, in *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, P Schaff and H. Wace eds, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 4, 303-447  
 Augustine *De Trinitate*, translated as *The Trinity*. The best translation is by E. Hill (Brooklyn: New City, 1991). However an earlier translation can be found in the *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3. Both texts in the Eerdman's editions are on the web.

### **Recommended texts.**

Torrance, T. F., *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being in Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996). – more doctrinal/theological

Ayres, Lewis, *Nicea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 2003) – more historical.

These are the two best books I believe on the Trinity but they are not light reading.

Fortman, E. J., *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Hutchinson, 1972).

Grenz, Stanley, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004).

Erickson, M. J., *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

Boff, Leonardo, *Trinity and Society* Translated by P. Burns (New York: Orbis, 1988).

Letham, Robert, *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology and Worship* (Phillipsburg, P. & R, 2004)

LaCugna, Catherine, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).

Moltmann, J., *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, Translated by Kohl, M. (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

Torrance, A.J., *Persons in Communion: Trinitarian Descriptions and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

Zizioulas, John, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

Bray, Gerald, *The Doctrine of God* (Leicester, IVP, 1993).

de Margerie, B. *The Christian Trinity in History*, Translated by Fortman, E.J. (Still River, MA.: St. Bede's Publications, 1982).

Wainwright, A.W., *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1969).

Karkkainen, Veli-Matti, *The Trinity in Global Perspective* (Westminster/John Knox, Louisville, 2007).

Weinandy, T. G. *Athanasius: A theological introduction* (Hampshire, Ashgate, 2007).

Hall, C. A. *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 2002)

### **On the Trinity as a model or image of the church**

Volf, Miroslav, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

Giles, Kevin, *What on Earth is the Church* (SPCK/Collins/IVP, 1995) chapter 10.

Hunt, Anne, *Trinity* (Maryknoll: New York, 2006) chapter 6.

Fiddes, S Paul, *Participating in God* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2000).

Cunningham, David, *These Three are One* (London, Blackwell, London, 1998).

### **VI. Course Instructor.**

Kevin Giles served as an ordained minister in the Anglican Church for 38 years. He is married to Lynley. They have four grown up children and nine grandchildren. Kevin holds a doctorate in New Testament studies and has published ten books and over sixty scholarly articles in journals, symposiums and dictionaries. In recent years he has written and lectured extensively on the Trinity. Since relinquishing his parish responsibilities in 2006 Kevin has been busy writing, lecturing, and helping in his son-in-law's church in the outer suburbs of Melbourne.