

Undergraduate Programs

Theology

The study of Theology provides an essential academic foundation whether as a major or as a prerequisite for the study of any other major within the Liberal Arts as it alone offers us the fundamental reconciliation of "fides et ratio", faith and reason, that are the basis for all human knowledge. Holy Spirit College presents the study of Theology as a Thomistic undertaking with St. Thomas Aquinas, the *Summa Theologiae*, the *Holy Bible* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as our guides.

At Vatican City on June 16, 2010, his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI addressed the faithful at his public audience:

"Today I would like to continue a presentation of St. Thomas Aquinas, a theologian of such value that the study of his thought was explicitly recommended by the Second Vatican Council in two documents, the decree "Optatam Totius," on formation for the priesthood, and the declaration "Gravissimum Educationis," which deals with Christian education. However, already in 1880, Pope Leo XIII, who greatly esteemed [Thomas] and was a promoter of Thomistic studies, wished to declare St. Thomas the patron of Catholic schools and universities.

The main reason for this appreciation lies not only in the content of his teaching, but also in the method he used, above all his new synthesis and distinction between philosophy and theology. The Fathers of the Church had found themselves faced with different philosophies of a Platonic type, in which a complete vision of the world and of life was presented, including the question of God and of religion. In confronting these philosophies, they themselves elaborated a complete vision of reality, starting from the faith and using elements of Platonism, to respond to the essential questions of man. They called this vision, based on biblical revelation and elaborated with a correct Platonism in the light of faith, "our philosophy." The word "philosophy" was not, therefore, the expression of a purely rational system and, as such, different from faith, but it indicated a comprehensive vision of reality, constructed in the light of faith, but made by and thought out by reason; a vision that, it is true, went beyond the capacity proper to reason, but that, as such, was also satisfying for it.

For St. Thomas the encounter with the pre-Christian philosophy of Aristotle (who died around 322 B.C.) opened a new perspective. Aristotelian philosophy was, obviously, a philosophy elaborated without knowledge of the Old and the New Testament, an explanation of the world without Revelation, by reason alone. And this consistent rationality was convincing. Thus the old form of the Fathers' "our philosophy" no longer worked. The relationship between philosophy and theology, between faith and reason, had to be thought out again.

There existed a complete and convincing "philosophy" in itself, a rationality preceding faith, and then "theology," thinking with the faith and in the faith. The pressing question was this: Are the world of rationality, philosophy thought out without Christ, and the world of faith compatible? Or do they exclude one another?

There was no lack of elements that affirmed the incompatibility between the two worlds, but St. Thomas was firmly convinced of their compatibility -- more than that, that a philosophy elaborated without the knowledge of Christ almost awaited

the light of Jesus to be complete. This was the great "surprise" of St. Thomas, which determined his path as a thinker. To show this independence of philosophy and theology and, at the same time, their reciprocal rationality was the historic mission of the great teacher. And thus we can understand why, in the 19th century, when an incompatibility between modern reason and faith was forcefully declared, Pope Leo XIII indicated St. Thomas as the guide in the dialogue between the one and the other.

In his theological work, St. Thomas presupposes and makes concrete this rationality. Faith consolidates, integrates and enlightens the patrimony of truth that human reason acquires. The trust that St. Thomas accords to these two instruments of knowledge -- faith and reason -- can lead back to the conviction that both proceed from the one source of all truth, the divine Logos, which operates both in the realm of creation as well as in that of redemption.

*Together with the agreement between reason and faith, it must be acknowledged that they make use of different cognitive procedures. Reason accepts a truth on the strength of its intrinsic evidence, indirect or immediate; faith, instead, accepts a truth based on the authority of the Word of God who reveals himself. At the beginning of his *Summa Theologiae* St. Thomas writes: "The order of the sciences is twofold; some proceed from principles known through the natural light of reason, such as mathematics, geometry and similar ones; others proceed from principles known through a higher science: as perspective proceeds from principles known through geometry and music from principles known through mathematics. And in this way the sacred doctrine (namely, theology) is a science because it proceeds from principles known through the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and of the saints" (I, q. 1, a. 2).*

This distinction ensures the autonomy both of human sciences as well as of the theological sciences. However, this is not the equivalent of separation, but implies a reciprocal and advantageous collaboration. Faith, in fact, protects reason from every temptation to mistrust its own capacities, it stimulates it to open to ever more vast horizons, it keeps alive in it the search for foundations and, when reason itself applies itself to the supernatural sphere of the relationship between God and man, it enriches its work. According to St. Thomas, for example, human reason can without a doubt attain to the affirmation of the existence of one God, but only faith, which receives divine Revelation, is able to attain to the mystery of the Love of God, One and Triune.

On the other hand, it is not only faith that helps reason. Reason also, with its means, can do something important for faith, rendering it a threefold service that St. Thomas summarizes in the preface of his commentary to Boethius' *De Trinitate*: "To demonstrate the foundations of the faith; to explain through similarities the truth of the faith; to refute the objections that are raised against the faith" (q. 2, a. 2). The whole history of theology is, fundamentally, this threefold project of explaining the intelligibility of faith, its internal articulation and harmony, its reasonableness and its capacity to promote the good of man. The correction of theological reasoning and its real cognitive meaning is based on the value of theological language, which is, according to St. Thomas, primarily an analogical language. The distance between God, the Creator, and the being of his creatures is infinite; the dissimilarity is always greater than the similarity (cf. DC 806). Despite this, in all the difference between Creator and creature, there is

an analogy between created being and the being of the Creator, which enables us to speak with human words about God.

St. Thomas based the doctrine of analogy, as well as his exquisitely philosophical arguments, also on the fact that with Revelation, God himself has spoken to us and has, therefore, authorized us to speak of him. I consider it important to recall this doctrine. In fact, it helps us to surmount some objections of contemporary atheism, which denies that religious language is equipped with an objective meaning, and maintains instead that it has only a subjective or simply emotional value. This objection results from the fact that positivist thought is convinced that man does not know being, but only the functions of reality that are experienced. With St. Thomas and with the great philosophical tradition, we are convinced that, in reality, man does not only know the functions, object of the natural sciences, but he knows something of being itself—for example he knows the person, the you of the other, and not only the physical or biological aspect of his being.

In the light of this teaching of St. Thomas, theology affirms that, though limited, religious language is equipped with meaning—because we touch being—as an arrow directed toward the reality it signifies. This fundamental agreement between human reason and Christian faith is recognized in another basic principle of Aquinas' thought: divine grace does not annul but supposes and perfects human nature. Human nature, in fact, even after sin, is not completely corrupt, but wounded and weakened. Grace, lavished by God and communicated through the Mystery of the Incarnate Word, is an absolutely free gift with which nature is healed, strengthened and aided in the pursuit of happiness, the innate desire in the heart of every man and every woman. All the faculties of the human being are purified, transformed and elevated by divine grace.

An important application of this relation between nature and grace is recognized in the moral theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, which is very timely. At the center of his teaching in this field, he puts the new law, which is the law of the Holy Spirit. With a profoundly evangelical focus, he insists on the fact that this law is the grace of the Holy Spirit given to all those who believe in Christ. To such grace is joined the written and oral teaching of the doctrinal and moral truths, transmitted by the Church. Stressing the fundamental role in moral life of the Holy Spirit's action, of grace, from which the theological and moral virtues flow, St. Thomas makes one understand that every Christian can attain the lofty prospects of the "Sermon on the Mount" if he lives an authentic relationship of faith in Christ, if he opens himself to the action of his Holy Spirit. However—Aquinas adds—“even if grace is more effective than nature, still nature is more essential for man” (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q, 29, a. 3), due to which, in the Christian moral perspective, there is a place for reason, which is capable of discerning the natural moral law. Reason can recognize [this law] considering what is good to do and what is good to avoid to obtain that happiness which is in each one's heart, and which also imposes a responsibility toward others and, hence, the search for the common good. In other words, the virtues of man, theological and moral, are rooted in human nature. Divine grace supports, sustains, and drives the ethical commitment but, on their own, according to St. Thomas, all men, believers and non-believers, are called to recognize the exigencies of human nature expressed in natural law and to be inspired in it in the formulation of positive laws, that is, those issuing from the civil and political authorities to regulate human coexistence.

When the natural law and the responsibility it implies are denied, the way is opened dramatically

to ethical relativism on the individual plane and to the totalitarianism of the state on the political plane. The defense of man's universal rights and the affirmation of the absolute value of the dignity of the person postulate a foundation. Is not the natural law precisely this foundation, with the non-negotiable values that it indicates? The Venerable John Paul II wrote in his encyclical "Evangelium Vitae" words that remain very timely: "It is therefore urgently necessary, for the future of society and the development of a sound democracy, to rediscover those essential and innate human and moral values which flow from the very truth of the human being and express and safeguard the dignity of the person: values which no individual, no majority and no State can ever create, modify or destroy, but must only acknowledge, respect and promote" (No. 71).

In conclusion, St. Thomas Aquinas proposes to us a broad and trustworthy concept of human reason: broad because it is not limited to the spaces of the so-called empirical-scientific reason, but open to the whole being and hence also to the fundamental and inalienable questions of human living; and trustworthy because human reason, above all if it accepts the inspirations of the Christian faith, is a promoter of a civilization that recognizes the dignity of the person, the intangibility of his rights and the strength of his duties. It is not surprising that the doctrine about the dignity of the person, fundamental for the recognition of the inviolability of man's rights, matured in realms of thought that took up the legacy of St. Thomas Aquinas, who had a very lofty concept of the human creature. He defined it, with his rigorously philosophical language, as "that which is most perfect found in the whole of nature that is a subsistent subject in a rational nature" (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 29, a. 3).

The profundity of St. Thomas Aquinas' thought stems—let us never forget it—from his lively faith and his fervent piety, which he expressed in inspired prayers, such as this one in which he asks God: "Grant me, I pray, a will that seeks you, a wisdom that finds you, a life that pleases you, a perseverance that waits for you with trust and a trust that in the end succeeds in possessing you."

Undergraduate Courses

THEO 105: Introduction to Sacred Scripture: This course introduces students to the foundations of the Catholic understanding of Sacred Scripture as Divine Revelation and the soul of sacred theology. It considers questions of scriptural authorship, inspiration, and inerrancy, as well as the relationship between the Divine and Human authors, and the reception and transmission of the Bible in the Church. It will consider the relationship between the Old and New Testaments within God's plan of salvation. It will also provide an introduction to methods of scriptural interpretation, including the four senses of Scripture and the historical critical method, considering questions of literary genres and textual traditions. Sources include scripture itself, as well as magisterial and patristic documents, particularly the Constitution *Dei Verbum* of the Second Vatican Council and *Verbum Domini* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, 2010). (4 credit hours)

THEO 115: Sacred Doctrine: This course serves as the second theology course in the core curriculum. Building upon the scriptural foundation of the previous required course in Sacred Scripture, this course is an introduction to dogmatic Catholic theology. Particular attention will

be given to natural and divine revelation, the modes of transmission of divine revelation, and the essential doctrines of faith, the moral life, and the sacraments. (4 credit hours)

THEO 205/630: Moral Theology: This course investigates the dignity of life in Christ, founded on love, by examining Christian moral principles, ethics, and modern issues. Course will include such topics as the Decalogue; the two Great Commandments; natural and divine law; the human person and act; virtues/vices; grace; beatitudes; sin; freedom; eternal life; mercy; conscience; gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit; moral absolutes; social doctrine; sexual morality; conversion; and holiness, all within the context of the teaching authority of the Church. Magisterial documents including *Veritatis Splendor* and *Evangelium Vitae* will be examined. (4 credit hours)

THEO 215: Logic and Metaphysics: The first part of this course will familiarize students with some basic logical concepts and provide methods to analyze the validity of arguments and to generate basic deductive arguments. The second part of the course will focus on the questions of nature and being, particularly as developed in Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. Topics examined include the fundamental structures of reality (including the distinctions between substance and accident, matter and form, potency and act, essence and existence) as well as the transcendental properties of being. Emphasizing an Aristotelian-Thomistic approach to physical/metaphysical inquiry, modern and contemporary views of nature and being will be examined and evaluated. (4 credit hours)

THEO 315: Trinity and Christology (Systematic Theology): This course will examine the Christian faith in the Triune God, including the historical developments of Christian creeds, major dogmatic controversies, the early ecumenical councils and patristic figures that contributed to the development of Trinitarian theology. It will also consider Trinitarian theology from a synchronic view, reflecting the Catholic understanding of the Triune God and the implications of that understanding for mystical, pastoral, and moral theology. It will also examine the Christian faith in Jesus Christ, Son of God and true man, considering the scriptural texts related to Christ's nature, the development of Christological dogma, major figures and controversies, and the implications of Christological dogma for Christian life. Christ's role as redeemer and the redemptive value of Christ's sacrifice will be explored, together with the questions of justification and merit. These topics will be explored with reference to S.Th. Ia Q2-43; IIIa 1-59. (4 credit hours)

THEO 325: Liturgy and Sacraments: The liturgical life of the Church, especially as it unfolds in the celebration of the seven sacraments, will be explored in this course. It will consider the development and theology of Christian liturgy in both East and West, with a focus, however, on the Roman rite. The relation between liturgy and Christian theology and anthropology will be considered, together with the role of liturgy within the life of the believer and the life of the Church. The sacraments will be considered in terms of their foundations as instituted by Christ and as understood through Scripture and Tradition. Questions of minister, recipient, form, matter, and effect will all be examined, together with the relationship between the sacraments, Christ's passion, death, and resurrection, the economy of salvation, and the Church. The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of the Second Vatican Council as well as Saint Thomas' teaching in the S.Th. IIIa 60-68 will be considered. (4 credit hours)

THEO 335: Ecclesiology & Patristics: This course will consider the theological nature of the Church. Preparations for the Church in the Old Covenant will be considered, together with Christ's actions and intention in founding His Church. Latin and Greek Patristic texts on the nature of the Church will be considered. The role of the Church in uniting the believer to God will be studied, as well as the unicity and salvific universality of the Catholic Church, and the theological relationship between the Catholic Church and non-Catholics. The Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, will be explored in depth. (4 credit hours)

THEO 450: Introduction to Canon Law: This course is to provide a basic understanding of the legal system of the Catholic Church (canon law), its origins, and its importance. It will familiarize students with the rules for applying canon law and the sources where such laws can be found. Finally, there will be opportunities to relate universal and particular law to concrete situations and explain the application of the law. (4 credit hours)

THEO 415: Christian Anthropology: This course studies the Catholic doctrine of the human person in his/her relation to God, to nature and to others. It begins with an examination of the doctrines of creation, the ordering of humanity to its divine destiny, the creation of humanity in the "image and likeness" of God, and the historical life of mankind under divine providence. The course then proceeds to discuss the relation of the human person to God, to his or her own nature and to others. Among the theological topics that will be discussed in this section of the course are: man's nature after the fall, divine and human freedom, divine grace, the relationship of self and others essential to the divine ordering of human life, the supernatural destiny of humanity, death, and last things. In addition to biblical readings, seminarians will be asked to read relevant texts from patristic, medieval and modern writers. These topics will be explored with reference to S. Th. Isaiah. (4 credit hours)

THEO 425: Theology, Protology, & Eschatology: This course will consider human origins and man's final end. It will also consider the possibility of knowing God that arises from man's peculiar status as a created being. It will analyze the development of Christian thought on these themes, giving a strong emphasis to relevant biblical texts. The nature of sin, including both original and actual sin will be explored. It will consider topics including heaven, hell, and purgatory, prayer for the dead, gradations of beatitude, all in the context of God's relationship to man. These questions will be explored in light of St. Thomas' presentation of the topic in the *Seth. Ian Q1, 44-119; Imia 69-99.* (4 credit hours)

THEO 445: Philosophy and Theology: An introduction to major topics in the philosophy of religion: the relation of Christian faith to reason, the nature of God, the problem of evil, arguments for God's existence, science and Christian belief, God and morality, miracles, and the nature and existence of the soul. (4 credit hours)