

# Faith, Reason, and Culture

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## THL 1000 Foundation Narrative

The Department of Theology and Religious Studies is committed to the time-honored definition of its task as “faith seeking understanding” (Anselm of Canterbury). It draws upon the rich legacy of St. Augustine’s passionate pursuit of truth, a purposeful endeavor that evokes the union of mind and heart, links faith with rational reflection and, in dialogue with culture, builds unity in the midst of diversity. Inspired by St. Augustine’s way of pursuing truth, theology is a living, enduring, compassionate way of understanding that continues to be refined, developed, and extended as it engages the contemporary world. Thus, the department accepts the definition, “faith seeking understanding,” as a process that takes place in a specific cultural context that also must be analyzed.

Villanova University exists within a world of profound religious, theological and cultural diversity, some of which can be seen on campus. Globalization and information technologies effectively collapse walls and barriers that once defined the boundaries and borders of our lives and of the disciplines within which we have learned to study. We, therefore, have an opportunity to open windows for understanding ourselves in relationship to others, the social order, and the social divisiveness and violent confrontations rooted in deep economic, political, cultural and theological worldviews (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 37: Sacred Scripture teaches the human family what the experience of the ages confirms: that while human progress is a great advantage to humans, it brings with it a strong temptation. For when the order of values is jumbled and bad is mixed with the good, individuals and groups pay heed solely to their own interests, and not to those of others. Thus it happens that the world ceases to be a place of true kinship).

Christianity itself is changing in the midst of these powerful forces that bring faith into question. More than ever, it is crucial that students of the Christian tradition recognize that what they believe has implications in relation to the lives of others in our own society and across the globe (particularly poor and marginalized people), the planet, other religious traditions and cultures. Theological and religious literacy is not only the mark of a liberally educated person but also an indispensable resource helping us to empathize with one another and contribute to shaping a more just, compassionate, and peaceful global society. Students and teachers thus have a triple task: to be steeped in the rich tradition of Christianity and the faith-claims that it makes; to understand how the Christian construal of reality interacts with and has a continuing impact on the global society today and for the future; and to engage in a thoughtful and practical inculturation of theology.

The Theology and Religious Studies courses acquire their unique significance in the Arts and Sciences Core Curriculum because of their inner need to make the dialogue between faith and culture authentic. Understanding the tight relationship of faith and culture, instructors accept the challenge to render faith intelligible, meaningful, and relevant in contemporary cultural contexts – both local and global. With their own canons of inquiry and verification and with increasing degrees

of methodological complexity, theological and religious studies disciplines probe rigorously broader questions of relevance to Christian belief and practice, the prophetic mission of the body of Christ, the union of mind and heart, life as a whole, and the discovery of God who is at the center of it all. This emphasis is characteristic of the University itself: “Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, the University is grounded in the wisdom of the Catholic intellectual tradition and advances a deeper understanding of the relationship between faith and reason.” (Villanova Mission Statement)