

Associated Canadian Theological Schools

THS 571: Introduction to Believer's Church Theology

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(with visits from other faculty)
Fall Semester, 2008
3 Credit Hours

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513-2044; <https://courses.mytwu.ca>
Mondays – 2:30-5:10 pm
Prerequisites: THS 540 or equivalent

I. Course Description

This course lays a foundation for theological study and reflection in all ACTS graduate degree programs. We will begin with a discussion of the nature and importance of theology and a review of key tools and methodological principles for the Christian thinker. We will also reflect on the particular dynamics of doing theology in the Evangelical and Believer's Church tradition. As an illustration of good theological reflection in action, we will explore the doctrines of revelation and Scripture, which are basic to our work. And we will provide a practical orientation to the expectations and opportunities for theological study in the ACTS curriculum.

II. Course Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, a student should be able to:

- 1) describe the **nature of theology, its role and importance** in the life of the individual Christian and of the church as a whole;
- 2) discuss the general **structure and function of theology as an academic discipline**, demonstrating an understanding of the relationship between various areas of theological study and their significance in the ACTS curriculum;
- 3) explain the key features that mark the **theological perspective of the Believer's Church Tradition**, showing an appreciation for its relationship to other theological traditions within historic Christianity and recognizing the significance of such concepts in their own ministry setting;
- 4) articulate the **historic Christian doctrines of Revelation and Scripture**, together with their biblical basis, contrasting these with other non-Evangelical perspectives;
- 5) discuss important **theological issues which arise in relation to these doctrines**, together with significant historical perspectives on those issues and key biblical concepts which apply to them;
- 6) apply basic **methodological principles, techniques, and tools for effective theological reflection and ministry application** in an Evangelical, Believer's Church Christian framework;

- 7) formulate concrete **plans for appropriate personal theological development** through the course of the student's degree program;
- 8) **integrate personal theological development with practical aspects of personal Christian life and ministry.**

III. Course Format

Whenever possible, we try to offer Introduction to Believer's Church Theology in a team-taught format. ACTS views this class as a strategic part of its curriculum, so it seems wise to involve multiple faculty who can speak to the issues of theological integration and Evangelical identity from various perspectives. Normally the course is led by the two resident professors of theology at ACTS: Dr. Archie Spencer and Dr. Ken Radant. This fall, Archie is on sabbatical, so Dr. Wendell Phillips will be joining Ken at the helm. Other faculty will be invited to participate at points along the way where appropriate.

Because Believer's Church is required in all degree programs, in some semesters the enrollment is quite a bit larger than you will find in a typical ACTS course. When this happens, we understand that the course may feel a little less personal and interactive. We have attempted to compensate for this by building in a number of structured discussion sessions in smaller groups, where you will have opportunity to interact with others more intensively around readings, lectures, and course material. We also find that the team-taught arrangement gives a dialogical flavor even in a large group setting.

Obviously, when two faculty members give leadership to one class, the overall course outline is likely to feel a little less smooth and linear, and we frequently find that the proposed schedule is adjusted as the semester progresses. Thank you in advance for your understanding when this happens. If you think of ways in which we can improve the course design, we always welcome input. At the same time, you will find that there are significant benefits to this approach. It enables students to get acquainted more quickly with the range of views, styles, and personalities that characterize our own theology faculty, and provides a broader perspective on the theological variety that exists in the Christian community. It is easier for us to set up discussions that link you with others in your degree program or specialization or ecclesiological tradition. It better reflects the consortial nature of ACTS. And it creates an excellent context in which to challenge you to think about your ministry setting and the need to find your own personal approach to theological integration within your field of study.

IV. Course Texts

Required texts (ie: you will need to read these for the course)

Donald Bloesch, *Holy Scripture* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000).

Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Who Needs Theology?* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996).

Ken Radant, "An Introduction to the Study of Theology, Part 1." (See "Reading," below).

Recommended (ie: these are appropriate for course reading but not required; they would be good additions to your library)

Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Second Edition; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

Paul C. McGleson, *Invitation to Dogmatic Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006).

John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

V. Course Requirements

A. Reading

For this course, you will be reading ...

- **The required texts by Bloesch, Grenz/Olson, and Radant, in their entirety.** (Approx 515 pages)

Note that the Radant article will be posted on the TWU MyCourses webpage for this class. See “web support,” below.

- A minimum of **250 pages of reading on the nature of theology and the doctrine of revelation/Scripture from a general Evangelical systematic theology text** of your choice.

Several possible texts are listed at the back of this syllabus under recommended readings. If you have another text in mind, you are welcome to ask the instructors about it.

This reading is designed to give you an overview of these key subject areas for our course from another perspective, and also to help you become acquainted with at least one of the many good theological resource books available to you. Every person in ministry really should have at least one comprehensive theology text in their library to serve as a reference tool. Consider this an opportunity to browse possible texts, and to read a substantial section from one or more.

- A minimum of **300 pages of collateral reading on the nature and work of Theology, the doctrines of Revelation/Scripture, and the development of the Believer’s Church Tradition** from other relevant books or articles of your own choosing.

Collateral reading serves to supplement the texts and faculty presentations on our course material. Recognizing that not all students have the same background, interests, and needs, we are allowing you to customize your reading for the course in ways that will best serve your learning experience.

Several guidelines on the collateral reading:

- Part of the value of this course component is the opportunity to broaden your exposure to different traditions and points of view in relation to the materials covered in this course. You are therefore encouraged to choose readings which represent various theological perspectives and approaches to the material. *Do not simply read more of what is most familiar to you.*
 - This reading should explore several subject areas. Do not concentrate it all on one topic—plan to give some substantial time to the nature of theology and the doctrine of revelation/Scripture.
 - Your reading does not need to come from formal academic or highly technical sources. However, in its substance and argumentation it should engage the subject matter at a level appropriate to graduate theological study.
- ☑ To maximize the value of the reading and enhance our class interaction, **you will be expected to complete the appropriate readings by the relevant class period**, as set forth on the **course outline** (below).
- ☑ **You will write a reading report** with sections interacting on Grenz/Olson, Bloesch, your general systematic theology text, and your collateral readings. Each section will be approximately 2-4 pages. A template will be provided. **Reading reports are due Dec 15.**

Please note: no marks will be given for reading unless a suitable reading report is turned in to the instructor by the date stipulated.

B. Structured group discussions

- ☑ **During this course we will set up several structured group discussion times, in which the class will divide into groups to interact on materials from the readings and class presentations.** (Usually we do 2 or 3 per semester. Four is an unlikely possibility.) These discussions will follow a set of guidelines. We will allow time for discussion during class, though it may be necessary for groups to do some of their interaction outside class, either face-to-face at a time of their own choosing or online.
- ☑ **Participation in the group discussions will be peer-evaluated.** You will be submitting an evaluation form with scores for each of your group-mates, and your score will be determined by your group.

Expect the discussion sessions to require some work in preparation. This will primarily involve reading and/or reflection; written requirements will be minimal. Our goal in this exercise is to ensure quality conversation, not to generate research papers.

C. Critical reflection paper on the nature and role of theology

- You will write a brief paper (8-10 pages) reflecting on the nature of theology and its role in Christian life and ministry.**

The purpose of this paper is to help you reflect critically on the readings and class presentations on the nature of theology, and begin to develop your own personal philosophy of theological reflection for life and ministry.

The paper should be structured in 4 sections, each section answering one of the following questions:

- In what ways have the readings and class sessions of this course reinforced my perspective on the nature and place of Christian theology? In what ways have they changed my thinking from where it was when the course began?
- What do I see as the most significant *helpful* elements in the things I have read/heard from Grenz and Olson, from Radant, from Phillips, and from my other theology texts on the nature and practice of theology? (At least one or two key points from each.) What concerns or questions do I have in relation to these sources? (Something on at least 2 or 3 of them, please.)
- If I had to explain my own emerging understanding of the role of theology in my own personal life and ministry to someone, what key points would I use to communicate it?

This should include at least: (a) a definition for theology; (b) comments on its role, contributions, limitations; (c) comments on its importance; (d) practical suggestions as to how you might develop and apply it in the specifics of your life and ministry setting; (e) a few principles as to how to keep it healthy as part of a vibrant spiritual life.

It's OK to build this section around general principles, but *do not* leave it at the level of generalities. Look for specific applications to your own present or anticipated life and ministry setting.

- Situate this personal view of the role of theology: (a) How is it similar to and different from the various sources you've considered in class sessions and readings? And (b) how is it similar to, and perhaps different from, what you perceive as the dominant approach to theology in your personal church and/or denominational setting?
- The paper is due on Nov 3.** This is not a formal research paper, so we are not concerned about bibliography or sophisticated footnote apparatus. A personal, somewhat informal style is acceptable. Nevertheless, the paper should be written in good, clear prose, cleanly edited and properly and consistently formatted.

D. Critical reflection paper on revelation, Scripture, and the Evangelical - Believer's Church tradition

- You will write a brief paper (8-10 pages) interacting with key concepts from the section of our course dealing with revelation, Scripture, and the Believer's Church tradition.**

This paper will help you consolidate your understanding of the doctrines of revelation and Scripture. It will also push you to reflect on the significance of these doctrines and some of the special issues and challenges associated with them. And it will invite you to consider how these (and other related) doctrines have shaped the life of the church, particularly within the Believer's Church movement.

Again, the paper should be structured in sections which answer the following questions:

- List (point form) what you view as the key ideas which are essential in a good presentation of the doctrines of revelation and Scripture, if you had to teach these in a church setting.
- Comment briefly on the reason it is essential to hold these truths about God's revelation and the Bible. How do these ideas shape the rest of our doctrine? How do they affect church life in general, and a believer's faith in particular? What happens if we compromise on them?
- Reflect on the role these doctrines play in your own church tradition. Does your tradition embrace the same essentials you have named? How has your tradition's view of Scripture shaped other aspects of its thought and practice? In particular, if your tradition is part of the Believer's Church movement, how has its understanding of revelation and Scripture influenced other key elements that mark it as part of that movement?
- Identify several of the most challenging issues that relate to the doctrine of revelation and Scripture—either in your own current ministry context or in the Christian world in general. Why are these issues a challenge at this time? How do they affect faith and ministry in your setting? Briefly, comment on key insights or strategies which will help you to address these challenges as you face them.

- ☑ **The paper is due on Dec 1.** Once again, this is not a major research paper which requires and extensive bibliography. However, you should be interacting with the sources you are reading—and where you quote from or engage a source directly, it is appropriate that you leave a documentation trail through footnotes. As always, the paper should be well-written and well presented.

Assignment weight (%)

Reading completed (reading report).....	10
Reading completed <i>on time</i>	5
Structured group discussions.....	25
Paper 1: nature and role of theology	30
Paper 2: revelation, Scripture, believer’s church	30
Total:	100

Late Assignments will be penalized as follows:

- Reduction by 5% of assignment value for each (working) day after due date (Assignments due at class time are considered late after the end of the class period)
- Late or incomplete reading is evaluated qualitatively
- No late assignments will be accepted after Dec 18

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage	Grade Point
A+	97-100	4.30
A	93-96	4.00
A-	90-92	3.70
B+	87-89	3.30
B	83-86	3.00
B-	80-82	2.70
C+	77-79	2.30
C	73-76	2.00
C-	70-72	1.70
F	Below 70	0.00

VI. Submitting Papers Electronically

Assignments may be submitted either in hard copy or electronically. If in doubt about which method is appropriate, please feel free to ask—especially in class, so everyone gets the information.

If you turn assignments in electronically, we have two requests which will help us to handle your materials easily and not lose them:

(1) Please use document attachments linked to emails, rather than pasting your material into the email message. (The format is less likely to be corrupted, and the item is easier to file.) Attach your documents as MS Word files, or if you are not using Word, as files that will convert easily and neatly to Word. (Examples would include Wordperfect or .rtf—“rich text format”—files.)

(2) Before you attach your file, please save it (“save as”) using the following format: last name – initial – assignment name.doc. So, for example, Ken’s first paper would be radant-k-paper 1.doc, and his reading report would be radant-k-reading report.doc. This makes it much easier for us to track your papers. As you can imagine, if we get 20 papers all called “research paper.doc” it is likely that some will be misplaced.

VII. Web Support

All ACTS courses are supported with web pages through the TWU MyCourses system.

We will use the course web page to post any course notes and other materials which we wish to distribute to the class. (For example, the Radant essay will be posted on the web page for you to download.) You will want to check the page periodically to watch for updates and announcements.

Note that we will not be distributing hard copies of course notes in class. They will be posted on the course website, allowing you to download and access them in hard or soft copy as you choose. We recommend that you download notes and bring them along to class, as this will make it easier to follow lectures and add your own notes as we go.

We may also use the forum tool on the course web-page to facilitate portions of the structured group discussions. You will want to get acquainted with that tool in case it is needed in this class or in other ACTS courses.

You should have received information on the TWU virtual campus and MyCourse system with your class registration materials. If you do not have an appropriate password, are unfamiliar with the system, or are having trouble making it work, please do not come to faculty for assistance, as we are not equipped to help you with in this area. You can get basic information from the Registrar's office, and can get more detailed help from the "esupport" people who specialize in such things. They can be reached at esupport@twu.ca, or 604-513-2148 (toll free at 1-866-614-4652).

Please remember that TWU uses the web system to distribute your grades for this and other courses at the end of the semester. ***Plan to use your TWU email***—or at least to set it to forward automatically to your personal account. ***Any other notices, mid-course grade information, etc., which we send you during the semester will go to your TWU email address as well.***

VIII.

Tentative Course Outline

Date	Topic(s)	Assignments Due
Sept 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus, preliminaries • Theology: what it is, why it matters 	
Sept 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theology as an academic discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Grenz/Olson
Sept 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theology in my academic program and ministry area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Radant article
Sept 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion session 1: Nature and relevance of theology 	
Oct 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The substructure for Evangelical theology 	
Oct 13	Thanksgiving Monday – no class	
Oct 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does theology actually work? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading on nature of theology in systematic theology text – done
Oct 27	Reading Week – no class	
Nov 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A case study in “doing theology”: revelation and Scripture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading on revelation/Scripture in systematic theology text – done • Reflection paper 1 submitted
Nov 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revelation and Scripture (2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Bloesch
Nov 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revelation and Scripture (3) 	
Nov 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion session 2: Revelation and Scripture 	
Dec 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evangelicalism and the Believer’s Church tradition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection paper 2 submitted
Dec 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where to from here? 	
Dec 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All reading (including collateral) completed, report submitted 	

IX.

Some recommendations on systematic theology texts

There are many fine texts on Systematic Theology from the Evangelical perspective. As part of your long-term development as a theological thinker, it is worth your while to become familiar with a number of these: general overviews, texts dedicated to specific topics, broad generic studies, presentations from a particular tradition or perspective, volumes old and new. For the purpose of this class, our goal is simply to help you become better acquainted with one or two such texts. (We have no in-principle objection to you reading from a number of sources, but in our view the exercise will be more cohesive, helpful, and manageable if you focus on one primary text or at most two.)

We have listed several possible texts below. The choice is up to you, but we would request that you follow several basic guidelines:

- Unless there is a special reason to do otherwise, we would strongly encourage you to use a text which is broadly Evangelical for this particular assignment. There is a place and time to read Schleiermacher or Tillich, but this is not it. The goal is to help round out your exposure to the Christian faith from an Evangelical perspective, and to enrich your thinking on revelation and Scripture as these are viewed within the classic Christian tradition.
- By all means, if you own a theology text and you have not had the time or motivation to read it, then use the text you have. But do not re-read materials you already read as part of another course in your undergrad program or in THS 540. Let this reading take you to new places.
- The 250 page requirement is somewhat arbitrary. We chose that number because, if you read the full volume by Erickson—which is one of the most widely used standard theology texts among Evangelicals today, his sections on theology, revelation, and Scripture come out to approximately 250 pages. (Note that we refer to the full volume by Erickson, not his *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, which is an abridged version.) If you are reading from another source, you will have to decide what sections and pages to read—and where to go for supplementary material if you do not get enough pages.

Some possible texts for your consideration

- Demarest, Bruce, and Gordon Lewis. *Integrative Theology*. Grand Rapids: Academie, 1987-. 230
Creative attempt to do interdisciplinary theology. Many interesting insights, but sometimes a little "cluttered."
- Erickson, Millard. *Christian Theology*. (2nd Edition, unabridged, 1 volume) Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998, 1983-85. 230.2 *A recent Evangelical classic, middle-of-the-road, attempts to balance usefulness as a resource text with readability.*
- Finger, Thomas N. *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach*. Scottdale: Herald, 1985-. 230.2
Creative theology through a particular thematic grid.
- Garrett, James Leo. *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990-. 230.2
- Grenz, Stanley J. *Theology for the Community of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994. *Recent, more attuned to postmodern concerns than many other Evangelical texts.*
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994. *Quite readable, very Bible-focused, fairly central in orientation (with a Vineyard element); a little basic but definitely usable.*
- Horton, Stanely M., *Systematic Theology*. Springfield Mo. Logion Press, 1995. 230.994.S97.

- McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 4th Edition. Malden MA: Blackwell, 2007. *Quite historically oriented, at times quite detailed; written for a broad university-style audience so presents options without arguing for a particular point of view; very current in terms of the issues it tackles.*
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart, *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991-1998. 230.044P2613.
- Williams, J. Rodman. *Renewal Theology*. Grand Rapids: Academie, 1990. 230.2 *One of the foremost theologians in the Pentecostal movement, represents that tradition well.*

Some other possibilities, mostly older (and less recommended unless you've done reading in the newer volumes already and you're looking for something different) ...

- Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939,41. (4th edition) 230.2 *A classic of Reformed theology. Not easy, but very thorough.*
- Boettner, Loraine. *Studies in Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947. 230.2
- Chafer, Louis Sperry. *Systematic Theology*. Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947. R 230.2 *Key figure in the U.S. Dispensational movement, useful as a representative of Dispensational theology.*
- Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*. (3 volumes) Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977 (=1872). 230.2 *Note the original publication date; a classic of the Old Princeton approach to Orthodoxy in a Reformed variation.*
- McClendon, James W., *Systematic Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986-2000. BT75.2M39.
- Pieper, Francis. *Christian Dogmatics*. (4 volumes) St. Louis: Concordia, 1950-57. 230.2 *For those who would like a Lutheran angle on things.*
- Shedd, William G.T. *Dogmatic Theology*. (3 volumes) Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953. R 230.2 *An older Baptist classic.*
- Strong, A.H. *Systematic Theology*. Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1912. R 230.2 230.2 *An even older Baptist classic—very detailed, not easy reading.*
- Thiessen, Henry C. *Lectures in Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979. (from 1949) R230.2
- Wiley, H.O. *Christian Theology*. (2 volumes) Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1940. R 230.2 *As the publisher suggests, a text in the Nazarene tradition.*

Supplement: Important Academic Notes from ACTS

Web Support – Student Portal <https://students.twu.ca>

All students at TWU have a TWUPass username and password. This is determined at the time of an online application or can be managed through the computing services help desk or the link on the student portal. Your student email account is also available through this student portal and is vital for communication about grades, account statements, lost passwords, sign-up instructions, etc. If you do not know your account or password, there is a link at the login area called “I forgot my password.” When you click on that link, you will be walked through the process of retrieving your account information.

Campus Closure

In the event of deteriorating weather conditions overnight or other emergency situations, every effort will be made to communicate information regarding the cancellation of classes to the radio stations CKNW (980 AM), CKWX (1130 AM), MAX (850 AM), PRAISE (106.5 FM) and KARI (550 AM) by 6:30 a.m., and an announcement will be placed on the University's switchboard as well as on the website <http://www.twu.ca/conditions/>. The first announcement regarding a closure will cover the period up to 1:00 p.m. only. If classes are to be cancelled beyond 1:00 p.m., this decision will be announced by the same means before 11:00 a.m. that day. Students and faculty should assume that all night classes will continue to operate. If the emergency continues into the evening, students and faculty may check for a closure notice on the University's switchboard and website after 3:00 p.m. that day.

Paper Formatting

Students need to adhere to Turabian format except in counselling courses, for which APA format is used.

Students are encouraged strongly to use RefWorks (available through the library home page www.twu.ca/library) as their bibliographical manager and as a tool for formatting bibliographies. They will need to be aware of the need to “clean up” most bibliographies generated by this program. Students are encouraged to view the documents on the following websites for format samples: <http://faculty.ucc.edu/egh-damerow/turabian.htm> or www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/. Note that in RefWorks the available formatting styles are those of Turabian (Notes), 6th edition, and APA – American Psychological Association, 5th edition.

Counselling students are expected to purchase the APA Publications Manual. More information found at the following website. <http://www.apastyle.org/pubmanual.html>.

CANIL students can locate this on the CANIL intranet, under the “student” side. A hard copy is given to incoming students in the fall.

Please check with your professor to see which one he/she recommends you use!!

Research Ethics

Please note that all research projects involving human participants undertaken by members of the TWU university community (including projects done by ACTS students to satisfy course or degree requirements) **MUST** be approved by the Trinity Western University Research Ethics Board. Information and forms may be found at <http://www.twu.ca/research/ethics/Main.asp>. Those needing additional clarification may contact Dr. Bruce Guenther. Please allow at least three (3) weeks from the date of submission for a review of the application.

Academic Honesty

A fundamental expectation, grounded in biblical ethics, for anyone involved in academic work at ACTS is that he/she practice academic honesty. Students must become familiar with, and adhere to, the principles and requirements associated with academic honesty. Further details on this subject are contained in the ACTS Student Handbook in section 4.12. The handbook is available online on the ACTS webpage (www.acts.twu.ca) at the following link: www.acts.twu.ca/Handbook.html.

Equity of Access

It is the responsibility of a student with a learning disability to inform the ACTS Director of Student Life of that fact before the beginning of a course so that necessary arrangements may be made to facilitate the student's learning experience. We are unable to accommodate any student who informs the Director of Student Life of a disability after the beginning of class.