**Understanding Jesus**

**THL 3200-001**

**Dr. Jessica Murdoch**

**TR 10:00 – 11:15 am**

This course will explore the history of Christian theological reflection on Jesus Christ. We will discuss Christology from Scriptural, historical and contemporary perspectives. First, we will trace the development of the biblical understanding of Christ. Then, we will consider the central historical moments of the Church’s reflection upon the mystery of Christ. Lastly, select modern Christological issues and questions will be addressed in the course. The approach to this course will be both systematic and Thomistic.

**Problem of Evil**

**THL 3250-001**

**Dr. Shams Inati**

**TR 11:30 – 12:45 pm**

This course addresses the traditional and theological problem of evil, as well as a number of related issues. Various formulations of the problem will be presented, and various solutions will be drawn from different periods of thought.

**Sacraments**

**THL 3400-001**

**Dr. Timothy Brunk**

**MWF 9:30 – 10:45 am**

This course is a treatment of the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. We will draw attention to the history of their understanding and practice, as well as to contemporary issues and questions about sacraments. Though this course will address all seven sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, reconciliation, anointing of the sick, matrimony, holy orders), we will investigate Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation in greater detail.

**Liberation Theologies**

**THL 3740-001**

**Fr. Arthur Purcaro, OSA**

**TR 8:30 – 9:45 am**

This course will introduce students to Latin American Liberation Theology, one of the most profound contemporary theological movements in the Church. Liberation Theology emerged out of the concrete struggle in Peru to overcome poverty, oppression and repression. We will examine the biblical and ecclesial roots of liberation theology, its “unconventional” theological methodology, the powerful insights of Gustavo Gutierrez and some other of its theologians and religious leaders, its impact, the price paid for prophetic witness, the controversy that surrounds it, and its ongoing challenge to theology today, to the Church and its institutions, and to a global society plagued by growing inequality.
Technology and the Human Person
THL 3790-001
Dr. Ilia Delio
Tuesday 4:30 – 7:00 pm

We live in an information age where technology and human life have become seamlessly interactive. How did we arrive at a level of technological dependence? Where are we going with our technologies? This course aims to explore the impact of information technology on human personhood and community. We will first look at the meaning of human personhood from the perspectives of Scripture, spirituality, philosophy and culture and then examine personhood and community in light of social media, robotics and new trends in artificial intelligence. Our discussions will be oriented to the questions: What is the human person? What do we hope for as persons and as community? Can technology help us create a more unified world?

Environmental Christian Ethics
THL 4330-001
Dr. Mark Graham
TR 1:00 – 2:15 pm

This is a course in Christian environmental ethics. Part of the course is spent addressing foundational philosophical and theological issues in environmental ethics. Substantial segments are devoted to agriculture, environmental toxins, and the moral standing of animals. Weekly discussions focus on practical, contemporary environmental issues such as hunting, nuclear power, global warming, fast food, genetic engineering of animals, pollution, automobile use, and the preservation of coral reefs, to mention but a few.

Course requirements: regular attendance; regular class participation; mid-term and final exams; unannounced in-class quizzes; and one in-class presentation.

Introduction to Biomedical Ethics
THL 4480-001
THL 4480-002
Dr. Brett Wilmot
MW 1:30 – 2:45 pm
MW 3:00 – 4:15 pm

The purpose of this course is to develop tools for critical analysis of biomedical ethical issues within a Catholic Christian context. From the conception of life to the end of life, we are faced with new technologies and a stunning array of choices that affect ourselves and our loved ones. We will be considering a range of topics that affect patients, care providers, and the broader society in which Christians and non-Christians seek to live good lives with moral integrity. The vision of personal development and human flourishing from a Catholic perspective will be given special consideration in answering questions of medical ethics. Critical examination of competing moral traditions will be encouraged. By examining major frameworks of ethical analysis, the student will gain confidence in critically analyzing current issues of bioethics which include informed consent, reproductive technologies, stem cell research, abortion, organ donation, definition of death, physician assisted suicide, and end of life decisions. Critical analysis of emerging biomedical ethical challenges will be encouraged. How do we render Christian faith intelligible and relevant to transform our world with so many competing influences in a pluralistic society? By the end of the course students should have a foundation from which they can approach emerging bioethical questions.

THM: Solidarity in Eastern Europe
THL 4490-001
Dr. Gerald Beyer
MW 1:30 – 2:45 pm

Diversity 3; Peace and Justice
Throughout the twentieth century, “Eastern European” connoted “second class” or “uncivilized territory,” as historian Timothy Garton Ash has written. This course will focus attention on two countries in the region that have suffered tremendously in the twentieth century, Poland and Bosnia and Herzegovina. We will explore Poland under Communism, the rise of Solidarność, its demise after 1989, Poland’s transformation to capitalism and democracy and its recent illiberal turn. We will also examine the case of the Bosnian war and why ethnic and religious groups, especially Bosnian Muslims, were demonized and targeted during the war. We will discuss the ongoing challenges to building peace and solidarity in this historically marginalized and misunderstood part of Europe, “the Balkans,” highlighting the vital contribution of women to the peacebuilding process, and considering what forms of solidarity from other nations might be beneficial.

THM: Wisdom of Sufism
THL 4990-001
Dr. Yasemin Akis
TR 1:00 – 2:15 pm
Arab and Islamic Studies

“Come, come, whoever you are, wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving, it doesn't matter.”
Rumi

Sufism is a mystical belief and practice in which murids (committed one) seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God. This course offers an introduction to the Sufi thought and culture through the lives and teachings of Sufi thinkers such as Rumi, Yunus Emre, Haci Bektas-i Veli, and Ibn Arabi. Sufi literature’s most influential works will be considered through sample materials and the lives of their writers. During the course we will examine the central concepts of Sufism such as tasawwuf, murid, dervish, pir and sama. The class considers the Sufism’s conceptualization about the development of the self in its philosophical roots.

THM: Religious Traditions of the Middle East
THL 4990-002
Dr. Yasemin Akis
TR 2:30 – 3:45 pm

Understanding the modern Middle East is almost impossible without first developing an appreciation for the importance of its diverse religious traditions, and the role that religion has played in the development of the region since antiquity. This course examines the many ways that religion has functioned in Middle Eastern societies, beginning with ancient, pre-Islamic practices, such as the Zoroastrian religion of the Persian Empire, the development of Judaism among the ancient Israelites, and the spread of Christianity in the eastern Roman Empire. Of special interest will be the rise of Islam in the seventh century, and the development of unique and localized Islamic traditions in the rapidly expanding Arab empires of the medieval period. The class will focus on such themes as the differences between Sunni and Shia Islam, the position of non-Muslim minorities in Islamic history. The class will conclude by looking closely at the many ways religion is practiced in the Middle East today, from the official secularism of states like Turkey, to the post-revolutionary religious politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Sports and Spirituality
THL 4990-003
Dr. Edward Hastings
TR 4:00 – 5:15 pm

Fr. Thomas Keating states, “Everything in the universe is meant to be a reminder of God’s presence.” This course would like to take Fr. Keating at his word and attempt to look to the world of sports as a locus for discovering the presence of God in our midst. Sports are a significant aspect of the
American culture, extremely popular and always revelatory. This course will explore and evaluate the various aspects of the sports experience (participants, coaches, fans, officials) as vehicles to help us connect more deeply with God.

### THM: Contemplate, Create, Repeat

Dr. Margaret Mell  
**THL 4990-100**  
**Monday 6:10 – 8:50 pm**  

Most of us have heard about contemplative (or meditative) spiritual practices. Creative spiritual practices are becoming more common as people begin to experience the real presence of the Spirit in their everyday lives. They inspire (Latin root: *inspirare*, breathe in) every element of our lives.

Both contemplative and creative practices bring our awareness and attention to Beauty that lies underneath the surface of all aspects of our everyday lives—including our academic studies. Contemplative and creative practices enliven qualities of our being and doing that bring life and new energy into all our “usual” activities—they can become acts of prayer that help our attention and awareness deepen, broaden, and become more integrated into everything that matters to us and the world around us as our paths of life continue to unfold—during and after our study programs here, at Villanova.

#### Course Segment Descriptors

1. In-class meetings for this course will be retreat-like in nature.
2. Required reading comments and conversations, and, contemplative practice session sharings will take place online (BlackBoard) for the duration of our course.
3. Reflection papers will be uploaded to BlackBoard at regular intervals.
4. A final creative project using the expressive arts will be presented at the close of the course.

#### Learning Goals

Students will

1. learn contemplative practices that can be adapted and incorporated into their daily lives.
2. learn, work, and play with various creative practices.
3. learn and practice reflective and *lectio divina* styles of reading, writing, gazing, listening.
4. create a particular expressive arts project that she/he will present to the class at the close of the semester.

#### Class Meeting Requirements

1. This course is an intensive seminar.
2. There are no excused absences for in-class meetings—no exceptions.
3. Check the in-class course day/date/time parameters to be absolutely certain you can attend all in-class meetings before registering for this class.
4. During the first half of the semester, classes meet 6:10-8:50 p.m. on Mondays.
5. After the spring break, students will work online and on individual projects, which will be presented in class.

Examples of the Expressive Arts: music, dance, poetry, some genre of prose, painting, drawing/sketching, pastels, collaging, photography, videography… the instructor is open to receive, discuss with you, and approve your creative suggestions.

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### THM: Black Theology and Black Power

Dr. Timmy Lucky  
**THL 5000-001**  
**MW 4:30 – 5:45 pm**  

*P&J; Africana Studies*

What would Jesus say about the killings of Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Rekia Boyd or Aiyana Stanley-Jones? What would he preach/teach concerning the legacy of chattel
slavery or the economic exploitation of the Black poor? How have people of faith and moral conscience responded to racist practices throughout history and modernity?

In this course, we will explore the implications of “Racist Ideas” embedded within American Law and Policies. We will juxtapose those ideas and practices against Theological ideas and practices to drive towards a call for justice and liberation commonly articulated in the “Black Lives Matter” movement. A fundamental question is one of Theodicy: If God is benevolent, just and powerful, how can/does He permit evil persist in the lives of Black people living in the United States of America?

As we study together, we will engage the Bible, religious scholarship and the texts of historical narratives, literature, visual art and films to explore key topics from a Theological perspective (to include: racism, antiracism and humanity). Ultimately, we will seek to be empowered to integrate a new understanding into our own moral practice, in order live up to the prophetic call to fair and equitable justice for all.

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**THM: Islam/Muslims in the Contemporary World**

**Dr. Helen Mesard**

**THL 5000-002**

MWF 11:30 – 12:20 pm

Muslims make up almost a quarter of the world’s population, and Islam is a significant religious and cultural force within communities in almost every country across the globe. In this course we will examine a number of issues of particular interest and relevance to Muslims today. We’ll place contemporary considerations and debates within historical context, and highlight the ways in which the Qur’an and the traditions of the prophet Muhammad continue to shape and animate Muslim responses to uniquely modern challenges. Some of the topics that will be covered include women and gender, violent and non-violent resistance, and the environment. The course will also examine the unique role and contributions of American Muslims.

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**THM: Do Black Lives Matter to G-d?**

**Dr. Naomi Washington Leapheart**

**THL 5000-003**

MW 4:30 – 5:45 pm

P&J; Diversity 1; Africana Studies

Has God sanctioned #BlackLivesMatter? Would Jesus protest the killings of Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Rekia Boyd, or Aiyana Stanley-Jones? How should people of Christian faith respond to Black protest? In this course, we will attempt to construct a Divine argument for resistance to racialized violence and oppression. To do this, we will engage the biblical text and the texts of historical narrative, literature, poetry, music, visual art, and film to explore key theological topics, including sin, suffering, and salvation. As we center the perspectives of Black, womanist, mujerista, queer, and Native theologians, scholars, organizers, artists, and activists, we will seek to discover a theological framework for the contemporary Movement for Black Lives. Ultimately, we will seek to be empowered by this framework, integrating it with our own faith and practice in order to live into the prophetic call to do justice.

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**Islam: History, Thought and Culture**

**Dr. Shams Inati**

**THL 5150-001**

TR 10:00 – 11:15 am

History and development, beliefs and rituals, sects and intellectual movements: Pre-Islamic Arabia, emergence of Islam, Muhammad as prophet and statesman, territorial expansion, religio-political factions, intellectual development, rituals and beliefs, sharia and its sources, legal schools, religious sects, philosophical trends, mystical orders, art, reasons for the decline, Islam today. Films and visits to mosques. This course fulfills requirement for diversity, Africana Studies, and concentration or minor in Arab/Islamic Studies.
Is transcending gender necessary for true mystical experience? Many mystics and scholars of religion argue that mystical experience is universal, meaning it is the same for everyone. If this is true, then it seems that going beyond gender is necessary. However, mystics frequently transgress or uphold traditional gender boundaries and discuss gender explicitly when describing their mystical experiences. Moreover, despite some mystics claiming that the soul leaves the body during a mystical experience, many others imply that their knowledge is embodied (the concept that one’s physical body contributes to how one knows something). Given these tensions, it is vital to examine the significance of gender in Islamic mysticism.

After an overview of Islam and Islamic mysticism generally, the course will focus on the lives and works of Muslim saints and mystical philosophers. Special focus will be given to women, queer, and gender non-conforming saints. We will also address the ways in which mystical experiences conform to or subvert heteronormative masculinity and the gendered power dynamics of sainthood. With this understanding in place, the final section of the class will interrogate the philosophical and theological assumptions of a universal mystical experience or a specifically gendered one.

Religion in Russia
THL 5200-001
Fr. Joseph Loya, OSA
MW 3:00 – 4:15 pm

“A nation can be best understood in the light of three main factors .... the geography of the land ... the history it has experienced ... the religion it has embraced.” (Nicolas Zernov)

Course Objectives:
• To provide students with a solid grounding in the History, beliefs, spirituality, and life of religious believers - especially those of the Russian Orthodox Church - as they seek to live and prosper in a modern, complex and pluralistic world.
• To be sensitized to the truth, “The History of the Russian Church cannot be separated from the History of Russia... Even the simplest delineation of the development of the Church inevitably includes a definite attitude toward Russia’s past.” (Alexander Schmemann)
• To obtain a firm grasp of relations between the state and traditional religious bodies in Russia throughout the major periods of Russia’s History.
• Be able to visit a Russian Orthodox church here or abroad without experiencing “culture shock,” i.e., students are to be made confident in knowing the religious worldview that a Russian Orthodox church represents.

Religion and Literature: C. S. Lewis
THL 5999-001
Fr. Francis Caponi, OSA
MW 3:00 – 4:15 pm

C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) was one of the most popular and influential authors of the 20th century. On every subject of interest to the modern Christian – the nature of prayer, the meaning of evil and suffering, sin, religion and science, sexual morality, heaven and hell, miracles, forgiveness, and war and peace (to name only a few) – Lewis contributed a clear-sighted sermon, thoughtful essay, passionate letter, or book-length investigation. In addition, his works of fiction, his autobiographical writings, and his enormous body of correspondence present a brilliant writer, a creative theologian, and an engaging friend.
This course will pursue Lewis the author and convert, the seeker of wisdom and the
defender of the faith. We will read his seminal essay *The Abolition of Man*, his theological fantasies (*The Great Divorce, The Screwtape Letters*), two of his major systematic works (*Mere Christianity, The Problem of Pain*), his science fiction trilogy (*Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, That Hideous Strength*), his reflections on prayer (*Letters to Malcolm*), and his autobiography (*Surprised by Joy*). These will be supplemented by several of his most important essays. Students will engage in both creative writing and critical analysis. Spirited discussion will be a major part of each class meeting.

**Required Texts**


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**THM: Exodus and the African American Religious Expression**

**Dr. Carey Walsh**

**THL 5999-002**

**TR 10:00 – 11:15 am**

*Diversity 1*

The course examines the appropriation of the Exodus in Afro-American religion and culture. The Exodus text and background will be explored through attention to its reception history for primarily Afro-American religious traditions and political expression (e.g., slave religion, Black Theology, Rasta, and the Civil Rights Movement). Key theological motifs of the Promised Land, Redemption, enslavement, Empire, and freedom will be explored in the biblical text and in the subsequent religious expression they inspired.

In this course, students will analyze biblical perspectives on slavery in the Old and New Testaments, and the development of the institution of slavery in America and the Caribbean Islands. Then, students will explore the psychological and spiritual effects of oppression when reading a variety of responses to slavery, in the development of Black and Womanist Theologies, and the thought of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Nelson Mandela. Importantly, they will learn that the effects of systemic dehumanization do not end with emancipation. Black Theology, in general, privileges religious experience, art, literature, music, and lived narratives. To that end, during the course, students will critically analyze slave narratives, folk and rap lyrics, and films that deal with these motifs.

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**THM: Theology and Horror in Pop Culture**

**Dr. Joshua Wise**

**THL 5999-003**

**MWF 10:30 – 11:20 am**

Horror as a popular genre often draws on and intersects with the idea of religion. From exorcisms to haunted houses to encounters with vampires, religious symbols and traditions are invoked to cast away evil. This course will look at how religion, especially Christianity, has been used in horror books, short stories, movies, television and video games to juxtapose supernatural good with supernatural evil. Students will read, watch, and play during the semester to consider what part horror has in Christian theology, and where fear fits in with a worldview that includes God.
THM: Theology of Friendship
Dr. Jennifer Jackson
THL 5999-006
TR 2:30 – 3:45 pm

From popular culture to rigorous interdisciplinary scholarship, contemporary life and thought have been truly enriched by retrievals of ancient and medieval understandings of friendship. This course centers around an examination of ancient and medieval Christian contributions to the discourse of friendship, culminating in its most systematic treatment in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. The course readings, which include selections from Augustine’s *Confessions*, Heloise and Abelard’s *Letters*, Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*, Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si*, and interdisciplinary secondary studies, pose two challenges for our reflection: to arrive at the central elements of a theology of friendship as reflected in ancient and medieval thought, and to articulate the ways in which questions of gender, sustainability and poverty engage with these reflections. This is a discussion-based course informed by short lectures and exercises attentive to diverse learning styles, interdisciplinary inquiry, and online resources.

THM: The Holocaust and Religious/Ethical Issues
Dr. Elliot Ratzman
THL 5999-007
TR 8:30 – 9:45 am

This course is an inquiry into the victims, perpetrators, rescuers, and bystanders around the Nazi genocide of the Jews and others. Utilizing film, history, memoir, social science and theology we will examine aspects of the Holocaust from the perspective of ethics, theology, and religious studies. How could Nazism turn 'ordinary men' into mass murderers? How could so many remain passive bystanders? What did Christians do to perpetuate and resist such evil? How did Jews and Jewish theology understand the Holocaust? How did Nazism understand Christianity? Why did some rescue and other collaborate? Where was God? Debates around this distinct catastrophe have relevance for us today as we consider universal claims about human nature, morality, suffering, and the responsibility of religious traditions for resisting evil and promoting justice.

THM: Theology and Film
Dr. Christopher Barnett
THL 5999-100
Wednesday 6:10 – 8:50 pm

Since its inception, cinema has been used as a means of both raising and answering questions long central to the Western intellectual tradition: Who or what is God? What are the origins and ends of life? Does life possess inherent worth, or is it just a chaotic play of forces? Why do we suffer and how should we respond to it? What is belief? What does it mean to pursue justice and love in an obviously imperfect world? How does or might faith impact this pursuit? In raising these sorts of issues, film has emerged as a distinctive interlocutor with religion in general and with Christian theology in particular.

In recent decades, few filmmakers have addressed theological questions as much as Martin Scorsese, Terrence Malick, and Joel and Ethan Coen (typically referred to as the Coen Brothers). The overarching aim of this course will be to investigate their films, paying particular attention to the role that theology plays in them. This task will be carried out in three main ways. First, there will be a general orientation to the nature of cinema and to its historical development, which, perhaps surprisingly, first emerged from Christian catechesis. Second, a number of films themselves will be viewed and a range of critical methods employed to tease out their philosophical and theological significance. And, finally, direct scholarly attention will be paid to the issues raised, with related readings in theological subjects such as natural theology, theodicy (“the problem of evil”), and spirituality. Throughout, students will be encouraged to engage film in both oral and written form.
In October 2016, the American singer-songwriter Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature — an honor that stands as the capstone of his illustrious career. Dylan emerged in the early 1960s as an icon of the antiwar movement, penning folk songs such as “Blowin’ in the Wind.” At the same time, however, he sought to defy neat categorization, drifting toward rock and roll, publishing beat poetry, then reinventing himself again, first with a turn toward country music, then with a seemingly never-ending experimentation with musical genres, from R&B to gospel to pop to rockabilly to Christmas music and, most recently, to the “American standards” made famous by Frank Sinatra. Along the way, he has dabbled with other artistic media. His memoir Chronicles: Volume One (2004) was a finalist for a National Book Critics Circle Award; he has exhibited his numerous paintings in museums across the world, including the National Gallery of Denmark and the National Portrait Gallery in London; his sculptures have been displayed at Halcyon Gallery, also in London; he has even written and starred in a feature film, Masked and Anonymous (2003). At the ceremony making him a Nobel Laureate, it was said that Dylan is “a singer worthy of a place beside the Greek bards, beside Ovid, [and] beside the Romantic visionaries” — high praise for the man born Robert Allen Zimmerman and raised in the small mining town of Hibbing, Minnesota.

Dylan’s accomplishments are indeed legion, but this course is entitled “Bob Dylan and Theology.” How, exactly, are the two related? There are two broad ways to answer this question. The first is by attending to Dylan’s background and his dynamic place in American society, starting with the socio-political upheavals of the 1960s, transitioning to the dissipation of the so-called “Me Decade” of the 1970s, and carrying on through seminal historical events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Along the way, Dylan himself has evolved, taking on a variety of public personas, a number of which are related to the Judeo-Christian tradition, from his early interest in biblical prophecy to his Christ-centered evangelism in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In short, to follow the contours of Dylan’s biography is to trace changes in American religious life over the same timeframe — a period in which the country has wrestled with role of religion in a postmodern and ostensibly post-religious society. The second way to connect Dylan to theology is to consider his art per se, especially his songwriting. Which theological themes turn up regularly in his songs? Can we, in turn, determine his understanding of the nature of reality (metaphysics) and of the spiritual life? In investigating these questions, it will be seen that there is (in the words of R. Clifton Spargo and Anne K. Ream in The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan) “a certain degree of religious consciousness in all of Dylan’s music.”

Part biographical account, part cultural analysis, and part theological aesthetics, this course will ultimately acquaint students with one of the most important artists in American history, whose work represents a response to and an expansion of the religious traditions that have animated the nation. To explore his life and art, then, is to explore the mystery of the divine itself, both in its historical manifestation and in its more intimate disclosure through beauty.
military forces, our academic journey culminates in an examination of peacebuilding, a proactive approach to conflict resolution, which rejects the fatalistic inevitability of war and seeks to correct the perception of passivity typically cast upon nonviolence.

Paying attention to our lives, and to the people and world around us, helps us become people of spiritual depth, as well as effective leaders. But what exactly is attention? How can we cultivate an attentive spirit amid a busy life and a distracting world? How, as leaders, can we direct and sustain others’ attention? In this course, students will explore the role of human attention in spiritual life and in leadership by learning from scientific and theological perspectives on attention, and by trying out a variety of attentive experiments and practices. The course has six units: (I) Basics of attention and leadership; (II) Mindfulness, discernment, and attention to self; (III) Empathy, listening, and attention to people; (IV) Spirituality, prayer, and attention to God; (V) Delight, responsibility, and attention to the created world; and (VI) Practices of attentive leadership.