

Module Overview

Leaders Guide

This module and the companion one (F6 – A short foray into theology B) are introductory modules about what theology involves.

Aim of this module

The aim of this module is to help participants appreciate what theology is and to introduce some major themes at the centre of the Christian faith.

Participant outcomes

When you have completed the work for this module you will be able to describe how you already engage in theological reflection and outline how such reflection is a source of faith development. You will also be able to recognise some of the key areas of Christian theology.

Leader's role

Please provide a relaxed, friendly and open environment with brief breaks if and where appropriate. Because the first part of the module involves some reading (not a lot), it would be good for people to read silently to themselves and then share reading out loud (to reinforce meaning and content).

Resources

For this session the leader will need newsprint sheets or a whiteboard or an overhead projector and transparencies.

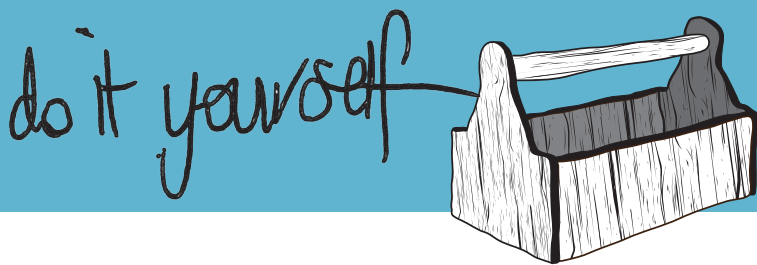
Each participant will need

- Photocopies of the two handouts
- Individual highlighters or pens
- A Bible (preferably NRSV).
- An exercise book to use as a journal.

Session Outline

90 mins

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Introduction | (5 min.) |
| 2. What is theology? - Plenary | (5 min.) |
| 3. Theology is ... (F5.H1) | (20 min.) |
| 4. Plenary reporting | (5 min.) |
| 5. Who is a theologian? (F5.H2) | (15 min.) |
| 6. Plenary discussion | (15 min.) |
| 7. Small group discussion | (15 min.) |
| 8. Close | (10 min.) |



1. Introduction

In this session and the next, participants will take an introductory glance at what theology is and what it involves. In a very simple way some of the major themes that have been the substance of theology will be introduced.

Make sure that participants know one another or are introduced. Share a brief time of reflection and thanksgiving, praying for the presence of the Holy Spirit for the discussion and time ahead.

2. What is theology?

In plenary, write up a sign with the word “theology” on it. Ask participants to share in brief sentences or single words what the word suggests to them (for example, theology might mean “nourishment”, “difficult”, “exciting”, “important” etc.) (5 min.)

Theology is something all of us can and do engage in to understand our faith. Theology is discussion and language about God. It requires our heart, not just our mind. The questions with which theology grapples are significant existentially: they deal with who we are, what life means, and where we are going. Some of those questions are listed on Handout no. 1. Beside each question is the name for the theological area in which the question falls.

3. Theology is ...

In groups of 3 or 4 read F5.H1. (20 mins.)

Discuss in the small group your reaction to these definitions of theology and to the questions listed. What is the most compelling question for you?

4. Plenary reporting

In plenary, discuss different insights or comments from the smaller groups. (5 min)

5. Who is a theologian?

In small groups, read the extract from Guthrie’s book Christian Doctrine in F5.H2. (15 min)

6. Plenary discussion

Ask people to share any fresh insights they have as they reflect on the reading. (15 min.)

7. Small Group Discussion: Theology in Australia today

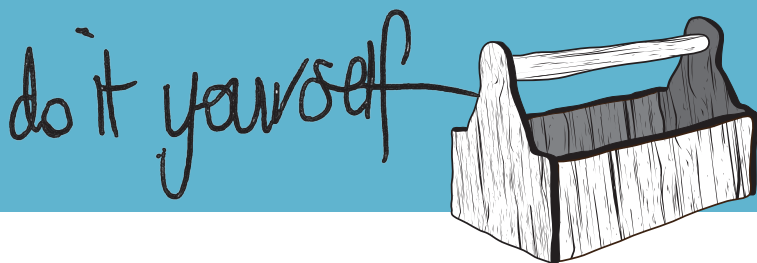
Lead a discussion on “How does our culture in 21st Century Australia help or impede talk about God?” You may like to summarise briefly on the whiteboard. (15 min.)

If there is time, in small groups, ask people to talk together: Where do we encounter God? (15 min.)

8. Close

Summarise the questions people are left with and invite them to note them in their exercise book/journal.

Close the session with a prayer of thanksgiving for all the ways in which God comes to us, and restores us and offers us life.



Handout #1 Theology

From theos, Greek for God; and logos, Greek for language/ word/study. Theology is therefore the language or study about God.

Theology is ...

“(The study of theology) is by definition the quest for the ultimate truth about God, about ourselves, and about the world we live in.” (Shirley Guthrie)

“Faith seeking understanding.” (St Anselm)

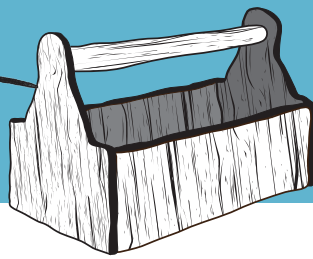
“The study which, through participation in and reflection upon a religious faith, seeks to express the content of this faith in the clearest and most coherent language available.” (John Macquarie)

4. “Theology as thoughtful faith comes from and returns to the service of God and neighbour” (Daniel L Migliore Faith Seeking Understanding, 2nd Ed 2004 p 7.)

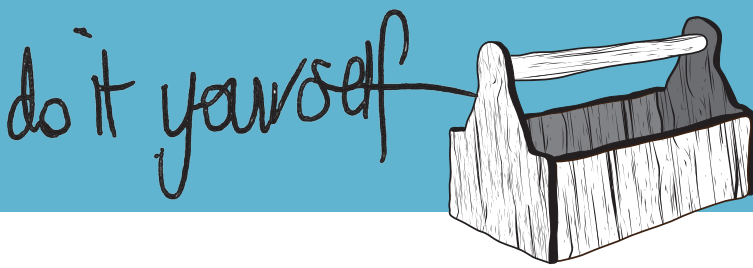
Everyday human questions and their theological name

Everyday questions	Theological name
How can we find God? How does God find us?	Revelation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we find God revealed in the world, in scripture, in the tradition(s) of the church? • Is God still revealing Godself? • If so, how?
Who is God? What is God like?	The Trinity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has the church developed the understanding of God as Trinity? • What important things does this understanding say about the God that Christians know?
What are we doing here?	Creation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the cosmos good, indifferent or opposed to human well-being? • How is God involved in God’s creation today? • Is the creation there for human exploitation or for humans to care for?
Why doesn’t God do something about the mess we are in?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The problem of evil and suffering, or theodicy • How can we talk about a good and loving God and at the same time take seriously the pain and suffering in the world around us and in our own lives? • What does this reveal about the identity and nature of God, and God’s relation to the cosmos?





Who are we?	<p>Christian anthropology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it mean to be a person in the Christian understanding? • What are some implications of being “made in the image of God”? • Are we alienated from God or in fellowship with God? • Are we individuals or in community? • What is sin and how does it manifest itself?
Where is God?	<p>Incarnation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What unique and particular things can be said about God from incarnation or embodiment (em-body-ment,) in/as Jesus of Nazareth? • How could Jesus be both fully divine and fully human?
Is God for us or against us?	<p>Atonement (at-one-ment) and salvation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we doomed by sin? • Do we need saving? Why? • What do we need saving from? • What do we need saving for? • What are the biblical metaphors for what God did in Jesus Christ? And how adequate are they today? • Are there other images? • What does God say about Godself and us that is distinctive in the cross and resurrection?
Is there a future for the planet and for humanity? What can we hope in?	<p>Destiny and destination (Eschatology)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the kingdom of God? • How does it impinge on the life of the world? • What is the ultimate purpose and destiny of the cosmos? • What happens, if anything, after death?
What is our potential? What's new?	<p>The Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is God present with us now? • Who is the Holy Spirit? • What does the Spirit do among us and within us? • How can we fulfil God's highest purposes for us? • What is the nature of the new life in Christ? • What spiritual practices are helpful for nurturing our relationship with God?
Into what kind of community does God call us?	<p>The Church (Ecclesiology)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the nature and purpose of the church? • What does it mean to be the people of God; the body of Christ?
How should we live? What are we to do?	<p>The Christian life and Christian ethics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we discern what God wants us to do? • How do we follow Jesus today? • Where do social justice and personal faith intersect? • What do we make of politics, power, and society?



Handout #2 Who is a theologian?

"The Christian community is not the only community you belong to. You are a member of a family community; you are a husband or wife, daughter or son (etc.)... You are a member of one race or another, one economic class or another; and more than likely even the particular congregation you belong to has been brought together more obviously on the basis of common racial and class ties than on the basis of common theological convictions.

"You are deeply involved not only in the Christian way of life but also in the (Australian) way of life, ... your understanding of the Christian faith is inevitably influenced by your (Australian) culture as well as by your reading of the Bible and study of church doctrine.

"You are the citizens of a particular nation as well as "citizens of heaven", and your liberal or conservative politics affects your theology as much as your liberal or conservative theology affects your politics.

"In short, part of your life is coloured by what goes on in the church, but much of it is also coloured by what goes on in the home, bank, supermarket, court, movies and television studios. Even when you leave the "world" to go to church, you take your worldly life with you. In so far as you are in the church, the world is there too

"This means that if Christian theology is to be more than an intellectual game, if it is to deal with you personally, it has to bring the word about God to bear not just on your church life but on your life in the world.

"... when you finish your study, you will not have a nicely wrapped-up system of theology with every question answered and every problem solved. You will not have "arrived" in your understanding of the Christian faith; you will only be a little further along the way. Moreover, you will be better theologians just because you have learned that our faith must be in the God who is beyond all that any of us can ask or think, and not in our simple or complicated, liberal or conservative, orthodox or heretical theology."

Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, Revised edition. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994, pp. 4-6.