THEOLOGY (PH.D.)

Requirements

Advisor

Upon entering the Ph.D. program, a student will be assigned an advisor working in the student’s intended Field of Study. This advisor will assist in the selection of courses, monitor the progress of language acquisition, and fill all additional roles necessary for good progress. By the conclusion of the first year of coursework, students may choose another member of the department to fulfill this role. Students certainly may, but are not required to, ask their advisor to serve as the mentor for the dissertation.

Curriculum

With the consultation of an advisor, students will take responsibility for planning a curriculum of study that is both broad and specialized. Coursework at the doctoral level, even outside of seminars, demands a more active role on the part of the student: rather than simply absorbing information, the student is expected to contribute to the encounter with texts and ideas, to design projects, and to pursue independent study. A list of offerings for the current semester can be found on our page on the Fordham website. Students must complete at least 66 credits of coursework to earn the Ph.D., with a minimum accumulative GPA of 3.5.

The only general requirement is that students must complete a zero credit course, THEO 5015 Teaching Theology, before they are permitted to teach courses for the department. The department will offer this course at least once every four semesters.

Language Proficiency

In the course of doctoral studies, all students will be called upon to demonstrate reading proficiency in two modern languages and will be expected to use these linguistic skills in reading for classes and papers. Unless otherwise specified, the two required modern languages are French and German (Students in Systematic Theology may substitute Spanish for French or German). This can be completed by taking a reading exam (ZZGA 0941) or by completing reading courses (FREN 5090 or GERM 5001). For some students, a similar knowledge of ancient languages will need to be demonstrated. Check your proposed Field of Study for more information about language requirements.

Graduate Teaching Assistantships

As part of the Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) program, every second-year Ph.D. student will have an opportunity to work with at least one faculty member in a Fordham undergraduate classroom prior to teaching on his or her own in the third year.

Comprehensive Exams

The student is required to choose two general areas of research within his or her primary field of study and one area in a related field of study, which will constitute the minor exam. The fourth exam will be more narrowly focused and should reflect the student’s intended subfield of dissertation research. Ordinarily, a student will take the exams (THEO 0930) during the sixth semester.

Dissertation

A doctoral dissertation is the literary exposition of a thesis. The thesis is the theological proposition for which one marshals evidence and arguments. Although scholarship may be focused in different ways in the various field specializations, every dissertation will include some degree of research, at least into the state of a question; and every thesis will include some degree of argument and judgment, at least regarding the theological relevance of one’s data. The dissertation must be methodologically self-conscious. It must justify its method and structure and continually demonstrate their presence. Students must develop a proposal (THEO 0950), have the proposal accepted (THEO 0960), and have continued direction (THEO 0970) from your faculty advisor(s).

Concentrations

Bible

The program in Bible equips students with a sound linguistic and exegetical training for research and teaching. Reading courses in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek are fundamental to the program, and study of other ancient languages relevant to the student’s area of research are available through the Inter-University Doctoral Consortium and the New York Theological Group.

In addition to French and German, students in Bible must demonstrate proficiency in Hebrew and Greek through departmental exams and proficiency in Aramaic through a course or tutorial.

A student whose field of study is Bible will take his or her two major exams in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and New Testament. The dissertation area exam will focus on the testament in which the student is concentrating.

Christianity in Antiquity

More than a reframing of the chronological parameters for academic investigation, Fordham’s program in Christianity in Antiquity promotes immersion in the variety of aspects of ancient culture. It provides advanced instruction in the resources, issues, and methods associated with the fields of Second Temple Judaism, New Testament, Patristics, and early Christianity.

As part of the courses required of all Ph.D. students in theology, students are required to take one course in Second Temple Judaism (THEO 6026) and one course in Greco-Roman World (THEO 6192).


In dissertation research, students are encouraged to push the current boundaries of topics and methods in their chosen fields. Our faculty members embrace research into practices and artifacts, as well as the customary literary sources, in order to explore theological themes and diverse constructions of social identity.

History of Christianity

Faculty members and students in history of Christianity/historical theology examine the ways in which Christians, through the centuries, have engaged their tradition, its beliefs and practices, and the world in which they live. Theology and doctrine, devotional life and practices, liturgy, institutions, cultural productions, and lived religion are all foci for study. Faculty and students focus on specific theologians in particular
contexts (e.g., Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Henri de Lubac), on historical periods and/or regions (e.g., the early Byzantine era, the medieval west, the United States, 20th century Europe), or on themes throughout Christian history (e.g., asceticism, the papacy, heresy, Jewish-Christian relations, mysticism, gender, embodiment, sacred space).

In addition to French and German, students in historical theology/history of Christianity who intend to write a dissertation in a pre-modern period for which Latin and/or Greek is necessary must demonstrate proficiency in the relevant language(s) by the successful completion of the relevant exam(s).

At the current time, the faculty in historical theology/history of Christianity define the possible areas of research in which a student may select a major or minor exam as follows: Early, Medieval, and Modern. Each area of research has its own bibliography selected by the faculty. A student whose field of study is historical theology/history of Christianity will select two of these areas of research for his or her major exams.

Systematic Theology

Systematic theology engages Roman Catholic theology in historical and contemporary eras, while also facilitating the study of Orthodoxy, Protestantism, and other religious traditions and worldviews. In addition to classical topics (such as theologies of God and Christ), the Systematic theology program enables students to focus on ethics, ecclesiology, ecological theology, feminist theology, liberation theology, liturgical theology, Orthodox theology, philosophical theology, and Catholic social thought.

In an effort to bring more precision and, indeed, comprehensiveness to the comprehensive exams in systematic theology, each student in the field of study will adhere to the following principles concerning the two major exams. The first topic that all students in systematic theology will propose is an overview of 20th and 21st century theology. A bibliography of “Paradigmatic Works” is available as the basis for this question. The second topic that each student will propose is one of the areas of the “grid” in systematic theology. At the current time, these areas are identified as follows: fundamental theology, theology of God, Christology, theological anthropology, ecclesiology, sacramental theology, and moral theology.

Theological and Social Ethics

This newly launched field of study in the Department of Theology enables students to develop rigorous and robust scholarly expertise in theological and social ethics, informed by attention to theory, context, and practice. This field of study integrates and amplifies existing departmental and university strengths in the contemporary and historical study of ethics. Faculty members bring particular acumen in Catholic traditions, feminist and liberationist ethics, bioethics, economic, and environmental ethics.

As part of the courses required of all Ph.D. students in theology, students must enroll in the annual designated doctoral seminar (identified from among annual departmental course listings) and in a one-time praxis-based tutorial (to amplify the student’s experience in considering issues of theological, social, and ethical significance by attending to context and praxis).

All students in TSE are required to pass language exams in French and German. Students may elect to substitute Spanish, depending upon the student’s scholarly research agenda.

The structure of the doctoral exams follows established procedures for the department. The first major exam must be “Major Texts in Theological and Social Ethics.” The second major exam addresses key themes, texts, methods, and/or figures in a particular area but must be sufficiently distinct from the dissertation topic. Students may choose among the options that include: philosophical sources and theological ethics; foundational theological ethics; Catholic social thought; topical exams (bioethics, economic ethics, gender and sexuality, liberationist and feminist, race and white privilege, environmental ethics); and theological ethics in comparative and historical contexts. The minor exam is chosen from existing exams offered by the other fields of study and must be sufficiently distinct from the dissertation topic.