



Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Theology

Level 8 (NFQ)



THE PRIORY INSTITUTE
A Dominican Centre for Theological Studies

This course is aimed at those who wish to study their Christian faith at an academic level with the intention of deepening their understanding of the central themes in Christian theology as it is done in the 800-year old Dominican tradition.

Stage 1

INTRODUCTORY MODULE

1. Learning to Learn: Critical Skills (5 Credits)

This short, introductory module demonstrates how distance learning fits in with the human experience of lifelong learning. It shows how learning styles are quite personal, and involve a great deal of reflection and self-appraisal. Reading is important, as is the discipline of writing assignments. The module also touches on study skills, time management and examination techniques. There is no fee for this module.

AUTUMN SEMESTER

2. Doing Theology (15 Credits)

Jesus made people think! And Christianity from its earliest days has honoured the human capacity for reflection. Whenever human enquiry touches on the big issues of life 'its origin and destiny' and relates these issues to the question of God, then the world which opens up is the world of theology. This module traces how the Judeo-Christian tradition reveals a God who is unique, personal and involved in human affairs. The module also treats of moral theology and the Church, and shows how a questioning mind is a key element in the journey of faith.

3. Spirituality and the Moral Life (10 Credits)

This module focuses on the spiritual awakening occurring inside and outside mainstream religions. The module then discusses what is specific to Christian spirituality, and traces its roots back to the Hebrew Scriptures which speak of the passionate engagement of God in human affairs. The module traces the various schools of spirituality that are characteristic of different times and places, and introduces students to classical texts from the Desert Fathers down to the twentieth century. The module also explores fundamental moral theology and what it means to reach our full human potential.

SPRING SEMESTER

4. Scripture (15 credits)

The Scripture module begins with Genesis chapters 1-11 and shows how this text is seminal to all subsequent pages of the Bible. The student is introduced to the five books of the Pentateuch and to the early history of the Jewish people. The four gospels, together with the letters of St John and St Paul, form the main focus of the New Testament study. The final part of this module analyses the critical tools developed by scripture scholars to interpret biblical texts. The methods outlined here are essential prerequisites for the deeper study of the Bible undertaken in later modules.

5. Philosophy (15 credits)

This module examines the need for theologians to study the great philosophers, not least because these philosophers have exercised an indelible influence on the development of theology. But it also outlines the questions being asked by philosophers independently of theologians. The module looks back to the philosophy of ancient Greece, and to the great figures of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. It then explores the era of greatest integration between philosophy and theology "the Middle Ages" when theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas successfully integrated the Scriptures with philosophy.



Stage 2

AUTUMN SEMESTER

6. Christian Anthropology (15 credits)

The concepts of creation, grace, sin, virtuous living and eschatology are explored by this module in a manner which also reveals common areas of enquiry shared by Christianity and the science of anthropology. The module then gives an ecological response to the creation accounts in Genesis. The concept of Original Sin and its impact on human flourishing is examined in detail, leading to a study of grace as articulated by Paul, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther, followed by contemporary approaches to what it means to live virtuously in a complex world. The Christian belief in life after death is explored, living well so that we may die well.

7. The God of Christian Faith (15 credits)

God is One and Three (Trinity); God is the source of all created reality (Creator); and God has become human (Christ). This module addresses each of these aspects of God. The module then outlines how God can be understood as both transcendent and immanent. The Creator is transcendent, but is involved with creation in a manner that rules out pantheism, modalism and dualism. Since God is the ultimate point of reference for meaning in life, this impacts on the relationship between human beings and the wider world. The trinitarian teaching of the Eastern Orthodox churches has a special place in this module.

SPRING SEMESTER

8. The Gospel of Mark (15 credits)

Mark is the oldest gospel, a fact which is remarkable considering its fresh and direct style. After a detailed study of the gospel's origins, author and social context, the module presents the unfolding drama of the disciples' relationship with Jesus, leading, as it does, to their dramatic collapse of faith. This is the sustaining theme of Mark's gospel. After this collapse, hope could only be found in Galilee. The textual analysis is supplemented by several critical studies which represent the main thrust of contemporary scholarship on Mark's gospel. They show why this particular gospel is enjoying a resurgence of interest in recent times.

9. Themes in Modern Philosophy (15 credits)

Epistemology (the theory of knowledge) was transformed by Descartes into the basis of all modern philosophical thinking, and Kant proposed the concept of duty as the fundamental moral source. The claims of knowledge, scepticism and relativism are all addressed here. The twentieth century is represented by Wittgenstein and Heidegger, two giants who typify modern philosophy, the analytical and the continental traditions. The module concludes with five detailed philosophical responses to what is arguably the greatest challenge of all: "What is the meaning of life?"



Stage 3

AUTUMN SEMESTER

10. Psalms and Prophets (15 credits)

This module studies the Psalms within their Jewish cultural context and demonstrates their formative role in Jewish spirituality and their place in the emergent Hebrew Bible. This is followed by an analysis of the psalms as quoted in the New Testament, especially as used by Jesus or of Jesus in the early Church. The module then discusses how the Psalms are experienced in prayer, and faces up to issues such as the violence and vindictiveness expressed in some Psalms. The module studies the books of Amos and Hosea, but concentrates centrally on the best-known prophetic text of all 'Isaiah' beginning with its structure and historical background, delving into the deeper theological issues contained in this fascinating text.

11. Philosophical Theology (15 credits)

In this module, the great theological themes such as God, the meaning of life, salvation, etc. are studied from a purely rational, philosophical perspective, away from the influence of faith and revelation. So the question is posed: Can we reason to the existence of God and to the nature and attributes of God? Classical arguments for the existence of God are presented and analysed, as is the relationship of faith to reason, and a philosophical approach to knowing God by way of 'the divine attributes' is undertaken. Finally, the module addresses the vexed question of religious language and of how words can be used for what is, by definition, beyond words?

SPRING SEMESTER

12. Church and Sacraments (15 credits)

From the outset the Christian community has identified itself as 'an assembly', a church 'with rituals and sacraments. How the Church developed its understanding of itself as the Body of Christ is traced through the patristic period, the Middle Ages, the Reformation and the Council of Trent. The most comprehensive expression of this theology "the Second Vatican Council" shows that a theology of worship now occupies a central place in the Catholic Church. The sacraments of initiation, "Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist", are examined in detail. Participation in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, has focussed the ecumenical search for a common Christian theology. The sacraments of Orders, Marriage, Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick are defined as sacraments "for the time of waiting".

13. Life and Justice Issues (15 credits)

This module begins with an exploration of medical ethics and its application to contemporary issues in health care, especially the doctor/patient relationship. Questions concerning the beginning and ending of life, assisted conception, IVF, abortion, euthanasia and assisted suicide are evaluated from both a Catholic and secular perspective. Key questions in genetics are all examined. A study is made of the fair allocation of scarce financial resources, along with the moral questions behind pharmaceutical research. The module investigates the link between ethics, justice and spirituality. Justice, and concepts such as the common good, human rights, human dignity and care for the earth are explored.



Stage 4

AUTUMN SEMESTER

14. Theology of World Religions (15 credits)

Ever since Vatican II Catholic theology has developed a position of openness and dialogue towards other religions. The first part of this module deals with the phenomenon of religious pluralism and the variety of responses to its challenge. One religion may or may not be open to the content of other faiths. Key issues such as truth and salvation are also examined. The second part takes a closer look at Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, and examines the theology and rituals associated with each of these traditions. The historical origins, essential characteristics and ritual practices of each of these faiths is demonstrated, and their relevance and importance to the modern world is explored in detail.

15. Pauline Writings (15 credits)

Paul of Tarsus was a contemporary of Jesus ... but the two never met. It was Paul's experience of the risen Christ that turned Saul into Paul, a major turning point in the emergence of the early Church. St Paul became the apostle of the resurrection, and his writings were influential in many Christian communities in the ancient world, especially the communities of the Mediterranean. The Module explores the cultural context of the Pauline mission, and outlines the exegetical methods used in probing his texts, especially the rhetorical structure of the letters. All seven undisputed letters are examined: 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philemon, Philippians, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans.

SPRING SEMESTER

16. Christology, Soteriology and Eschatology (15 credits)

The module begins with the Arian controversy and the trinitarian responses made by the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople. The christological controversies and the reactions of the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon are studied, with particular reference to the debates about the identity of Christ. Contemporary ideas of the Trinity and Incarnation as found in Catholic, Protestant and Eastern Orthodox Churches are explored. Theologies of redemption (soteriology) focus on the human and divine aspects of Christ. The destiny of creation (eschatology) is explored beginning with the Old Testament apocalyptic literature and its adoption by the New Testament writers and the Church fathers.

FINAL MODULE

17. Integrative Project (15 credits)

Students are expected to produce a dissertation which is conclusive, strongly supported by independent thought and initiative, and of a standard that contributes to academic theology or a related discipline. A research topic will be proposed by students in consultation with their project supervisor. Primary and secondary sources must be used, the validity of each being assessed using proper scientific tools and techniques. The Final Report will be assessed on style and layout, logical sequence, quality of English and the arrival at appropriate conclusions and recommendations, all adequately defended. The project will require proper referencing and a focused bibliography laid out in a consistent fashion.



Course Overview

This BA (Hons) Theology by blended learning is particularly suitable for those who cannot attend classes regularly. The modules are delivered by suitably qualified and experienced scholars who are specialists in their disciplines. The BA provides an excellent foundation for further studies, teaching, pastoral and retreat work. *An option exists to exit the course with the academic credits/qualification earned at each stage.*

Assessment

For each module, you submit an essay and, at the end of the semester, sit a written examination. For some modules a journal of exercises is also required.

Course Duration

Each module is studied during a fifteen-week semester. The BA (Honours) in Theology is achievable in four years if you study two modules per semester. You may, if it suits you, work at a different pace, e.g. one module per semester.

Course Delivery

Delivery is through blended learning, with a mixture of onsite and online study. Attendance in person at semester launch days is required. In addition, each module has two study days and two tutorial days, which students must attend either in person at St Mary's Dominican Priory, Tallaght, Dublin 24, or later online. Ongoing support is available from a coordinator and in-depth help from specialist academic tutors.

Admission Requirements

Mature students (aged 23 or over) do not need formal qualifications to undertake one of our courses.

You need to submit a 500-word account of why you would like to study theology. This can be as personal as you wish and may be handwritten or typed.

You may begin your studies in either Spring or Autumn.

Fees

Fees are payable at the beginning of each semester and vary depending on the number of modules, and whether or not you are studying for academic credit. For our current fees, please consult our website.

Accreditation

The BA (Hons) Theology is validated by Technological University Dublin and is aligned with the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

When to Apply

By early September or early February for the autumn or spring semesters. Please consult our website for cut-off dates.

Further Information

The Priory Institute is a centre for theological, biblical and philosophical studies, established by the Irish Province of the Dominican Order and is Catholic and ecumenical in its approach. It seeks to engage with the best thinking of our times and brings the insights of different philosophical and religious thinkers to bear on the study of theology and religious studies.

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