



International Theological Institute

THREE YEAR BACHELOR PROGRAM IN THE CATHOLIC LIBERAL ARTS

INTRODUCTION

The International Theological Institute is proud to announce the establishment of a three-year bachelor program in the Catholic liberal arts, formulated according to a great-books curriculum and following a seminar pedagogy. It is the first liberal arts program of its kind in Europe in modern times.

Man, made in the image of God (*imago Dei*) and with the capacity for God (*capax Dei*) is “the only creature on earth whom God willed for his own sake” (CCC 356). Among all the earthly creatures, “he alone is called to share, by knowledge and by love, in God’s own life. It was for this end that he was created” (CCC 356).

This is the truth of man which arouses his longing for wisdom and understanding, and which serve as the foundation to all the academic programs of the International Theological Institute. The great and universal truths for which he is made to know, by study and by prayer, may lead him to the truth that “will set you free” (Jn. 8: 32). The purpose of a liberal education is to help man attain something of this freedom. It strives to help students come to recognize and understand universal truths with their minds, and to embrace with their hearts the beautiful and incorruptible goods they proclaim.

Such an education is thus ordered to the harmonious formation of the human person and to his ultimate flourishing. As it aspires to form the student personally, in intellect and will, it prepares him in a unique way for whichever profession or vocation he shall eventually embark upon. Thus, though a liberal education seeks to form the person as one “whom God has willed for his own sake” (CCC 356), it also enables its graduates to contribute to the good of our wider society and of the Church.

The Liberal Arts and the Splendour of Truth

“Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth” (Pope St. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*). The two principal parts of a liberal education correspond to this teaching: *theology*, in which we enquire into divinely revealed truth by the light of faith, and *philosophy*, in which we enquire after the most universal truths by the light of natural reason. The liberal arts were classically understood as the seven introductory disciplines that prepared the mind for the contemplation of philosophical and theological truth. Three of the liberal arts—the *trivium* of grammar, logic, and rhetoric—are inherently preparatory and fundamental: the student is able to reflect upon the order of the mind’s own acts in enquiring after truth. Four of them—the *quadrivium* of geometry, arithmetic, music and astronomy—contemplate mathematical truths, which the mind is able to grasp with particular clarity, and applies those truths to two phenomena that are particularly suited to inspiring *wonder*: the movement of the stars, and the harmonies of music. Thus, a liberal education begins in *wonder* and aspires to end in wisdom. To express it another way, it begins with the liberal arts and ends in the contemplation of philosophical and theological truths contained in God’s revelation to man.

The Liberal Arts in History and at the ITI

Though we offer the first program of its kind in Europe in modern times, such an education has a long and venerable history. In the ancient world, liberal education was conceived of as the education proper to a free man (*liber*). It was meant to be formation in leisure (*scholē*), rather than in manual work. Already in ancient Greece, the mathematical arts of the *quadrivium* and the rational arts of the *trivium* were seen as essential to such an education, as training the mind to open itself up to the whole of being and to the great universal truths that would bring forth wisdom of heart and mind.

In the Middle Ages the study of the liberal arts flourished again after the educational reforms of the Emperor Charlemagne and, later, in the great medieval universities and in the teaching of the mendicant orders. It came to be recognised primarily as a preparation for the study of sacred theology, the queen of the sciences, in which the source of all being Himself is contemplated in His own revelation.

Our own time has witnessed a move away from this understanding of the humanly formative and liberating purposes of education. As is well known, in the modern academy education has been divided and reduced into two approaches: on the one hand, it is regarded as a metrical science, ordered to those aspects of material things subject to measurement and experiment, and valued principally for its practical application; and on the other hand, education tends to be approached as a sceptical study of humanities, conceived of as human sciences cut off from any claims of eternal truth, and unconnected from any notion of wisdom that might direct a person's living.

Thus, our initiative is provoked by the urgent educative needs of our time, and follows upon the work of similar initiatives overseas. In the United States of America in the later twentieth century, there began a revival of liberal education that strived to return to the ancient conception of openness to the whole of reality, so as to bring about true wisdom in the student. This was initiated in the 'great books' movement, pioneered by such philosophers as Mortimer Adler, who wished to return to the great masters of the intellectual life in order to re-vitalise and re-orientate modern, western education. A decisive role was played in this movement by European, German-Jewish *émigrés* to the United States such as Hans Jonas, Leo Strauss, and Jacob Klein. And, eventually, a group of Catholic philosophers, trained in these methods and formed intellectually in the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas, founded Thomas Aquinas College in California with the vision of ordering the other arts and sciences to theology, as queen of the sciences. Since this initial revival of a Catholic conception of the liberal arts, several other such initiatives have been established in other parts of the United States.

Therefore, in founding a program in the Catholic liberal arts at the International Theological Institute, we are continuing an initiative that has begun elsewhere, though we are striving to establish and enrich it within Europe, within the ancient and former Christendom. By doing this, the ITI is developing and broadening a path it first embarked upon over 20 years ago in her programs of sacred theology: a mission of opening the minds of its students to the splendour of the truth with the help of the great masters of the ancient and Christian tradition.

It is therefore in light of our theological foundation that we embark upon our own program of the Catholic Liberal Arts. In view of the classical understanding of the liberal arts as a *praeambula theologiae*, we have designed our program to follow a deliberate sequencing of courses, where each discipline serves to lay foundations and prepare the student for the next. As the light of revelation presupposes nature and builds upon it, our own curriculum builds upon the truths found in nature before endeavouring, in its later stages, to reflect upon the revealed Word of God. Thus, our program is set within an all-encompassing sapiential order provided by sacred theology, and serves to prepare the student for the study of theology and the possibility of continuing his studies in a deeper reflection of the Christian mysteries (STM 4 & 5).

The degree granted is a BA in the *Catholic Liberal Arts*. The central role played by philosophy and theology in the program means that this degree also fulfils the requirements for the first six semesters of the Master's degree in sacred theology (STM 1-3).