

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2

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## TH 291: Inquiring after God

Instructor: Ellen Charry  
E-mail: [ellen.charry@ptsem.edu](mailto:ellen.charry@ptsem.edu)

Theology is both a spiritual and an intellectual undertaking. It involves inquiring after God and the things of God, as these impinge upon and shape us. As first-order reflection about the way things are, theology is a normative activity. All persons are theologians to the extent that they ask about the nature of reality. Further, all persons are ethicists to the extent that they ask themselves how they ought to live in light of answers to the previous question. The task of theology then is practical: to help us understand ourselves and reality so that we may live well. The purpose of theological study is to raise these questions to self-consciousness and to further them.

The task of Christian theology is to enable people to do theology within the parameters of the Christian heritage. Its goal is to help people know, love, and enjoy God better. It is then, both a theoretical and a practical (ethical/spiritual) activity. It calls for the careful examination of ideas and the sources from which they come, as well as application for the way we are to live.

As a theoretical activity, theology seeks to understand. As a practical activity it seeks to guide in light of what is understood. Such guidance is for the spiritual nurture of the community of faith. Christianity is at once a set of ideas and a way of life. Thus, intellectual, ethical, and spiritual life cannot be disentangled. Theological inquiry then is for our spiritual growth.

Theology, both as a religious activity and an intellectual activity, is an art. It requires skills that can be learned and which must be honed by practice. The purpose of this course is to develop the skills to enhance the theological aptitude of those who inquire after God through reading, writing, reflection and other practices of the religious life.

### **Goals and Strategies:**

1. To invite students into theology as a spiritual art through reflection on the experiences of our common life as well as the practices of the Church that enable us to inquire after God and thereby grow in faith and holiness. To this end, class format will include small group spiritual reflection time. One reflection paper on the student's spiritual growth as a result of the class will be due at the end of the term.

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2. To train beginning theology students in the skill of understanding and interacting with theological texts across the ages. Regular written homework assignment will achieve this.
3. To train students in the art of making informed theological judgments through theological research and writing. One research exercise will further this goal.
4. To advance in the spiritual life. Spiritual exercises accompany each chapter of the text.

### **Requirements:**

1. **Homework:** Read all assignments carefully and meditatively. You are strongly advised to pray before reading each assignment. Some prayers for undertaking study are included herein.

Come to each class fully prepared to discuss all material in each chapter of *Inquiring* (both Classic Texts and Contemporary Reflections) and to share its implications for both ministry and spiritual growth. Preparation includes writing a 250 word “interaction” for **15** of the reading selections over the course of the semester. Instruction for “interaction” papers is included herein. Bring your paper to class the day scheduled for discussion of that text. 60% of final grade.

2. **Research Exercise:** Theological study entails learning to make informed judgments about the theme or topic under consideration. This is the purpose of research. To practice this skill, students will be required to prepare a short research exercise on one of the assigned readings. Students are to research and review three items relating to the text assigned, usually selecting one of these for treatment in a short paper (no more than 1250 words). The paper should assess the secondary literature in light of the student’s grasp of the primary text. The exercise will be due **October 23**. Students are encouraged to discuss their selections with the instructor either via e-mail or personal appointment. 20% of the final grade.

3. **Spiritual Exercises:** Exercises for each chapter are included in the syllabus. Some require written reflection. Students are to keep a notebook of these reflections that may feed into the final reflection paper. Students are to bring their reflections to class on the date due as these will furnish the material for small group discussion. No grade points.

4. **Spiritual Reflection Paper:** Theological study as spiritual practice aims to deepen our knowledge and devotion to God. To this end, students will prepare one reflection paper examining their own spiritual growth as a result of theological study in this course. This paper should identify how various writers encountered in the course stimulated or challenged their spiritual life and orientation. It should be no more than 1250 words and is due on the date schedule for a final examination. It will contribute 20% to the final grade.

### **Books:**

### **Required:**

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Charry, *Inquiring after God: Classic and Contemporary Readings*.  
Sire, *Habits of the Mind: Intellectual Life as a Christian Calling*  
Paul & Elder, *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concepts & Tools*

**Recommended:**

Deborah Core, *The Seminary Student Writes*.  
Shirley Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*.  
Clark, *101 Key Terms in Philosophy*

**Office Hours** are by appointment ([ellen.charry@ptsem.edu](mailto:ellen.charry@ptsem.edu); 497-7952; 921-0682).

**Theology Lunch:** Please join the instructor for lunch most Thursdays, noon-1:30, dining room east balcony.

Please do not hesitate to avail yourself of these opportunities for further conversation.

## Assignments

Most assigned reading is from *Inquiring after God*. Students are encouraged to consult further reading suggestions at their leisure, use the notation apparatus in *Inquiring* for additional suggestions, and ask the instructor for additional readings in areas of a student's interest.

### INQUIRING AFTER GOD THROUGH THEOLOGICAL STUDY

September 16	<b>Organizing Session</b>
September 21	Sire, <i>Habits</i> , pp. 29-146. Paul & Elder, <i>Critical Thinking</i>
September 23	Gregory Thaumaturgus, "The Oration and Panegyric Addressed to Origen" <i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> vol. 6, pp. 26b-36b (on PTS website).

### INQUIRING AFTER GOD THROUGH THEOLOGICAL STUDY

September 28	<i>Inquiring</i> , Introduction, pp. xvi-xxx; chapter 1, pp. 1-16 (Classic texts: Anselm, Bonaventure)  <u>Further Reading:</u> Norman Malcom, "Anselm's Ontological Argument," <i>Philosophical Review</i> 69, (1960), 41-62.
September 30	<i>Inquiring</i> , chapter 1, pp. 16-28.

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St. Anselm's famous Proslogion begins with a prayer for enlightenment. He patterns his plea after his master St Augustine of Hippo, whose life was dedicated to the search to know and love God. Anselm wants God, and he wants us to share that longing, that we might be like plants that turn and grow toward the light. The Christian life may be described as an extended exercise in training the self to want God. Pray Anselm's prayer to behold God. Which parts of you want God and which resist wanting him? How does God delight you? What about your longing for God did Anselm understand and what did he miss?

## INQUIRING AFTER GOD BY MEANS OF SCIENTIFIC STUDY

October 5                    *Inquiring*, chapter 2, pp. 29-51 (Classic text: Thomas Aquinas)

### Further Reading:

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 2, Blackfriars and McGraw-Hill, Appendices by Thomas Gilby.

Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 21-57.

Paul Davies. *The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World*.

Norman Kretzman & Eleonora Stump (eds.) *Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (esp. articles by Aersten and Jordan).

Ralph McInerny, *A First Glance at St. Thomas Aquinas*

Modern science is skeptical of God, and in our honest moments, we cannot but share some of that skepticism. Seek out another student with whom you can discuss the faith vs. science debate in order to clarify for yourself whether and if so to what degree the tension between religion and modern science is an issue for you. Write down the self-understanding that you gain from this conversation.

## INQUIRING AFTER GOD THROUGH DISCERNMENT

October 7                    *Inquiring*, chapter 3, pp. 53-62 (Classic text: Julian of Norwich)

October 12                    *Inquiring*, chapter 3, pp. 62-80

### Further reading:

Martin Thornton, *English Spirituality*

Professor Koenig argues that Christian discernment is a process of deepening self-clarity called forth by the cross of Christ. It brings us from the darkness of self-delusion into the light of self-recognition. It is often a painful process of self-honesty occasioned by being confronted by one who brings us to naught.

Recount for yourself your own experience(s) being "noughted" and the insights and discernment that eventuated from them. Give thanks.

Sit quietly at the foot of the cross with Mary Magdalene. What has she to teach you?

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## INQUIRING AFTER GOD WHEN WORKING

October 14            *Inquiring*, chapter 4, pp. 81-107 (Classic texts: Calvin, John Paul II)

### Further Reading:

Baum, G. (1982). The Priority of Labor: A Commentary on Laborem exercens, Encyclical Letter of Post John Paul II.

Leeuwen, M. S. V. (1991). Gender and Grace: Love, Work, and Parenting in a Changing World.

Miller-McLemore, B. (1994). Also a Mother: Work and family as Theological Dilemma.

Paul IV, P. (1964). Dogmatic Constitution of the Church: Lumen Genium, Catholic Information Network.

Volf, Miroslav. (1991). *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work.*

The world of work is often contrasted with the world of faith or the church, as if different values apply, different standards are in play, and different concerns involved. Reflect back on your work experiences. The Reformed tradition has been perhaps the clearest of the Christian traditions in articulating the unity of religious and work life in its teaching on vocation or calling. If you sense yourself to be called to serve God in the church, spend a few minutes writing down for yourself the nature of this call. If you sense yourself called to serve God in another venue or “profession” explain this call in religious terms.

## INQUIRING AFTER GOD THROUGH FRIENDSHIP

October 19            *Inquiring*, chapter 5, pp. 108-120 (Classic text: Aelred)  
**Research Exercise Due**

October 21            *Inquiring*, chapter 5, pp. 121-32.

Friendship was highly prized in the ancient world. It is less so now, as relationships have become highly instrumentalized and sexualized. Consider friendships you have or now have. In what ways have you been a faithful friend, and where could you have done better. What constitutes being a true friend? Our culture is often given to false encouragement, but a true friend has a more demanding task. What traits and virtues do you want to cultivate in yourself to become a better friend to those who trust you?

### Reading Week

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## INQUIRING AFTER GOD IN MARRIAGE

November 2            *Inquiring*, chapter 6, pp. 133-55 (Classic text: St Augustine of Hippo)

### Further Reading:

Anderson, et al., *Marriage: Just a Piece of Paper?*

Don S Browning, *Marriage and Modernization*

John Chryssavgis, *Love, Sexuality an the Sacrament of Marriage*

Mace, D. and V. Mace. *The Sacred Fire: Christian Marriage Through the Ages.*

Marriage is difficult and Christian marriage is especially demanding. It is currently fading in esteem around the world, especially in the west. If you are heading for the pastorate, take this opportunity to begin thinking through a theology of marriage for your ministry. Begin by identifying the questions that would need to be discussed in a theology of marriage. On a personal level, if you are married, where does your marriage press you to grow spiritually? If you are divorced, what have you learned about yourself that calls for spiritual growth? If you are not married, assess the strengths and weaknesses that you offer to a potential mate.

## INQUIRING AFTER GOD WHEN AFFLICTED

November 4            *Inquiring*, chapter 7, pp. 156-70 (Classic text: John Chrysostom)

November 9            *Inquiring*, chapter 7, pp. 170-78

### Further Reading:

Henry Leroy Finch, *Simone Weil and the Intellect of Grace.*

D. B. Harned, *Patience: How We Wait Upon the World.*

Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited.*

Suffering eventually comes to everyone. Yet it is not uniform. There is suffering from natural causes, and suffering as a result of the actions of others. Of the latter, some suffering is inadvertent, while other suffering is the direct result of others' self-seeking. It is the last that is perhaps most painful. It marks the difference between unavoidable suffering and inflicted suffering: affliction. For the Christian, perhaps the most painful realization is that we inevitably afflict others, sometimes simply in being ourselves. The adage "just be yourself" can be bad advice. Recall events in your life in which you suffered at the hands of another and those in which others suffered on your account. Sadly, after the fact there is often no way we can make amends for our sins. Contrition

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and repentance have always been central to the Christian life. We can, however, attempt to learn from our sins and entreat God for strength.

## INQUIRING AFTER GOD BY REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS

November 11            *Inquiring*, chapter 8, pp. 179-90 (Classic text: St Catherine of Siena)

November 16            *Inquiring*, chapter 8, pp. 191-206

### Further Reading:

Gestrich, C. *The return of splendor in the world : the Christian doctrine of sin and forgiveness.*

Jones G. *Forgiveness.*

Lehmann, P. *Forgiveness: decisive issue in Protestant thought.*  
New York,

Palmer, P. F. *Sacraments and forgiveness; history and doctrinal development of penance, extreme unction and indulgences.*

Taylor, E. D. "Sacramental Forgiveness and Spiritual Well-Being."  
*The Anglican* 27(4): 12-7.

Perhaps the height of human freedom is the ability to forgive those suffering from having hurt or even damaged us. The ability to forgive carries great power. Scripture calls it the key to heaven. Forgiveness is a tricky business, however. It takes a good bit of spiritual maturity to forgive. On the other hand, offering easy forgiveness without remorse or what the Christian tradition calls contrition may not bring about spiritual growth and so be lost on the sinner. Yet, unless forgiveness, reconciliation, or rehabilitation are available at some point (timing is everything), tender souls will suffer with no recourse. To whose peace of mind do you hold the key? Can you offer forgiveness? Forgiving does not necessarily repair the damage done, but it does offer a glimmer of hope. If you can, try reaching out to someone who has sinned against you with a word of hope.

## INQUIRING AFTER GOD WHEN MEDITATING ON SCRIPTURE

November 18            *Inquiring*, chapter 9, pp. 207-220 (Classic text: Augustine)

### **Thanksgiving**

November 23            *Inquiring*, chapter 9, pp. 221-231

### Further Reading:

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William S. Babcock, “*Cupiditas and Caritas: The Early Augustine on Love and Human Fulfillment*” in *The Ethics of St. Augustine*, Babcock, ed., pp. 39-66.

Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Art of Lectio Divina*

Scripture cannot be captured by referring to a biblical vision of this or that. It is simply too complex and varied. Further, much in scripture is painful to read and morally off-putting. At the same time, scripture pulls and presses us into places we would rather not go and at times sets standards for us that we would rather not be called to reach. The Johannine teaching on love is one of these. Christian love may be said to be the loftiest goal of the Christian way. Select a scripture passage that nurtures you and write down why and how it does.

### INQUIRING AFTER GOD WHEN PREACHING

November 30            *Inquiring*, chapter 10, pp. 232-256 (Classic texts: Augustine, Calvin)

Further Reading:

Michael Battle, *Reconciliation and Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*

Gerard Sloyan, *Preaching from the Lectionary*

Some of you will preach traditional sermons in churches on Sunday mornings. It is the only remaining place where it is socially acceptable to address people, and so an awesome responsibility. Apart from this formal setting, we all preach our beliefs by the lives we lead and the words we speak and write. We are often far more transparent than we wish. Take notes on a sermon while it is being delivered. Afterward, analyze what is being conveyed and the effects it might have on different hearers. Compare what you think the preacher is trying to accomplish with what was accomplished.

### INQUIRING AFTER GOD AT THE LORD’S TABLE

December 2            *Inquiring*, chapter 11, pp. 257-270 (Classic text: Luther)

December 7            *Inquiring*, chapter 11, pp. 270-77.

Further Reading:

David Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery*

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. and Catholic Church. *The real presence of Jesus Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist : basic questions & answers.*

Church of England. House of Bishops. (2001). *The eucharist: sacrament of unity.*

Mitchell, N. (1994). *Eucharist as sacrament of initiation.*

Schmemmann, A. (1988). *The Eucharist--sacrament of the Kingdom.*

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Christianity cherishes a God who feeds us with himself. People need and love to be fed. Feeding people is an expression of love that words cannot express. Christian sacred eating and drinking is the reenactment of the unity of the believer with Christ in baptism as well as the visible symbol of the church's unity. Attend a Eucharistic celebration in a tradition other than your own. What is being enacted there?

## INQUIRING AFTER GOD THROUGH ART

December 9            *Inquiring*, chapter 12, pp. 278-94  
(Classic texts: John of Damascus, Theodore of Studios,  
Abbé Suger, Isaac Watts)

December 14        *Inquiring*, chapter 12, pp. 295-305.

### Further Reading:

Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*

Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics*

Richard Harries, *Art and the Beauty of God*

Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty: The Holy in Art*

John Milbank, et al., *Theological Perspective on God and Beauty*

John Navone, *Enjoying God's Beauty; Toward a Theology of Beauty*

Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God in Imagination, Beauty and Art*

Art has been the single most important means of teaching Christian beliefs to the faithful, but it is not uncontroversial. Most western art is Christian. Search on-line for a Christian painting or sculpture that speaks to you. <http://www.textweek.com/art/art.htm>  
<http://www.kfki.hu/~arthp> <http://witcombe.sbc.edu/ARTHLinks.html> <http://www.fine-art.com> Think of the artist as a theologians and the work as a sermon or lesson on the art of knowing God. Dwell quietly with the work, attending to its details and well as its overall effect. How does the artist help you know God better?

## INQUIRING AFTER GOD WHEN AT PRAYER

December 16        *Inquiring*, chapter 13, pp. 306-336 (Classic text: Maximus Confessor)

### Further Reading:

Rebecca Bondi, *To Love as God Loves*

Olivier Clément, *Three Prayers*

Thomas Merton, *On Prayer*

Martin L. Smith, *The Word Is Very Near You.*

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Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*.  
Stephanie Paulsell, *Rules for Prayer*

The Christian standard is to pray without ceasing, to make one's whole life a gift of prayer. This week, practice praying for those you do not know. Here are a few suggestions. As you are going from one place to another (on foot or in a conveyance) pray, "Lord, have mercy on him/her" for every person you pass. Select an item from the news and pray for the people named. Write a prayer list of those in need (those hospitalized, cancer patients, prisoners, mourners, etc) and pray for them daily. Read the obituary pages of the newspaper and pray for the mourners and give thanks for the lives of the deceased. Read the marriage and birth announcements and pray for the newlyweds, parents and newborns. Read the crime report and pray for the victims and the perpetrators.

**Final Examination Date: Reflection Paper Due, 5 PM, 117 Hodge Hall**

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## Homework Preparation

Students should use the following questions to prepare each reading and the “interaction” paper (250-300 words) to bring to class. Following are some general questions to guide you. Guideline questions for six specific readings are also included. These are pedagogical aids only, and not meant to be prescriptive or restrictive.

- (1) Identify a central theme, question, or problem being addressed.
- (2) Explain how the author treats it.
- (3) How has the author advanced understanding of the theme or problem?
- (4) Compare and contrast this orientation with other assigned readings for this chapter of *Inquiring*.
- (5) How has the author helped you?

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## Gregory the Wonder-Worker

### “Oration and Panegyric Address to Origen.”

Questions to Consider:

1. What is philosophy and what is its goal?
2. How does philosophy as Origen understood it compare with philosophy and theology as we understand them today?
3. What is Origen’s pedagogy?
4. What changes does Gregory undergo through his studies with Origen?
5. What is piety?
6. Identify O’s & G’s psychology and its relation to philosophy.
7. What is the function of virtue ethics here?
8. What are the cardinal virtues?
9. Why does Origen encourage studying Greek philosophy?

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**Anselm (1033-1109)**

***Proslogion***

1. Prologue: What is the different between faith seeking understanding and understanding seeking faith?

2. Chapter 1: What are happiness and unhappiness for Anselm?

3.Chapters 2-5: The Ontological argument.

What are its strengths/weaknesses?

For whom is it intended?

What notion of greatness is operative here?

How does it compare with modern notions of greatness or highest good?

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## **Bonaventure**

1. How does B. get from Anselm's highest good to the doctrine of the Trinity?
2. What is marvelous to B. about the Trinity?
3. What is the function of amazement in contemplation of God?
4. What is the goal of contemplation as seen in Anselm and Bonaventure?
5. How does contemplation as the goal of Christian "philosophizing" differ from the other understandings of the goals of knowing God with which you are familiar?

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## **Simone Weil**

1. What is affliction?
2. What are consequences of affliction?
3. How can one escape the consequences of affliction?
  - 4 How does suffering differ from affliction?
  - 5 What is Weil's view of suffering?

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## **Augustine of Hippo (354-450)**

### *Confessions* (ca. 400)

1. What is the spiritual value of the contrast between the greatness of God and human smallness?
2. Discuss the conundrum of praise and knowledge/love and knowledge and its spiritual import.

## **Jean Calvin (1509-64)**

### *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536-1959)

1. What is knowledge of God, where does it come from, and what is its spiritual value?
2. What is the relation between knowledge of God and piety?
3. What is the seed of religion or conscience and how do they relate to the knowledge of God?
5. What is the role of observation in shaping piety?
6. What is the role of Christ in the formation of piety?

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## **Prayers when Sitting Down to Study**

### **Before Studying the Work of a Theologian and Teacher of the Church:**

Holy Father, by your Holy Spirit you give to some the word of wisdom, to others the word of knowledge, and to others the word of faith: We praise your Name for the gifts of grace manifested in your servant *N.*, and we pray that your Church may never be destitute of such gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Mighty Father, you gave to your servant *N.* special gifts of grace to understand and teach the truth as it is in Christ Jesus: Grant that by this teaching we may know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

### **Before Studying the Work of a Monastic:**

Father of all, by whose grace your servant *N.* kindled with the flame of your love, became a burning and a shining light in your Church: Grant that we also may be aflame with the spirit of love and discipline, and walk before you as children of light; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### **For Guidance in Study:**

O Lord Jesus Christ, who are the truth incarnate and the teacher of the faithful; let your spirit overshadow us in the study of your ways, and conform our thoughts to your truth, that learning of you with honest hearts, we may be rooted and built up in you; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

O holy God, who has taught us that your Word is a lantern to our feet and a light to our path; grant that we, with all devoutly study teaching offered in your name, may realize our fellowship one with another in you; and may learn thereby to know you more fully, to love you more truly, and to follow more faithfully in the steps of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning; grant that we may in wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of your holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessing and hope of life eternal, which you have given us in our savior, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

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**For Guidance:**

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through the holy and blessed Trinity, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

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