

Course Prospectus

For THL 450: Introduction to Biblical Theology

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OVERVIEW

Our major goal in this course is for students to integrate their biblical understanding through comparative study of basic doctrine as taught by Catholics, Protestants and the Church of God. Students should be able to clearly and succinctly demonstrate fundamental doctrinal understanding. Moreover, this course guides students in gathering a portfolio of their theological proficiency, self-evaluation of that portfolio, and an assessment of their theological competency.

Course description

This course deals with the principal doctrines of Christianity as seen through various theological systems and interpretations. Topics include the nature of God; biblical and theological development of concepts regarding the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the creation and the purpose for mankind; and covenants, salvation, grace, law, faith and the Church. Upon completion, students should be able to demonstrate fundamental doctrinal understanding. This is the capstone course for the Bachelor of Theology degree program.

Prerequisites and corequisites

Prerequisites are all THL courses required for the B.Th. degree or consent of instructor. There are no corequisites for this course. (NOTE: This course is for those completing their B.Th. Degree requirements.)

Course credit

Three (3) semester hours.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

On successful completion of this course, a student should be able to:

1. Rightly divide the Word of Truth by demonstrating understanding in a topical or systematic way of the core doctrines of the Bible;
2. Describe the historical and contextual nature of all theological enquiry;
3. Demonstrate a solid understanding of the teachings of the Christian faith and articulate the biblical and historical background and context of these teachings;
4. Reflect critically upon the central doctrines of the Church of God in comparison with traditional Catholic and Protestant doctrines;
5. Distinguish theological positions different from one's own;
6. Demonstrate a basic familiarity with different theological methodologies;
7. Articulate the relevance of God's Way of Life for our world today;
8. Show a portfolio of their theological proficiency and identify strengths and weaknesses in their theological proficiency; and
9. Achieve at least a score of 80% on a comprehensive assessment of their theological competency.

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

The instructor of record for this course is Mr. Peter G. Nathan. To contact him on course details and issues, please use email feature in the e-learning system (Populi) or pnathan@livinguniv.com. His telephone number is 704-708-2295.



Peter Nathan served as a faculty member in Theology for seven years at Ambassador College/University. As a faculty member in 1990, he led a group of students to participate in the Tel Mozan Expedition, Syria, which was directed by Giorgio Buccellati and Marilyn Kelly-Buccellati. His studies at Southern Methodist University focused largely on Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis. Most recently he has completed a Master's program at University of Cambridge focusing on Jewish Christian relations, with an emphasis on early Church history and the "Parting of the Ways."

Subsequent to the time at Ambassador University, he focused on education of young adults within church communities, providing seminars in Biblical Studies

to help lay a foundation for future roles in the ministry. In addition, he has written and published numerous articles on the identity of the early church, which carefully examined and challenged many of the commonly held assumptions relating to that era of time. The place and use of the Dead Sea Scrolls in understanding the early church environment has been a special interest.

Ordained to the ministry of the Church of God in 1973, he has pastored churches in diverse parts of the world and has been deeply involved in ministry to the developing world. He is a member of the Society of Biblical Literature, the American Schools of Oriental Research and the International Patristics Society.

As well as serving on the Living University Administrative Council, Mr. Nathan serves as the University's Chair of the Theology Department, and Vice Chair of the Learning Resources Committee.

COURSE PROTOCOLS

Technology access

This course requires that students have web access and an established email account. The Adobe Acrobat Reader is necessary to view documents that are PDF files. One can download the reader free at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html> which can then be installed and used to access PDF documents on this site.

Students with disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities have a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. Students having a disability requiring an accommodation should inform the instructor by email (on the "Course Info" page, click on the instructor's name and then select "Send E-mail").

Attendance in this online course

One of the most vital aspects of the college and university experience is attendance and punctuality in the learning environment. Regularity of attendance is necessary to maintain a satisfactory academic record and for students to derive maximum benefit from a course, whether in an online course or in an on-campus course. We have noticed that students who fall behind in their coursework typically drop out. Therefore, we highly encourage you to complete your assignments on time, as we want you to succeed. Remember Ecclesiastes 9:10: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going."

Please be aware that all students who fall behind in an online course and do not complete twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the total assignments and other required activities for a course, on or before "Last day to withdraw from a course" as set forth in the University Academic Calendar, will receive a grade of "W" for it. After that date, the grade will be a "WF" and counted in a student's GPA. Moreover, an instructor may drop a student from a course whenever the instructor concludes that a student's class attendance or punctuality endangers the student's success or places other students at risk.

Withdrawing from or dropping this course

It is the responsibility of a student to drop a course if he or she cannot meet the requirements of the course. Any student who stops attending a course without officially withdrawing from it risks receiving a punitive grade for that course. A student who finds it necessary to drop a course after the Late Registration (Drop/Add) Period must notify the Registrar's Office in writing. Please note the following:

- If a student drops a course on or before the "Last day to withdraw from a course without a grade penalty" as published in the University Academic Calendar, even if his or her work is not of a passing grade, then a "W" is recorded.
- If a course is dropped after that date, but before the last 21 calendar days of the semester, then the instructor determines the grade. The faculty member will at this time record a grade of "W" if passing (not computed in GPA) or "WF" if failing (computed in GPA).

- Students who drop a course, yet remain in one or more other courses during the last 18 calendar days of the semester, will receive a grade of “WF.”
- Students who completely withdraw from the University at any time during the semester may be given a grade of “W” on all courses.

If students do not initiate the withdrawal process, the instructor is required to initiate the administrative process and to record a grade of “W” or “WF” for the course, depending on the date the faculty member drops the student from the course. Students who register for a course as an audit, but then withdraw, will be assigned a grade of “W” for the course.

TEXTBOOKS

The required textbook(s) for this course are:

Andre, Emmanuel Marie, Louis LaRavoire, and S.T.D. Morrow. *My Catholic Faith*. Kansas City: Sarto House, 2000. ISBN 0963903268.

[This book should provide you with a reliable source for reporting the Roman Catholic view on a variety of doctrinal topics.]

Armstrong, Herbert W. *Mystery of the Ages*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1985. ISBN 0396088082.

[You should use the first edition of this book. The second edition has been edited thereby introducing unacceptable doctrinal error into Mr. Armstrong’s original text; therefore, editions other than the 1985 first edition are to be avoided in this course. You should already have this book as it was the textbook for THL 250 (or THL380) Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. Mr. Armstrong’s book provides a good basic source for demonstrating Church of God understanding on a variety doctrinal topics. You will need to research other Church of God publications to adequately cover topics in this course (see Additional Books below).]

Guthrie, Shirley C. *Christian Doctrine*. Rev.ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994. ISBN 664253687.

[This book should provide you with a reliable source for reporting the traditional Protestant view on a variety of basic doctrinal topics.]

Additional Texts You May Find Helpful

This course will require some research on your part into the literature of the Living Church of God and the Worldwide Church of God up to the time of Herbert W. Armstrong’s death in 1986.

The Incredible Human Potential - Armstrong (ISBN 9780932694010)

Charts and Christian Theology & Doctrine - House (ISBN 9780310416616)

Chronological and Thematic Charts of Philosophies and Philosophers – Hunnex (ISBN 9780310462811)

Students may order their books through the University Bookstore which is partnered with Amazon.com. Additionally, christianbook.com and barnesandnoble.com are also excellent sources of new and used books. The books used or referred to in this course are commercial publications. They represent the views and ideas of their authors, editors, and publishers. Living University does not endorse these texts nor vouch for their accuracy; we simply employ them in helping you master the content of the course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Due dates and extensions

Submit assignments on or before the date due. Students must complete the course by the last official day of instruction as set forth in the academic calendar.

Icebreaker assignment

To officially begin this course you must complete an Icebreaker assignment by which you introduce yourself to your classmates through posting a short autobiography on the course discussion forum. A student can earn **30 points** by posting the Icebreaker assignment on time. The Icebreaker assignment must be submitted not later than the eighth day of the semester. Please read and comment on at least two other bios by the due date in order to get credit. Do NOT create a NEW discussion. Simply tell the class about yourself and your goals. This is not the place for a profession of faith, or the details your conversion experience, or problems you have had with previous fellowships, as that information is more of a private nature. Here you inform your classmates what you would like them to know about you. As we have people from all over the world enrolled in this course each autobiography will help us know, understand and appreciate each other.

Writing assignments

There are five (5) writing assignments in this course, each expounding on major doctrinal beliefs of Roman Catholicism and traditional Protestantism in comparison with clear biblical teaching. They are each worth **80 points**. There is also a “What I Learned” essay due at the end of the semester, worth **40 points**. In addition, you will be writing and compiling a portfolio demonstrating your proficiency of the bachelor degree program study objectives (see more below). **The portfolio is worth 250 points**. Writing assignments should follow the MLA style as set forth in *Writing Research Papers: A Complete Guide* (14th edition) by Lester & Lester. Please cite your sources and use quotation marks where needed.

The Theological Proficiency Portfolio

In this course you are to compile a proficiency portfolio based on your graded papers and other work and/or experience documenting your mastery of the B.Th. degree program of study objectives (listed below). A copy of this portfolio will be placed in your permanent university file and made available for inspection by accreditors and licensing authorities. Your task is to create your portfolio by first introducing yourself and your motivations for studying theology. Include material in your portfolio that showcases your theological proficiency, but also identify and succinctly summarize the strengths and weaknesses in your theological proficiency. Organize the evidence of your competencies and related experiences into seven (7) sections wherein you show you are a capable servant-leader who can:

1. Demonstrate mastery of the biblical foundations core competencies (biblical foundations core courses include the following: THL135, THL136, THL200, THL211, THL212, and THL226);
2. State, and in a structured way demonstrate, an understanding of major biblical doctrines and their underlying theology;
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the history and theology of the Church, and explain their importance and the development of Christianity as a major religion;
4. Demonstrate the veracity and reliability of the Bible, and using analysis tools demonstrate the purpose, significance and application of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament;
5. Correlate relevant archaeological, historical and biblical material with important sites, roads, features and events within the eastern Mediterranean region;
6. Demonstrate knowledge of the world’s major religions and how they differ from Christianity; and
7. Demonstrate understanding of eschatological events and Bible prophecy.

Quizzes and Examinations

There are no quizzes in this course; however, by the end of the semester you will need to take your bachelor degree exit exam, called the Theological Competency Assessment, which is integrated into this course. The test is worth **250 points** (see more information below).

Theological Competency Assessment

The purpose of this assessment, a 100-question, proctored, closed book, closed-notes, comprehensive multiple choice examination, is to obtain a measure of the degree to which you have mastered the theological content of the B.Th. degree program. Successful completion of this program of study should have enabled you to demonstrate mastery of biblical foundation core requirements reflecting basic academic knowledge of the Bible’s content and doctrines, as well as the seven (7) objectives of the theology

major (listed above, in the Theological Proficiency Portfolio section). This exam covers the content of the following courses, with questions based on the above objectives:

THL 135 Life, Ministry and Teachings of Jesus
THL 136 Acts and the Writings of Paul
THL 200 Principles of Christian Living
THL 211 Old Testament Survey I
THL 212 Old Testament Survey II
THL 226 Christian Leadership
THL 250 (or THL380) Introduction to Biblical Doctrine
THL 320 Introduction to Church History
THL 322 The Biblical Text
THL 412 Epistles of Paul I
THL 413 Epistles of Paul II
THL 416 General Epistles and Revelation
THL 421 History of Christianity I
THL 422 History of Christianity II
THL 460 Understanding Contemporary World Religions
THL 467 Historical Geography of the Bible Lands

Course evaluation

Student input is welcome for improving this course. Making suggestions by email is helpful. Our goal in this course is to facilitate the successful achievement of all instructional objectives by all students. At the end of the course students have the opportunity to assess the course. We want to make e-learning courses as effective as we can. We may also ask some other questions concerning a student's experience in distance learning to help us improve our program. We appreciate students letting us know how we can improve our products and services for them and other distance learners. Participation in the course evaluation is worth **30 points**.

GRADING

Your course grade will be determined based on the number of points you have earned over the semester as follows:

Icebreaker Assignment (30 points)
Writing Assignments (5, each worth 80 points for a total of 400 points)
Theological Proficiency Portfolio (250 points)
Theological Competency Assessment [**PROCTORED**] (250 points)
"What I Learned" Essay (40 points)
Course Evaluation (30 points)
TOTAL 1000 points

Grades are in the traditional American style of an A, B, C, D, or F. In distance learning, we believe that the measure of mastery of course subject matter is completion of 80% of the objectives for a course. That means that we want students to earn at least 800 points in this course. If they do not do so then they have not achieved the level of the mastery we would like them to have. We want this course to be competency-based and so it is possible for the entire class to receive an A or a B. There is no artificial curving of scores in the assignment of grades. Mastery of the material is what one's goal should be.

Grades, assigned by points, are as follows:

A = 900-1000 points
B = 800-899 points
C = 700-799 points
D = 600-699 points
F = Below 600 points

ACADEMIC IRREGULARITY

Students have the responsibility for conducting themselves in such a manner as to avoid any suspicion that they are improperly giving or receiving aid on any assignment or examination. An academic irregularity not only includes cheating but also includes plagiarism (taking another's ideas and/or words and presenting them as if they were the writer's own) and the submitting of the same paper in separate courses without prior consent from the faculty members concerned. In cases of suspected academic irregularity, faculty members may refuse to grade such papers or examinations, completely or in part, and to record each of them as a failure. If an academic irregularity is sufficiently serious, the University may take one or more of, but not limited to, the following actions:

1. Drop the student from the course with a grade of F;
2. Place the student on academic probation; and/or
3. Dismiss the student from the University.

COURSE OUTLINE

Below are the lesson sections, topics and assignments pertaining to each lesson for the duration of the course:

Lesson Readings are integrated into the lessons.

Lesson 1 Method and Task in Theology

- Topic 1 What is Theology?
- Topic 2 Is Theology Important?
- Topic 3 Who Is a Theologian?
- Topic 4 Who Says So? The Problem of Authority

Lesson 2 God and Human Beings

- Topic 1 General Revelation
- Topic 2 Special Revelation
- Topic 3 Who and What Is God?
- Topic 4 What Does God Want With Us?

Lesson 3 God the Creator and Creation

- Topic 1 Creation
- Topic 2 Providence and Evil
- Topic 3 Human Beings
- Topic 4 God's Law and Sin

Lesson 4 Jesus Christ and Reconciliation

- Topic 1 Reconciliation
- Topic 2 The Incarnation
- Topic 3 The Atonement
- Topic 4 The Resurrection

Lesson 5 The Holy Spirit and Christian Life

- Topic 1 The Holy Spirit
- Topic 2 Justification and Sanctification
- Topic 3 The Church of God
- Topic 4 Christian Hope for the Future

Theological Proficiency Portfolio

Theological Competency Assessment
