



SOPHIA INSTITUTE FOR THEOLOGICAL STUDIES AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY

*An online course led by Professor Tina Beattie and Dr Nontando Hadebe
January to December 2025*

OVERVIEW

Purpose of the Course:

In the eleventh century, Saint Anselm famously described theology as “faith seeking understanding”. This course is an exercise in faith seeking understanding. It is intended to enrich and deepen the life of faith through an introductory study of the main doctrines, debates and interpretative frameworks of theology and scripture in the modern Catholic tradition. It has been designed to encourage a prayerful and participatory engagement with theological and scriptural ideas, exploring their relevance in the context of different cultures, vocations and lifestyles.

We read the Catholic tradition as a shared story of faith and ask how this becomes incarnate in our communities and societies through the faithful practices of everyday life.

Objectives:

To understand the relationship between theology and practice, as a way of encouraging participants to bring reasoned reflection to bear on the significance and relevance of theological ideas, and how these shape our approaches to the opportunities and challenges we face. Participants will be encouraged to:

- Enter more deeply into the mysteries of faith through contemplation and prayer
- Engage in informed study and debate with regard to theological claims and teachings
- Recognise the importance of narrative and story-telling as a way of participating in the community of faith in different eras, cultures and contexts

- Understand the relationship between nature and grace, reason and revelation, in the development of theological ideas and arguments
- Explore ways of interpreting scripture (exegesis and hermeneutics) that open up different readings with regard to issues such as social and economic justice, inculturation and context, gender and feminism, fact and interpretation
- Explore the ways in which the Second Vatican Council and synodality are shaping church teaching and practice
- Appreciate the importance of good theological education for communities of faith
- Discuss and explore their learning with others in their communities

Outcomes:

Those who complete the course should have a grounding in the core doctrines, teachings and theological debates of the Catholic tradition, and their relevance for sub-Saharan Africa. They should be able to communicate what they have learned to their communities so as to encourage a theologically informed and engaged approach to the practice of their faith.

PRACTICALITIES

Teaching and Discussion Sessions:

All sessions will be online Webinars from 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm GMT. Professor Tina Beattie, Dr Nontando Hadebe and Sr Dr Anne Arabome will coordinate the sessions and lead the discussions, with contributions from guest lecturers.

The structure of each session will vary, but they will include short lectures, videos and recorded interviews, prepared readings, and time for questions and open discussion. Each session will begin and end with a prayer and guided reflection. There will be additional talks by guest lecturers as well as study days and short courses on particular topics as we go through the year.

Dates and Topics:

This is a provisional schedule. Topics may change depending on the availability of guest contributors and feedback from course participants. Additional sessions by guest lecturers will be offered. Dates have been selected to ensure that they do not clash with the Sophia Institute's Leadership Program led by Sr Linda Buck on Mondays, for those who want to attend both courses.

DATE	LECTURE TITLES	DISCUSSION TOPICS	LECTURER
20 th January	Introduction to the Course	Course outline, questions and Suggestions	Tina Beattie
10 th February	The Trinity – African Perspectives		Nontando Hadebe
17 th February	The Trinity – Persons in Relationship	Living in the Trinity	
10 th March	TBC		Nontando Hadebe
17 th March	The Fatherhood of God – Beyond Patriarchy	Fatherhood, families and leadership	Tina Beattie
24 th March	The Incarnate Christ – the embodiment of God's Love	Life in Christ – models of loving, leading and serving	Tina Beattie
14 th April	The Holy Spirit – Guiding, Inspiring and Communicating	What have we discovered about the Trinity? What are we learning?	Tina Beattie
12 th May	The Story of Scripture – how do we read the story of God in history and human becoming?	Our stories and God's stories – reflecting on scripture in our cultures and contexts	
19 th May	Reading Scripture I – the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible	Reflecting on Scripture I	
9 th June	Reading Scripture II – The Women of the New Testament	Reflecting on Scripture II	
16 th June			
23 rd June	Gender and Creation – Genesis 1-3 and embodied life	Gender, culture and nature	
14 th July	Mary and Eve in Scripture and Tradition	Mary, Eve and the representation of women	Tina Beattie
21 st July	Creation, Sin and Redemption – questions of power, violence and vulnerability	Challenging violence, resisting abuse	
11 th August			
18 th August			
8 th September			
15 th September	Creation, Creator and Creative Life – rediscovering grace in nature	What gives me hope?	
22 nd September	Dignity, Virtue and Flourishing – towards the fullness of life	Care for Creation – <i>Laudato Si'</i>	
13 th October	The Good Society – Catholic Social Teaching	Living Creatively – what is the good life?	
20 th October	Human Rights and Women's Rights: what are the issues?	Challenges we face	
10 th November	Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue	Facing the challenges and embracing the opportunities of diversity	
17 th November	Communities, Cultures and Societies – living justly, seeking peace	A spirituality of practical and prayerful action	
8 th December	Looking back, going forward	A review of the course: what have we learned, what questions are we left with, where do we go next?	

Reading and Resources:

Course participants will be asked to prepare for each session by doing a short reading on the topic we are studying. There will be additional resources available online for those who want to explore further, including links to journal articles, blogs, podcasts, videos and websites.

Feedback, Assessment and Evaluation:

A link will be provided to an online forum where participants will be encouraged to share ideas and engage in dialogue. At the end of every session participants will be asked to fill in a short feedback form, with a longer evaluation when the course is finished. This feedback is important in helping us to develop our courses and ensure that we meet the learning needs of participants.

On completion of the course, participants will be asked to provide a piece of personal reflection on what they have learned, and how this will help to inform their practice and community engagement. This can be in the form of a short written assignment (800-1,000 words), or a five minute video.

A certificate of attendance will be issued to those who attend at least ten sessions and who submit an assignment as described above.