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# DO 501 Basic Christian Theology

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## BASIC CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

I. **PURPOSE:** The purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to the study of Christian Theology. Over the course of the semester students will be introduced to all the major areas in the system of Christian doctrine. The relevance of theology for the Christian life and the practice of ministry will be stressed.

II. **OBJECTIVES:** By the end of the course students will:

1. Have developed a working theological vocabulary that will support further study in theology and related disciplines.
2. Have grasped the vital connection between theology and the Christian life and theology and the practice of ministry.
3. Have been introduced to all the major areas in the study of Christian theology.
4. Have examined, evaluated and used a reasonable range of literature related to the study of Christian theology.
5. Be able to apply theological concepts to the practice of ministry
6. Be able to reflect theologically upon the practice of ministry.
7. Grown in their knowledge and love for God through the study of Christian theology.

III. **TEXTS:**

Thomas Oden, *The Living God*  
*The Word of Life*  
*Life in the Spirit*

Ed Miller and Stanley Grenz, *Fortress Introduction to Contemporary Theologies*

IV. **REQUIREMENTS:**

1. Regular, active ATTENDANCE at class sessions. Dr. Seamands will generally lecture during class sessions. You are encouraged to raise questions as we move along.

During three class sessions during the semester we will take time to discuss material in the *Fortress Introduction to Contemporary Theologies*. Come prepared on those days with two or three questions the assigned reading has provoked in your mind.

We will discuss pages 1-78 on \_\_\_\_\_

pages 79-141 on \_\_\_\_\_

pages 142-216 on \_\_\_\_\_

2. SEVEN WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS containing your handwritten or typed responses to the assigned reading materials. You will turn in your assignments on seven precise dates at the end of the class session. There are no exams and no other written assignments. Dr. Seamands will evaluate your first written assignment and return it to you with suggestions for improvement. He will determine your grade at the end of the semester by evaluating three of the six other written assignments you have turned in.

Your written assignments will be accepted ONLY ON THE DUE DATES. No late dates or rewrites are allowable. Your participation in the course will be significantly weakened if the reading and writing is not done by the due dates. In case of an emergency based on unavoidable personal or family crisis, notify me by phone or in writing as the emergency is breaking. I can issue a written authorization for late work in extreme emergencies.

The due dates for the written assignments are as follows:

1. Weeks 1-2 \_\_\_\_\_

2. Weeks 3-4 \_\_\_\_\_

3. Weeks 5-6 \_\_\_\_\_

4. Weeks 7-8 \_\_\_\_\_

5. Weeks 9-10 \_\_\_\_\_

6. Weeks 11-12 \_\_\_\_\_

7. Weeks 13-14 \_\_\_\_\_

Turn in your LAST ASSIGNMENT in a large envelope, not a folder. Put your name and SPO number on the envelope.

Let me encourage you to use INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE for people. (Humanity is preferable to man; men and women is preferable to men, etc. See the seminary's "Suggestions for Using Inclusive Language for further guidelines).

There are two different types of written responses called for in the written assignments. Since this is such an important component of the course it is necessary to describe them in some detail.

### A. 4-Mat Reflections

A 4-Mat reflection (named for Bernice McCarthy's 4-Mat system) consists of two single-spaced typed pages (8 1/2 x 11). The first page contains one heading, the second page contains three. When laid out next to each other they look like this:

1st Page: Abstract Summary

2nd Page: Concrete Stories/  
Memories Evoked by reading

Reflection Expressed as  
Questions

Action: What I Must Do  
Because of This

Here are some explanations/guidelines adapted from a colleague of mine, Dr. Donald Joy, to help you get a better grasp of the four elements in the 4-Mat system.

(a) **ABSTRACT: Reader's Digest Summary.** Simply summarize the content of the assigned reading in your own words. There should be NO personal commentary or attempt to evaluate the content of the materials. Just summarize what the author says. Include as many of the key concepts and ideas as you can. Strive to be both comprehensive and intensive. Your summary should be stylistically correct, coherent and clear. The abstract should be one single-spaced page in length. Sorry, no typefaces below number 10 please!

Remember that meaning making requires first that you transform the reading materials into your OWN words. Effective "note taking" is more than capturing another person's words; it requires transforming a communication into your own language and symbols. Use explicit and visible QUOTE marks to identify the author's words. All other written material not clearly cited should be your own constructions and abstracted summaries of what you read.

(b) **CONCRETE: Get Vulnerable!** Describe one or two personal experiences which reading this material reminded you of. Here is your chance to be a storyteller. Tell it here in “first person,” describing action, quoting exact words you remember hearing or saying. Be as specific and concrete as you can, including who, what, when, where details. However, make sure that your personal anecdotes are clearly grounded in the concepts of the reading assignment. The “Concrete” section should not exceed half a page.

If you can connect what you are reading and hearing with what you have previously lived or observed, you will be profoundly changed by the semester. If you cannot connect the semester with past and present personal realities, you will never be able to teach or use what you are learning with any conviction and effectiveness.

(c) **REFLECTION: What questions popped up** as you read this material? Keep a rough note sheet at hand as you read so you can write them down. Then simply list three or four of them. Your questions may be critical or grounded in spontaneous curiosity or naive yearning for solutions. However, make sure they relate directly to the MATERIAL CONTENT of the reading materials NOT to the experience(s) you have just described in b. This section should take up about one fourth to a third of a page.

(d) **ACTION: So What Are You Going to Do About it , Anyway?** All ministry related learning MUST lead to acts of ministry--whether through transformation of your inner person or your acquiring of useful knowledge or skills. Here describe what you simply must DO if you keep faith with what you have now discovered as a result of reading this material. Make sure that your actions are **MAST (Measurable, Attainable, Specific and able to be accomplished within a given Time frame)** (for example, “For the next month during my times of prayer, I will meditate on a different attribute of God for five minutes). Do not report reflective responses (for example “I need to learn or read more or pray more about the attributes of God”). This section should comprise one fourth to one third of a page.

## **B. Application reflections.**

Under each section, an attempt has been made to relate the reading material to the life of the church and the practice of Christian ministry. Hence you will be asked to do things which more than likely you will be doing later on, especially if you are involved in some form of pastoral ministry. It is important that these reflections INTEGRATE what you have been learning in class and through the reading materials, and are not simply your "off the cuff" responses. The length of these application reflections is always specified.

## **V. COURSE OUTLINE AND ASSIGNED READINGS**

1. WEEKS 1 & 2. ***THE NATURE AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD***

A. 4-Mat Oden, *The Living God*, ix-xv, 11-130, 181-224 (159pp).

B. In the light of what you have learned, write a prayer of adoration (one which centers upon who God is) which focuses upon God's omnipresence, omnipotence, and omniscience. Assume that you will be using the prayer in a worship service where you have been asked to pray. DON'T move to other elements of prayer such as confession or petition, STAY with adoration. (1 page doublespaced).

For further reading:

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/1. The Doctrine of God*.

Donald Bloesch, *God the Almighty*

Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*.

Alan Coppedge, *Portraits of God*

A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*

2. WEEKS 3 & 4. ***CREATION AND PROVIDENCE; THEOLOGICAL METHOD; THE PERSON OF CHRIST***

A. 4-Mat Oden, *The Living God*, 227-234, 240-315, 319-344, 355-370; Oden, *The Word of Life*, 1-6, 13-56 (170pp).

B. You are visiting with Mary and John Smith, an unchurched couple in your community whom you have gotten to know quite well. A year ago, their teenage son, Mark, was seriously injured in a football game. As a result he is paralyzed from the waist down and confined to a wheel chair. Because John's parents were active members in your church, you got to know them after the accident. In fact, you visited with them many times during the first few months after the accident and have helped them work through their emotional pain. Now things have settled down and they seem to be making the best of the situation.

But during the course of this particular visit they begin to voice their questions about God. John expresses it like this: "I just don't understand it. How could a god who is loving and all-powerful, let something like this happen? Why didn't God intervene? It makes me wonder if God really cares the way you say He does and if he really is in charge after all. I want to believe, but I just can't make sense of it."

Write down what you would say to John and Mary? (2 pages doublespaced).

For further reading:

G.C. Berkouwer, *Providence*

Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*  
 Roger Hazelton, *Gods Ways with Man*  
 Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*  
 Philip Yancy, *Disappointment with God*  
     *Where is God When it Hurts?*  
 Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture*  
 I.H. Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration*  
 Clark Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*  
 John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible*

### 3. WEEKS 5 & 6. **THE INCARNATION**

A. 4-Mat Oden, *The Word of Life*, 57-144, 164-194, 229-260, 268-278 (158pp).

B. In the light of what you have learned, write a meditation for the December edition of a church newsletter. The meditation should be entitled, "Why All this Fuss About Christmas?" and should be based upon John 1:14--"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (2 pages, doublespaced).

For Further Reading:

Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*  
 Donald Baillie, *God Was in Christ*  
 William Barclay, *Jesus as They saw Him*  
 Donald Bloesch, *Jesus Christ*  
 Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*  
 Jurgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*  
 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus--God and Man*

### 4. WEEKS 7 & 8. **THE DEATH OF CHRIST**

A. 4-Mat Oden, *The Word of Life*, 279-414 (135 pp).

B. You are talking to a non-Christian friend of yours to whom you have been trying to witness about the Christian faith. She/he says to you, "I can't understand why you Christians make such a big deal about the cross. It bothers me that your religion centers around someone's gruesome, bloody, violent death. I don't understand why that had to happen. And I know I'm not perfect, but have I done something so bad that someone had to shed his blood for me? That's what you Christians say, but it doesn't make sense. In seeking to convey the significance of the cross, how would you respond to your friend? (2 pages, doublespaced).

For further reading:

Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor*  
 James Denney, *The Death of Christ*

John Driver, *Understanding the Atonement for the Mission of the Church*  
 Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*  
 Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*  
 John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*  
 Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross*  
 Douglas Webster, *In Debt to Christ*

5. WEEKS 9 & 10. **RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION; THE HOLY SPIRIT; REPENTANCE**

A. 4-Mat Oden, *The Word of Life*, 429-491, 501-525; *Life in the Spirit*, 1-8, 15-26, 34-70, 79-103 (164pp).

B. In the light of what you have learned, prepare an Affirmation of Faith (about the length of the Apostles' Creed) to be printed in the bulletin and used in a worship service on Pentecost Sunday entitled "I Believe in the Holy Spirit." Let your affirmation focus entirely on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

For further reading:

Stephen Davis, *Risen Indeed!*  
 John Jansen, *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ in New Testament Theology*  
 Walter Kunneth, *The Theology of the Resurrection*  
 Peter Toon, *The Ascension of our Lord*  
 Thomas Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection*  
 Leona F. Choy, *Powerlines: What Great Evangelicals Believed about the Holy Spirit*  
 Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*  
 Craig Keener, *Gift and Giver*  
 Donald Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts*  
 Charles Hummel, *Fire in the Fireplace*  
 Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*  
 J. Oswald Sanders, *The Holy Spirit and His Gifts*  
 J.T. Seamands, *On Tiptoe with Joy*  
 Clark Pinnock, *The Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*

6. WEEKS 11 & 12. **SALVATION, THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, AND THE CHURCH**

A. 4-Mat Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 108-119, 128-138, 145-50, 156-170, 177-246, 261-274, 279-310 (151 pp).

B. In the light of what you have learned, write a 500 word (2 pages, double-spaced) meditation based upon 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24: "May the God of peace himself entirely sanctify you; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it."



Work with this text in its context, and be sure to explain (1) what "entirely sanctified" means (the extent of sanctification possible in this life); and (2) how a person is wholly sanctified.

For further reading:

Melvin Dieter, ed., *Five Views of Sanctification*  
 Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness*  
 Darrell Guder, ed., *Missional Church*  
 Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*  
 W.E. Sangster, *The Path to Perfection*  
 Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*  
 Hans Kung, *The Church*  
 Donald Miller, *The Nature and Mission of the Church*  
 Howard Snyder, *The Community of the King*

#### 7. WEEKS 13 & 14. **MARKS OF THE CHURCH; HUMAN DESTINY**

A. 4-Mat Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 315-27, 337-343, 349-355, 369-386, 390-468 (119pp).

B. Harold, an older member of your congregation who had a dynamic witness for Christ has been dead for about a year. Now Martha, his wife, is sitting in your office and asking you some questions. "I know I'm going to be reunited with Harold someday," she says, "But tell me, where is Harold now? Is he in heaven with all the saints, alone with Jesus, or in some sort of purgatory? Is he conscious or sleeping? And what kind of body does he have, anyway? I hope I'm not being overly inquisitive, but it would be comforting to me to know." What would you say to Martha? (2 pp. doublespaced).

For further reading:

Robert Clouse, *The Millenium: Four Views*  
 Millard Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology*  
 Peter Kreeft, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Heaven*  
 C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*  
 Jurgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*  
 John Sanders, *No Other Name*  
 Peter Toon, *Heaven and Hell*  
 Jerry Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*

DO 500/501 Basic Christian Theology Evaluation Sheet

Dr. Steve Seamands

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

**Overall Evaluation of 4-Mat**

1. **Abstract Summary:** Written from author's point of view, no commentary, no evaluation of content. Concise, linguistically and stylistically correct, coherent and clear.

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

A. Included the key concepts in the assigned material in the summary:

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

B. Summarized *all* the various parts of the material appropriately:

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

2. **Concrete Stories/Experience:** Anecdotal reporting of specific people, places, words spoken, feelings evoked. Clearly grounded in the concepts of the reading assignment. Personal experience or observed action.

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

3. **Reflections Expressed As Questions:** Honest interrogation of conceptual or factual material. May be critical or grounded in spontaneous curiosity or naive yearning for solutions. Related to content of material, not previous concrete experience described. Must be cast as questions

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

4. **Actions:** Detailed report of something you have already done or NEED to do if you are to OBEY the insight or truth that came to you. DO NOT report reflective responses such as prayer or more reading. Actions should be *specific and measurable*:

0 ----- 1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5 ----- 6 ----- 7 ----- 8 ----- 9 ----- 10

**Evaluation of Application Reflection: A Prayer of Adoration**

**Grade:**