God as Trinity (THEO/SP 650)
Fall 2026
Garrett

"Rabbit Trinity," Holy Trinity Church, Long Melford (15th century)

Modality: online, synchronous/occasionally asynchronous
Time: Wednesdays, 8:30-10:45 AM CT
Prerequisites: THEO-500

Instructor: Dr. Nancy E. Bedford
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Office phone: 847-866-3931
Office hours: by appointment in person or on Teams

Note: This outline of the syllabus is meant for your orientation as you sign up for courses; I will provide a complete syllabus at the beginning of the semester.

Course description:

"For the Trinity is God, God is the Trinity. The Trinity is our maker, the Trinity is our protector, the Trinity is our everlasting beloved, the Trinity is our endless joy and bliss, by our Lord Jesus Christ and in our Lord Jesus Christ (…) where Jesus appears the blessed Trinity is understood, as I see it." Such are the words of Julian of Norwich, written in England in the 14th century (*Showings,* LT, 1.4)

What does it mean to confess God as Triune, as Julian does? What are the biblical roots of this confession of faith? How did we acquire the language with which to develop trinitarian doctrine? What does confessing, following, and living into the Triune God mean in practice for our spirituality? What are the ecclesial, social, political, economic, ecological, and ethical implications of trinitarian faith? Such will be the questions with which we shall wrestle in this course.

Topics and dates:

Session 1 (September 9 - synchronous): Introduction to the course, to each other, and to a trinitarian approach to God.

Session 2 (September 16 - synchronous): The biblical roots of trinitarian doctrine

Session 3 (September 23 – **asynchronous**): In search of vivifying trinitarian language

Session 4 (September 30 - synchronous): The Trinity in visual art

Session 5 (October 7 - **asynchronous**): Explorations in conciliar trinitarian themes

Session 6 (October 14 - synchronous): The Trinity inside and out: Augustine and Julian

Session 7 (October 21 - **asynchronous**): The Trinity and prayer

Session 8 (October 28 - synchronous): What do we mean by "Spirit"?

Session 9 (November 4 - synchronous): What do we mean by "Son"?

Session 10 (November 11 – synchronous): What do we mean by "Father"?

Session 11 (November 18 - **asynchronous**): Material implications of a triune confession of faith

Thanksgiving Break (November 25)

Session 12 (December 2 - synchronous) – Confessing God as Trinity in an Interfaith World

Session 13 (December 9 - synchronous) – Concluding thoughts on the strong name of the Trinity

Readings:

All the necessary weekly readings will be provided on Canvas.

Note on the use of generative AI:

As you decide whether or not to take this course, please note that your camera will need to be on during our synchronous sessions. Said otherwise, you will need to plan to be fully "present" even (or especially) in our virtual setting, which admittedly means overcoming a certain resistance that most of us feel when exposing ourselves to the camera. However, because there is a materiality to virtuality that we can use to our pedagogical advantage, we will use the electronic means at our disposal to practice attentive listening and participation as a material form of togetherness even as we are apart. We will actively bring our respective contexts to bear on the topics we cover. Fluid participation, attention, and

openness to each other are key to a successful and enjoyable course in this format. This is a course in which it is not acceptable to participate in while driving, cooking, cleaning, or any other task that you would not normally carry out in a face-to-face classroom.

Please understand also that to take this course is to commit to doing your own reading and writing, with no use of generative AI. I hope that in this semester together we will all become better writers and thinkers, but know that syntactical or grammatical errors in your written work will not hurt your grade. If English is not your first language, don't worry too much about it. I'm much more interested in the (necessarily imperfect) substance of your thought processes than in a supposed perfection of form.

Writing for the seminar will include forum posts and peer responses on Canvas, as well as a final paper or project we will workshop along the way. You should know that I am not interested in -and in fact, actively dislike- textual simulacra generated by LLMs (large language models, i.e. chatbots and/or "agentic" AI). I value your own priceless and particular voices, and the way in which engaging in reading and writing can help us think critically as well as providing an opportunity for spiritual formation (since ultimately in doing theology we are engaging with God). I have not yet found a problem in theology or in spirituality writ large to which LLMs might be a solution; we can talk more about this during the semester, as I am very interested in hearing what you think about this matter.

Meanwhile, for the duration of this class, the premise will be that AI gets in the way of the process of figuring out what we think as we are on the way together. Therefore, even asking LLMs to help "generate ideas" for an outline short circuits the process of critical thinking and individual synthesis, so I will ask you not to rely on anything other than your own interiority (and your consideration of written texts) for producing work. I am invested -and I hope you will be, too- in the knowledge and theological insights that each of us individually and we as a group can produce along the way as learner-teachers and teacher-learners, by wrestling with ideas, texts, and other forms of cultural production.

We bind unto ourselves today
the strong Name of the Trinity,
by invocation of the same,
the Three in One, and One in Three

(St. Patrick's Breastplate, written sometime between the 5th and the 9th centuries CE)