



# Higher Certificate in Theology

Level 6 (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 following 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?"



## Course Overview

This Higher Certificate in 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 Higher Certificate 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

Students submit a written assignment for each module during the semester and, at the end 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 Higher Certificate in Theology is achievable in two 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.

Applicants submit a 500-word account of why they would like to study theology. Applicants should have basic computer skills

## Fees

Fees are payable at the beginning of each semester and vary depending on the number of modules taken. Consult [prioryinstitute.com](http://prioryinstitute.com) for our current fees

## Accreditation

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

## When to Apply

By early September or mid January for the autumn or spring semesters. You can find the cut-off dates on [prioryinstitute.com](http://prioryinstitute.com)



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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