

Vanguard University
School for Professional Studies
Degree Program

“INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY”
THEO 103

Student Guide

7/02
V1.1
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TEXTS AND MATERIALS

Required texts:

Gilbert Bilezekian, (1993). *Christianity 101*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.

Frank D. Macchia, (2010). *The Trinity, Practically Speaking*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Biblica, 2010).

A modern translation of the Bible

For example - New American Standard, Revised Standard, New International Version.

Recommended texts:

Bromiley, Geoffrey W. (1978). *Historical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans.

McGrath, Alister E. (1998). *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.

Hart, Trevor. (1995). *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will provide a general introduction to the science and art of a Biblically formed theology.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. The student will have an awareness of the various disciplines of the theological enterprise and know how they arise from and/or relate to one another.
2. The student will have a basic knowledge of the Biblical sources upon which theology is dependent.
3. The student will have a standard against which to measure various contemporary theologies as to their adherence to or deviation from orthodoxy.
4. The student will learn to use the Bible appropriately to develop and expand a personal theology in community.

OVERVIEW

Everyone is a theologian. That is to say, everyone has thoughts and ideas about matters such as the character and nature of God, the existence of God, the nature of humankind, the problem of evil, the meaning of human existence, and so on. These are theological questions. The effectiveness or adequacy of the theology can be determined by the ways in which these questions are investigated and answered. It is possible for such a theology to prove unequal to the task, or thoroughly wrong headed, or fundamentally misinformed about critical matters. And for theology which views the Bible as its source and foundation, it is possible for such a theology to be Biblically uninformed or exegetically unsound. The point is, then, it is a difference of degree more than of kind between those who profess to disdain and those who profess to value theology.

Many Christians have a fundamental mistrust of theology, contrasting it to simple faith, for example. The fear is that theology will somehow corrupt or distort their faith. But classically understood, theology is “faith seeking understanding.” Christian theology especially is of the view that understanding is impossible without first believing. “Authentic Christian faith always inclines one toward understanding the God who has claimed our lives. And to the extent that a Christian seeks to understand the meaning of faith for answering life’s ultimate questions or for simply answering basic questions about growing in relation to God, he or she is already a theologian.”¹

It is with that in mind that this course is written. The goal is to encourage informed interaction with the text of Scripture and the community of the class to form a thoughtful, preliminary, personal theology. The assignments are structured to encourage the student to explore the Bible on a specific topic as the first order of business. Then, after writing their initial reflections and observations and formulating a preliminary theological statement, the student will read the text which will provide a more informed analysis of those same issues. Because even a so-called personal theology needs the interaction and evaluation of a community, the next stage will be weekly classroom interaction exploring the dimensions of the topics in a discussion format built around informed interaction, the goal of which is not defensiveness but increased understanding. The role of the instructor at this stage is that of an informed catalyst. The last step in this introductory process will be the writing of the final paper, which will be the student’s synthesis of the materials of the course into a cohesive whole.

Clearly, this can only be an introduction to the material available and the student is encouraged to continue to develop resources for further exploration, as well as to continue to develop and expand their personal theology. The goal of this course is that each student will grow in their faith and in their relationship with God.

¹ Grenz, Stanley J. and Roger E. Olson. (1996) *Who Needs Theology: An Invitation to the Study of God*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press

COURSE POLICIES

- **ATTENDANCE AND TARDY POLICY**

You must attend class on time and remain present until dismissed. Class attendance is necessary in order to complete the course. The School for Professional Studies relies on the dynamics of class interaction and group processing in order to integrate and apply the learning of academic content. This model also emphasizes the development and practice of interpersonal communication skills and teamwork (e.g., group problem solving and negotiation). The format therefore necessitates class attendance. In practical terms, one course session is equivalent to three weeks of traditional semester course work.

Due to the concentrated scheduling and the emphasis upon participatory learning, students need to be in attendance every week. Students who miss more than one class meeting (or more than five class hours) in any given course will automatically receive a failing grade and need to retake the course to obtain a passing grade. If an instructor deems that a student's second absence was under extremely unavoidable and unusual circumstances (i.e., an auto accident), the professor may file an academic petition on behalf of the student to the Dean of SPS. If the academic petition is approved, the instructor may give the student a "W" (Withdrawal) grade in place of a failing grade. The student will still be required to retake the course.

Students who arrive late disturb the class. At the professor's discretion, students who arrive late may not receive participation points for the unit covered. Students who are habitually late may be asked to drop the course.

- **CLASS PARTICIPATION**

You must be prepared and participate in all discussions. Criterion: Is the student engaged in classroom discussions? Does the student demonstrate an ability to handle assigned material with a degree of proficiency? (E.g., demonstrate the type of questions and issues consistent, and reflecting a familiarity with the assigned material). Participation evaluated according to quality, not quantity, of participation. Attendance will be scored, and no participation points will be awarded if the student is absent.

- **SUBMISSION OF FINAL EXAMS / PAPERS**

The School for Professional Studies office does not assume responsibility for any final papers. No homework or final papers will be accepted for professors in the SPS office, nor will final papers be returned to students through the SPS office.

The method for the submission of homework and the final exam or final paper will be determined by the professor. The professor will discuss the method which will be employed during the first night of class. All exchanges of papers will be between the student and the professor.

- **LATE PAPER POLICY**

You are responsible for submitting assignments on time (by 6:00 pm). Unless authorized by the Professor in advance, no credit will be given for assignments not turned in when due.

- **ACADEMIC DISHONESTY**

Work submitted for assessment purposes must be the independent work of the student concerned. Plagiarism, or copying and use of another's work without proper acknowledgment, is not permitted. Nor is it permissible for any former or present student to allow another student to refer to, use as a sample, or in any way copy or review their work. If a student needs guidance, he or she must seek the Professor's assistance.

- **DISABILITY SERVICES**

For students with documented medical or psychological disabilities, please contact the Coordinator of Disability Services to request reasonable accommodations. The Coordinator of Disability Services is located in the Counseling Center on the second floor of the Scott Academic Center and can be reached at extension 4489 or by email at disabilityservices@vanguard.edu

For students with a documented learning disability who would like to request appropriate accommodations, please contact the Director of Learning Skills, located upstairs in Scott Academic Center at extension 2540 or by email at disabilityservices@vanguard.edu

- **DIVERSITY STATEMENT**

The School for Professional Studies intends to foster a Christ-centered community that promotes appreciation and respect for individuals, enhances the potential of all members, and values differences in gender, race, abilities, and generation. As such, we endeavor to communicate with honesty, to speak with encouraging and edifying words, and to create a safe environment in our classes and interactions.

STUDENT EVALUATION

1. Attendance and prepared participation in the classroom discussions. (10%)
2. Completion of weekly assignments. (90%)

The weekly assignments are to be typed and proofed so that the grammar is correct and the student's thoughts are well organized and clearly expressed. One's style is not to be too conversational. This is a formal paper. Also, one is to be specific in the points being made. If summarizing scriptural teaching, one should refer to specific scripture references in parentheses and quote certain key verses or lines as appropriate. No Scripture passage should be completely ignored. If responding to a book passage or chapter, refer to specific points made in the book and reference the page number(s) in parentheses. No major point made in the book reading should be ignored. If a student is concise and does not waste words, the papers can be done within the number of pages suggested in the assignments (if the student feels it necessary to go over, such would be acceptable). The student should view the brief sample assignment paper provided in the appendix at the end of the syllabus. Below is a rubric giving the standards by which the weekly assignments will be graded:

Grammar, clarity of expression, organization and flow of ideas (10%)
 Theological substance of points made (20%)
 Specificity in referencing Scriptures or book reading material (30%)
 Thoroughness in covering all of the vital points from the reading (30%)
 Creativity in interacting with the material from the student's own viewpoint (10%)

STUDENT EVALUATION

Percentages	Points	Grade	Significance	GPA
93-100%	930-1000	A	Exceptional	4.00
90-92.9%	900-929	A-		3.67
87-89.9%	870-899	B+		3.33
83-86.9%	830-869	B	Above Average	3.00
80-82.9%	800-829	B-		2.67
77-79.9%	770-799	C+		2.33
73-76.9%	730-769	C	Average	2.00
70-72.9%	700-729	C-		1.67
67-69.9%	670-699	D+		1.33
63-66.9%	630-669	D	Below Average	1.00
60-62.9%	600-629	D-		0.67
00-59.9%	000-599	F	Failure	0.00

STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS

I. Week One: Scripture and Theological Method:

Short (one-page) written assignment, from Macchia's book only, is due on Week One:

A. From Scripture Reading (and Bilezikian's book):

1) Read the following verses on revelation: Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:18-20; Acts 17:24-31; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:15-16; 2 Peter 3:16-21. Also read Bilezikian pages 4 to 6. Think about where revelation is found. (**Note:** No written assignment is due on this reading. The Professor has written a two-page reflection on this reading in order to give you an example of how to do future papers. It can be found as an appendix at the end of this syllabus).

B. From Macchia's Book:

2) Read pages 31 to 37 and then summarize in one page how Christ establishes for us the authority of the Bible (and how the Bible confirms Christ as the Lord and Savior).

II. Week Two: God:

Written assignments from the four assigned tasks below are to be submitted (stapled or paper clipped as one large paper) on Week Two:

A. From Scripture Reading:

1) Read the following verses on God: Exodus 3:1-15; Psalm 139; Isaiah 40:12-31; 45:18-25; and 1 John 4:7-21 and then briefly summarize (in one to two pages) several major characteristics of God according to these verses. Refer specifically to key scriptures.

B. From Bilezikian's Book:

2) In one page, summarize Bilezikian's conclusions concerning God and suffering in the section entitled "The Heart of the Matter" on pages 43 – 46 and state why you agree or disagree with him.

C. From Macchia's Book:

3) Read the first chapter (pages 1 to 18) and in one page explain to someone who doesn't believe in the Trinity how the Bible supports it.

4) Read chapter 6 (pages 107-126). In one page, explain whether or not this chapter has adequately explained the Trinity to you.

III. Week Three: Christ and the Holy Spirit:

Written assignments from the four assigned tasks below are to be submitted (stapled or paper clipped as one large paper) on Week Three:

A. From Scripture Reading:

1) Read the following verses on Christ: Daniel 7:9-14; Isaiah 53; Mark 10:32-45; John 1:1-18; Philippians 2:5-11; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:14-15. In two pages, explain who Jesus is in these verses and what he came to do. Refer specifically to key scripture texts.

2) Read the following verses on the Holy Spirit: Psalm 104:27-30; Matthew 12:28-32; John 14:16-17; 25-26; 15:26-27; Acts 1:6-8; 2:1-4; Galatians 5:22-26; Ephesians 1:13-14. Then in two pages, explain what the Holy Spirit does in the world and in our lives. Refer specifically to key scripture texts.

B. From Macchia's Book:

3) Read chapter 4 (pages 67 to 85) and summarize in one page why you believe Christ is divine.

4) Read chapter 5 (pages 87 to 105) and explain in one page how the Spirit proves to be God by what he does.

IV. Week Four: Humanity and Salvation:

Written assignments from the three assigned tasks below are to be submitted (stapled or paper clipped as one large paper) on Week Four:

A. From Scripture Reading (and Bilezikian's book):

1) Read the following verses on humanity: Genesis 1-3; Psalm 8; Acts 17:24-28; Romans 5:1-11; 7:7-25; Ephesians 2:1-5. Then read Bilezikian pages 119-137. Describe human nature (in two pages) based on this reading. Be sure to refer specifically to key scripture texts.

2) Read the following verses on salvation: Luke 15; Romans 3:21-26; 8:28-30; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5; Ephesians 2:1-10; and Revelation 22:1-4. Also read pages 148 to 169 in Bilezikian's book. Then explain what salvation is in two pages, referring specifically to key scripture passages.

B. From Macchia's Book:

3) Read chapter 7 (pages 129 to 146) and briefly explain in one page how the doctrine of the Trinity has influenced how you view salvation.

V. Week Five: Church and End Times:

Written assignments from the three assigned tasks below are to be submitted (stapled or paper clipped as one large paper) on Week Five:

A. From Scripture Reading (Bilezikian's book):

1) Read the following scriptures on the church: Ephesians 2:11-22; 4:1-16; 1 Corinthians 3; 12:12-30. Describe the nature of the church from these scriptures (in two pages). Be specific, referring to key scripture texts.

2) Read the following scriptures on end times: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-11; Revelation 19-22. Read in Bilezikian from the bottom of page 234 to 247 on the signs of the end of the world. Based on the scriptures and this reading, summarize what will happen at the end of the world (in two pages). Refer specifically to key scripture texts.

B. From Macchia's Book:

3) Read the last chapter (8: Postcards to the World) and in one to two pages describe how the Trinity helps you to better understand Christian practice and hope.

LOGISTICS CHART

Hour	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
1	Introduction Definitions and Frameworks	The Doctrine of God Trinity	The Doctrines of Christ and Spirit Christ	The Doctrines of Humanity and Salvation Humanity	The Doctrines of Church and End Times Church
2	The Purpose and Value of Theology	Attributes	Christ	Humanity	Church
3	Break	Break	Break	Break	Break
4	The Tools and Tasks of Theology	Creation	Spirit	Salvation	End Times
5	Revelation and Issues of Authority	Election	Spirit	Salvation	End Times Course Evaluation

Appendix: Sample Assignment (done in response to Week One, letter A)

Name of the Student

Assignment Week

Title

Revelation is an important topic, because this is how we come to know about God and about the very meaning of life. Gilbert Bilezikian shows us that revelation is both general and special. General revelation is “knowledge obtained about God in a roundabout way by watching what he does” (p. 4), much like one learns something about an artist by looking at a painting that he or she has created. We gain general knowledge about God from nature, human beings, and history. Under nature as an example of general revelation, Bilezikian discusses two of the Scripture passages assigned to us in week one: Psalm 19 and Romans 1. Psalm 19 points out that the heavens “tell of the glory of God,” “proclaim his handiwork,” “pour forth speech,” and “declare knowledge” (119:1-2). All of these phrases indicate that nature speaks to us about God. Romans 1 is even more specific, noting that nature tells us about “God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature” (1:20). This makes humans responsible to search for more of God. If they fail to do so, “they are without excuse” (1:20). We should add that Acts 17 (given in our assigned Scripture reading) tells us something about how humanity and history informs us about God. God made all nations from one human pair and “marked out their appointed times in history” (17:26). This was done so that all peoples would seek God, for in God we all “live and move and have our being” (17:28).

Special revelation according to Bilezikian is more specific and thorough. It is found in Jesus Christ and the Bible (p. 5). He mentions one of our assigned Scripture passages: John 1:1-14. In examining this passage, I found that Jesus is called the “Word of God” who was with God

and was God (1:1). As God, this Word became flesh, revealing God the Father to us (1:18).

Another assigned Scripture passage, Hebrews 1:1-3, notes that Jesus is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (1:3). As such, Jesus is superior to all previous revelation given in the Old Testament prophets (1:1-2). They only spoke from God, while Jesus was the exact representation of God in flesh. He is not just a prophet; he is the very Son of God.

The Bible according to 2 Timothy 3:15-16 is “God-breathed” and useful for “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Timothy was to remember how the Scriptures made him wise for salvation through faith in Christ (3:15), so he should expect the Scriptures to have the same affect on others through his ministry. This is because the Scriptures are “God-breathed” or empowered by God to bear witness to Christ. 2 Peter notes that this was the case from the beginning, because biblical prophets and apostles, “though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (1:21). These biblical authors wrote what they actually heard and saw, so we know that we can rely on their testimony (1:12-20).

In sum, general revelation through nature, humanity, and history, is available to everyone and gives incentive to seek after God. This general knowledge, however, needs special revelation of God through Jesus and the Scriptures in order to gain the wisdom for salvation through Christ. Whatever the form of revelation, it is all possible by the hand of a merciful God and will give those who follow it the most important wisdom in life.

Note to students: It is not expected that introductory students will necessarily be able to think theologically as clearly as the above essay. But this is an example of how to pay close attention to the details of the Scriptures and/or reading material. It is also an example of how well organized thoughts are to be and how thorough they are to be (notice that no Scripture passage was ignored).