

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND FRANCISCAN STUDIES

Department Chair: Fr. Kyle Haden, O.F.M., Ph.D.

Faculty

Andrew Gertner Belfield, Ph.D.
 O. Bychkov, Ph.D.
 Fr. D. Couturier, O.F.M., Cap., Ph.D.
 Aaron Gies, Ph.D.
 J-F. Godet-Calogeras, Ph.D. (Emeritus)
 Fr. K. Haden, O.F.M., Ph.D.
 Myka Lahaie, Ph.D.

Theology and Franciscan Studies is a major unique to this campus that combines two fields of academic inquiry. While Theology studies God, things in relation to God, and the language used to convey those realities, Franciscan Studies focuses on figures and movements connected to the religious way of life initiated by Francis (d. 1226) and Clare of Assisi (d. 1253).

Taking our cue from Francis and Clare who sought to follow the Gospel as closely as possible, we recognize that the study of theology must incorporate a solid grounding in the Bible. Francis and Clare also sought to remain faithful to the Church even as they provided new visions of what a vocation in the Church meant. Thus, we recognize that a solid grounding in the theological teaching of the Church is essential. Francis and Clare also lived their life of faith in the service they performed for others. Thus, we recognize that Christian theology also entails a lived, social, ethical dimension. These convictions connect with the classic Franciscan approach to academic theology, which holds that theology is a wisdom which transforms the mind and the desires of the student and professor.

Students who take courses in Theology and Franciscan Studies can expect to learn more about the beliefs, values, and practices of Christians and especially the theological, spiritual, and religious tradition that flows from Francis, Clare and Bonaventure. Students also have the opportunity to learn about other faiths and religious practices from around the world.

Some Theology and Franciscan Studies courses focus on a particular theological theme or issue that has been debated by scholars over the centuries, while others explore the role of religion in contemporary society or examine the relation between religion and other realms of thought (science, philosophy, art, etc.). Other classes focus specifically on elements of the Franciscan tradition and the history of Christianity more broadly. In the midst of this diversity, one concern remains paramount: to equip students with intellectual concepts and methods to enable them to think carefully and systematically about the ultimate questions of life in the company of others who have explored these questions before them.

- Theology, BA (<https://catalog.sbu.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/theology/theology-ba/>)
- Theology, Minor (<https://catalog.sbu.edu/undergraduate/arts-sciences/theology/theology-minor/>)

Theology and Franciscan Studies (THFS)

THFS-101 THE WAY OF FRANCIS & CLARE (3 Credits)

This course is intended to introduce students to the Franciscan roots that underlie the mission and values of St. Bonaventure University. After familiarizing themselves with the social and cultural context that shaped Francis and Clare of Assisi, students will examine their lives, values and spirituality, and then study how these achieved systematic theological expression in the thought of St. Bonaventure. Students will then connect and apply key Franciscan insights to contemporary concerns.

THFS-104 THE WAY OF FRANCIS & CLARE HONORS (3 Credits)

This course is designed for students in the honors Program. It achieves the same objectives and satisfies the same requirements as does THFS 101 "The Way of Francis and Clare". An honors section is distinguished from a regular section by more than just the addition of an extra paper. At the discretion of the instructor, Honors courses typically do one or more of the following: cover additional topics, cover topics in more depth, and/or require additional scholarly assignments as compared to a regular section.

THFS-203 ISLAM: RELIGION & CULTURE (3 Credits)

This course examines the world's second largest religion according to its three major dimensions, namely, Islam (practices), Iman (faith), and Ihsan (integration and expression), as well as a historical dimension. Topics include the social and religious climate in pre-Islamic Arabia and the eastern Mediterranean, the life of the Prophet Muhammad, the history of the Islamic community, and the beliefs, practices, and spirituality of Islam. The culture of Islam, as expressed by the arts, will also be examined. Contemporary social and political issues that face the international Muslim community are also considered.

THFS-225 Theology and the Arts (3 Credits)

Aesthetic experience and the arts have been an important channel of religious expression in the history of humanity. Naturally they have been the subject of theological reflection and the focus of liturgical practice, i.e., practical theology. This course examines the theological reflection on aesthetic experience and the arts, as well as the use of the arts in liturgical practice in the Christian tradition (with limited comparisons to Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu traditions), which over the millennia has developed a considerable array of liturgical arts and theological reflection on them. The course focuses on the varied liturgical uses of and theological reflection on images, music, architecture, text, and combined media (such as liturgical action) in the life and liturgy of the church.

THFS-226 THEOLOGY THROUGH FILM (3 Credits)

What do films-religious or not-have to say about God, and how can theological perspectives on films enrich engagement with those films? Approaching these questions with the commitment that film and theology are mutually enriching, this course explores how theological thinking can transform the ways we encounter film and how film can in turn deepen our reflection on God and matters pertaining to God. After orienting students to some basic considerations in film literacy, the course considers films from various filmmakers on selected theological topics and themes, paired with relevant readings in film criticism and theology.

THFS-230 FAITH AND DOUBT (3 Credits)

Modern secular culture has raised many questions for religious faith. Traditional views of God have been challenged from a variety of directions, and the idea that one should submit one's life to a higher power runs counter to contemporary ideas about human freedom and psychological well-being. This course will examine recent critiques of belief in God and the nature of faith in order to clarify what might be required of an intelligent faith in God today.

THFS-235 CATHOLIC THEOLOGY (3 Credits)

Building upon THFS 101, this course examines classic topics in Catholic theology in further historical and conceptual depth. The specific contribution of Franciscan theologians to Catholic theology will be highlighted. Recent writings in theology will be considered.

Prerequisite(s): Take THFS-101

THFS-245 CHRISTIAN ETHICS (3 Credits)

What does it mean to think and live as a Christian in today's world? How does one decide? This course will explore some of the answers that Christian thinkers have given to such questions. The investigation will include an examination of selected moral and theological problems such as abortion, poverty, war and racism.

THFS-252 CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY (3 Credits)

This course examines the mystical traditions and practices found in Christianity as expressed in Scripture and the writings of later spiritual leaders.

THFS-261 JESUS THROUGH THE CENTURIES (3 Credits)

Jesus of Nazareth is not only the theological center of the Christian faith, but also the pivotal figure in the history of Western civilization. Debates over who he was and what he sought to accomplish have engaged the best minds of generations, and conflicts over these questions have divided nations and led to bloodshed. This course will explore the diverse and sometimes opposing views that Christians have held about Jesus over the centuries.

THFS-263 SACRAMENTS (3 Credits)

What is a sacrament? Why are sacraments so important in the spiritual life of the church? This course examines the theological basis of the sacramental system and presents a survey of the sacraments as celebrated in Christian churches. Included in the course is a study of symbols, rituals and the psychosocial dynamics of sacramental celebration.

THFS-266 FRANCISCAN THEOLOGY FOR TODAY (3 Credits)

Is Franciscan Theology still relevant today? The course will examine such Franciscan theologians as Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, Peter John Olivi and others in comparison with modern and contemporary theology and philosophy to answer the following questions from a Franciscan perspective: Is theology a true science? How do we prove God's existence? What is the role of the senses and the arts in becoming aware of God? How does the human mind reflect God? How does the will relate to the intellect? How should humans relate to one another socio-economically? What is God and how is God related to the physical world? How does the Trinity make any sense? Why do we need a mystical journey as well as rational?

THFS-270 INTRO TO THE BIBLE (3 Credits)

The Bible is a collection of books that both Jews and Christians honor as sacred Scripture, though in different ways. This course will introduce students to the historical, literary, and theological dimensions of the Bible as it has been understood by modern academic scholars and by Jews and Christians over the centuries.

THFS-271 UNDERSTANDING THE OLD TESTAMENT (3 Credits)

The collection of books that Christians call the "Old Testament," the first part of the Christian Bible, is also the sacred scripture of Judaism. It originated, however, before either of these religions, as a written reflection of the religious beliefs, practices, and ideals of a particular group of people in ancient Israel whom both Jews and Christians claim as their intellectual and spiritual ancestors. This course will explore the contents and message of these books in relation to their historical, literary, and theological contexts as both sacred literature of ancient Israel and canonical scriptures of Judaism and Christianity.

THFS-272 UNDERSTANDING THE NEW TESTAMENT (3 Credits)

The collection of books that Christians call the "New Testament," is the most important part of the Bible for Christians. It was written during the early decades of the Christian movement and serves as our principal source for information about the life and ministry of Jesus and the early history of the Christian church, including the rise of Christian theology. This course will investigate the contents and messages of the 27 books of the New Testament in relation to their historical, literary, and theological contexts in both the early Christian community and later Christian interpretations.

THFS-299 SPECIAL TOPICS (3 Credits)

An intensive study of a topic or issue not usually addressed in other courses offered by the department. The topic of the course will be advertised in the course schedule prior to the semester when it is offered. The course may be taken more than once provided the content has changed.

THFS-299B SP TOP:THEOLOGIES OF DISABILITY (3 Credits)

An intensive study of a topic or issue not usually addressed in other courses offered by the department. The topic of the course will be advertised in the course schedule prior to the semester when it is offered. The course may be taken more than once provided the content has changed.

THFS-307 CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM REL: PAST, PRES, FUT (3 Credits)

This course examines the historical, social and theological dimensions of Christian-Muslim relations from the advent of Islam to the current day. The first part of the course addresses questions such as: How have Christians and Muslims viewed each other's faiths over the centuries? To what extent have their relations been characterized by harmony and cooperation, or by strife and discord? How have these relations changed and why? In the second part, we examine contemporary theological questions, perspectives, and debates arising from this historical interaction. We will also address inter-religious dialogue in the United States, and the future of Christian-Muslim relations.

THFS-333 CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE (3 Credits)

A study of sexuality, spirituality and the sacrament of marriage. Utilizing experiential and historical data and a Catholic and Franciscan theological perspective, we will explore myths, realities and meanings of eros, sexuality, relational dynamics, intimacy, pornography, beauty, dating, marriage, sex, divorce, annulment, conflict resolution, commitment, parenting and spirituality. To achieve this goal, required reading, critical reflection and active class participation are essential.

THFS-340 ETHICAL LEADERSHIP:FRANCISCAN VALUES (3 Credits)

This course focuses on a healthy world, economy and our responsibility for it. It begins with the economic financial crisis of 2007-2008 and looks at the social, cultural, economic and psychological factors along with the ethical lapses that led up to it. This course then presents the major contributions that Franciscan thinkers have made to the way we can understand, accept and humanize the modern market economy. Franciscan principles and practices for a more social economy will provide students with the ethical insights and practical tools they will need in the workplace to balance freedom and responsibility, profit-making and solidarity, the care of creation and the common good.

THFS-342 BONAVENTURE-LIFE & WRITINGS (3 Credits)

Building upon THFS-101, this course examines the life & thought of St. Bonaventure within the broader context of the medieval world & the thought patterns Bonaventure inherited from the Christian intellectual tradition to that point. The course will introduce students to the changed context of Franciscan life at the Universities, the rise of the Universities & university curricula which shaped the Western intellectual tradition for over 400 years, the thought of prominent thinkers in the Christian tradition, & the thought of St. Bonaventure himself on a variety of theological, philosophical & spiritual themes.

Prerequisite(s): Take THFS-101 or THFS-104

THFS-345 CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT (3 Credits)

The course will introduce students to what has been called the greatest secret of the Catholic Church- its social teaching. Students will begin by exploring the historical and religious origins of the basic principles of Catholic Social Thought-the sacredness of human life, and the dignity of the human person. They will learn how that teaching has been articulated in Church documents, and has found expression in the Church and in secular movements. Ultimately, the course is not just another academic offering, but an integral part of the mission of the University. It is a key component of the University's response to the Church's call for a fuller integration of the Church's social tradition into the mainstream of Catholic education. The course will help demonstrate the University's commitment to human life, human dignity, and human rights.

THFS-348 HEALTH, FAITH & ETHICS (3 Credits)

This course introduces students to and acquaints them with the ways in which religious convictions and practices shape understandings of health and wholeness and, concomitantly, how health care should be administered to all in a just, right and equitable manner as people created in God's image. Questions of social justice and allocation of limited resources, especially to vulnerable populations like the elderly and the poor are considered. Specific ethical issues are treated within the purview of a spiritual/religious vision of human beings.

THFS-360 EARLY HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE REFORMATION (3 Credits)

For much of the last 2,000 years, the history of Western civilization has been framed around the history of the Christian church. This course surveys the history of Christianity from the Apostolic Fathers to the Modern Era. Attention will be given to the social, institutional and intellectual aspects of the Christian faith.

THFS-362 FRANCIS & FRANC. TRADITION (3 Credits)

The spiritual movement initiated by Francis of Assisi has played a key role in the spiritual and intellectual life of the Catholic church from the Middle Ages to the present. This course will examine the life of St. Francis and his impact on the church and the world. The course will also look at some of the great Franciscan scholars like St. Bonaventure in order to explore the influence and applications of Franciscanism to the modern world.

THFS-374 WOMEN AND THE BIBLE (3 Credits)

In this upper-level seminar course, we will study how representative women thinkers have interpreted biblical texts and figures. How, and why, do they read these texts? What questions and contexts guide their exegesis? To what extent does their work inform how we think about the Bible and the way we construct Christian history?

THFS-399 SPECIAL TOPICS (3 Credits)

As intensive study of a topic or issue not usually addressed in other courses offered by the department. The topic of the course will be advertised in the course schedule prior to the semester when it is offered. The course may be taken again provided the content has changed.

THFS-490 IND.STY:READINGS IN THEOLOGY (1-6 Credits)

Under the guidance of a professor, the student will pursue an advanced research project that involves significant reading and writing.

THFS-498 SEMINAR IN THEOLOGY (3 Credits)

An integrative capstone course for theology majors and minors. The course will explore a particular topic, theme, issue or author from a variety of theological perspectives. The topic of course will be advertised in the course schedule prior to the semester when it is offered. The course is required of all senior theology majors.