

# Theological Understanding

**Learning Goal:** Through the study of religious texts, traditions, rituals, history, and human experience, students will engage in an academic exploration of religion and theology. They will join in an exploration of God, humankind, and the world as expressed in the Catholic and other religious traditions. Students will appreciate the social, cultural, ethical, and theological implications that such questions have for how we should live both individually and as a community.

**Christian Foundations Learning Outcomes:** Students will

1. Demonstrate knowledge of major texts and themes of the Bible, including major theological and interpretive principles central to the Catholic tradition with attention to their social, cultural, ethical and/or theological implications; and
2. Demonstrate an understanding of basic methods and tools used in scholarly interpretation of biblical texts; and
3. Demonstrate an ability to read biblical texts in light of relevant contextual factors (e.g., historical, cultural, literary, theological).

**Theological Explorations:** Students will

1. Demonstrate an understanding of one or more aspects of Christian tradition and/or another religious tradition or traditions, acquired through focused study in a sub-field of theology or religious studies; and
2. Demonstrate an ability to explore religious questions from a believer's point of reference and from the critical perspective of the academy.

**Rationale** (i.e., the intention of the proposed outcomes): Students will take two courses devoted to theological understanding. Foundational study in Christian theological understanding will expose students to major texts and themes of the Bible, as well as to issues pertaining to its contextual and scholarly interpretation, and the implications that such texts have for our lives. Moreover, in conversation with biblical texts and themes, students will become familiar with biblical principles central to the Catholic Christian tradition. In addition to being one of the "great books" of Western civilization and culture, the Bible represents within the Catholic and other Christian traditions the fundamental gospel revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Therefore, and in light of *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and other Catholic teaching regarding the interpretation of the Christian Scriptures, it is fitting that students demonstrate knowledge of major texts and themes of the Bible, including theological and interpretive principles central to the Catholic tradition; an understanding of basic methods (e.g., source-, redaction-, narrative-criticism) and tools (e.g., biblical commentaries) for scholarly interpretation of religious texts; and an ability to engage biblical texts in light of contextual factors (e.g., historical, cultural, literary, theological).

Building upon this foundational work, students will develop further the skills of theological understanding, either through continued exploration of the Christian tradition or through exploration of another religious tradition or traditions. This

exploration can focus on one tradition as a whole, a part of one tradition, or several traditions. By focused study in a sub-field of theology or religious studies, we intend that students must continue to engage with the disciplinary methods and skills of theological understanding, understood broadly to include all of the subfields of theology (e.g., moral theology, ecclesiology) and religious studies (e.g., feminist, anthropological, psychological, or literary approaches to religion). A crucial aspect of this theological understanding is the ability to explore religious and faith questions from the inside (i.e., within a believer's frame of reference) and from the outside (i.e., from the critical perspective of the academy), as such a balance / tension is crucial for responsible theological work.