

## COURSE SYLLABUS

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# The Doctrine of the Trinity

Course Lecturer: Peter Toon, DPhil  
Former President of the Prayer Book Society

## Course Description

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To know God and to make Him known is our highest calling. By studying the historic, classic, and orthodox doctrine of the Holy Trinity, learners discover how and why the doctrine emerged in the fourth century, as well as the various and progressive ways this doctrine has been understood throughout history. Throughout the course, Dr. Toon demonstrates that a right understanding of the Trinity is essential to a right understanding of God's relation to man and man's relation to God.

## Course Objectives

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Upon completion of the course, you should be able to:

- Consider that Yahweh-Elohim (The Lord our God who is one Lord) is ONE God in whom is a unity in plurality.
- Recognize the dynamics of the New Testament presentation of the Father, who is God, of the only Son of the Father, who is God, and of the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son), and is also God.
- Appreciate the reasons why the early church had to state the biblical doctrine of the Trinity in ontological, essentialist terms.
- Understand the teaching of the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds and to know why "homoousios" is of critical importance for Christian orthodoxy.
- Know the difference between the Eastern and Western expositions of the Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, and to recognize the dangers of Tritheism, Binitarianism, Unitarianism and Modalism.
- Note that the Protestant Reformers followed the classic dogma of the Holy Trinity, as their Confessions of Faith indicate.
- Understand why Liberal Protestantism had little interest in the doctrine of the Trinity in the nineteenth century.
- Be aware of the resurgence of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity since Karl Barth made his formulation of the doctrine the center of his Dogmatics.
- Know the difference between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity as these expressions are used in theology today.

- Understand the absolute centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity for Christianity and for its worship, prayer, spirituality, ethics, mission, preaching, teaching, and evangelism.
- Learn by heart both the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Athanasian Creed, so that one's mindset is Trinitarian.

## Course Lecturer

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*Peter Toon, DPhil (1939-2009)*

### **Education:**

- Oxford University, DPhil
- University of London and Liverpool University, three master's degrees
- Cliff College, King's College, and the University of Durham

### **Teaching Career:**

- Lecturer at schools around the world (1970s-2009)
- Taught and lectured at more than 50 institutions worldwide, including Oxford, St. John's College of Cambridge University, the University of Dunham, Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
- Professor Systematic Theology, Nashotah House (1990-1993)

### **Other Career Highlights:**

- President and CEO, Prayer Book Society
- Regarded by colleagues as one of the finest minds of the Anglican tradition
- Special advisor to the Bishops of Durham and Newcastle in the areas of religions and cults
- Ordained in the Church of England in the Diocese of Liverpool
- Parish priest and Vicar, St. Mary's in Staindrop, England
- Expert in various fields such as Puritan History, Evangelicals in the Church of England, and John Owen
- Several denominational boards and committees

### **Publications:**

- More than 25 books, including *God's Statesman: Life and Work of John Owen*; *What We Believe*; *Let God Be God*; *Our Triune God: A Biblical Portrayal of the Trinity*; and *Genuine Godliness and True Piety: Worshipping God in Faith, Hope and Love*
- Countless booklets and articles
- Multiple works on topics such as the Lordship of Christ, justification, and sanctification

## Recommended Reading

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Though not required, you may choose to read the textbooks shown below to supplement your learning.

The texts are listed in the order of the intellectual demands made on the reader:

Bray, G.L. *The Doctrine of God*. Downers' Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Erickson, Millard J. *God in Three Persons*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995.

Hill, William J. *The Three-Personed God*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988.

Textbooks can be ordered through your local bookstore, various online bookstores, or through your preferred eReader when available.

## Course Methods

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The lecture content for each lesson is provided in two easy-to-use formats: audio and PDF text (if available). Students can choose the medium (or combination of media) that most closely aligns with their individual learning styles.

## Course Assessment and Requirements

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To earn a Certificate of Completion, you must complete the course requirements. Course requirements include:

1. Viewing the following for each lesson:
  - **Reading:** Suggested readings that will supplement your learning.
  - **Lectures:** 45-minute lessons that can be listened to as many times as needed.
2. Completing a final self-assessment form in which you will reflect on the content in the course and evaluate your life in light of what you have learned. The specifics of this assessment are provided in the course materials.

Course requirements noted in this syllabus will be validated before a Certificate of Completion is awarded to any student.

## Additional Resources

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(Both Translations by J.N.D. Kelly)

### 1. The Creed of the Council of Constantinople

We believe in one God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into existence, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures and ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and will come again with glory to judge the living and dead, of Whose kingdom there will be no end;

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is together worshiped and glorified, Who spoke through the prophets; in one holy Catholic and

apostolic Church. We confess one baptism to the remission of sins; we look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

## 2. The Athanasian Creed (Part 1)

Whoever desires to be saved must above all things hold the Catholic faith. Unless a man keeps it in its entirety inviolate, he will assuredly perish eternally.

Now this is the Catholic faith, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance. For the Father's person is one, the Son's another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is one, their glory is equal, their majesty coeternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, such also the Holy Spirit. The Father is increate, the Son increate, the Holy Spirit is increate. The Father is infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite. The Father is eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal. Yet there are not three eternal, but one eternal; just as there are not three increates or three infinities, but one increate and one infinite. In the same way the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty; yet there are not three almighties, but one almighty.

Thus the Father is God, the Son God, the Holy Spirit God; and yet there are not three Gods, but there is one God. Thus the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet there are not three Lords, but there is one Lord. Because just as we are obliged by Christian truth to acknowledge each person separately both God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the Catholic religion to speak of three Gods or Lords.

The Father is from none, not made nor created nor begotten. The Son is from the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, not made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this trinity there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less, but all three persons are coeternal with each other and coequal. Thus in all things, as has been stated above, both Trinity in unity and unity in Trinity must be worshiped. So he who desires to be saved should think thus of the Trinity...