

## Assemblies of God Theological Seminary

THEM 639 The Doctrine of the Trinity

October 22-26, 2007

Professor Frank D. Macchia, D. Theol.

### **I. Course Description:**

This course has as its goal an exploration of the doctrine of the Trinity as a contemporary issue in theology, including Pentecostal theology (the so-called “Jesus only” debate). The course will specifically involve a discussion of the biblical sources, historical development, and contemporary interpretations of the doctrine of the Trinity. Attention will also be paid to the significance of the Trinity for Christian life and mission.

### **II. Course Objectives:**

- A. To gain an awareness of the biblical foundations of the doctrine of the Trinity.
- B. To explore the historical development of the doctrine in both the Eastern and Western Church.
- C. To gain an appreciation for the spectrum of opinion among contemporary theologians concerning the Trinity.
- D. To look particularly at the Trinitarian issue as a challenge to Pentecostal theology.
- E. To recognize the significance of Trinitarian theology for Christian life and mission.

### **III. Textbooks:**

David Bernard, *The Oneness of God* (Series in Pentecostal Theology, Vol. 1) (Word Aflame, 1986).

Gregory Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity* (Baker, 1992).

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

Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology And Worship* (P & R Pub., 2005).

*One additional book to be chosen by the student (see IV. A-2 below)*

### **IV. Assignments:**

#### A. Pre-Course:

Come to class on October 22<sup>nd</sup> prepared to do the following:

1) Ten-page summary essay on major Trinitarian issues:

Assume an editor of a religious encyclopedia asks you to write a ten-page essay on the major issues involved historically in the doctrine of the Trinity. You will then read thoroughly the books by Letham (*The Holy Trinity*) and Grenz (*Rediscovering the Triune God*) to use as resources in writing the essay. Read Letham first, then Grenz. Select from these two books the most important issues to expose to your readers. Be concise but also clear and substantial. We will also involve these books in our class discussions.

2) A 20 minute class presentation on a book by a Trinitarian theologian:

Select a book by one theologian whose thoughts on the Trinity you would like to present in class. You MUST clear your choice with the professor (fmacchia@vanguard.edu). Choices are approved on a first-come, first served, basis, so contact the professor as soon as possible with your choice (suggest three choices in order of preference). The student will present and evaluate the major ideas of the book in class. The major choice of the book should be selected from the following list (students may ask permission for a book not listed):

Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics*, Vol.1, pt.1, the section on the Trinity in the latter half of this volume). Barth is a great Protestant theologian who did much to revive interest in the doctrine of the Trinity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is not an easy read but it is provocative!

Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Unity*. Readable. Boff is a liberation theologian who connects the Trinity with human community.

David Coffey, *Deus Trinitas: The Doctrine of the Triune God*. Coffey paves an interesting path between the Western and Eastern models of the Trinity. Dense and rich.

Catherine Lacugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (Harper San Francisco, 1993) (only Part 2 need be read, from p.209 to the end of the book). A readable guide to the Trinity from a relational perspective.

Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. Moltmann advocates for a social doctrine of the Trinity in which we start with God's relationality and not with God's Oneness.

Lesslie Newbigen, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (Wipf & Stock, 2006). Readable and rich guide to the connection between the Trinity and the mission of the church.

Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*. Rahner is a Catholic theologian who came up with the famous axiom that "the imminent Trinity is the economic Trinity," meaning that God is in Godself exactly as God is revealed in history. Not an easy read but well worth it.

Stephen Seamans, *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service* (Intervarsity Press, 2005). A readable guide to the Trinitarian structure of Christian ministry.

Thomas Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (T & T Clark, 2002). A rich theoretical discussion of Trinitarian theology by a Scottish theologian.

Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Crossway, 2005). Readable guide to a relational understanding of the Trinity.

#### B. Course:

Come to all of the class sessions prepared for discussion (especially by having read the books by Letham and Grenz) and to take thorough notes.

#### C. Post-Course:

Two further papers are required of all students:

##### 1) Five-page critique:

Read David Bernard's book, *The Oneness of God* and Gregory Boyd's book, *The Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity*. Then write a five-page (double spaced) critique of Bernard's book, using Boyd as a resource. The student is not to just repeat Boyd's criticisms of Oneness theology but rather to concentrate on Bernard's arguments and make his or her own judgments.

##### 2) Research paper on selected topic or biblical text:

Write a research paper on a specific Trinitarian topic or biblical text. Examples will be discussed in class. Due date will be fixed in class as well. **Note: Masters students will write a ten-page research paper. D.Min. students will write a twenty-page paper.**

#### **V. Evaluation:**

Ten-page summary paper on Trinitarian issues: 300 pts.

Class presentation on Trinitarian book: 200 pts.

Five-page critique of Bernard's book: 100 pts.

Research paper: 300 pts.

Participation in class: 100 pts.