

Syllabus THL 1000_18_23

Section Dr. Knauss: Theology and Culture

Requirements

1. Participation 33.33%

Grading criteria: regular attendance in class; thorough knowledge of the readings; creative, significant, helpful contributions in the class discussion; interaction with other students; completion of homework. Unexcused absences will reflect negatively upon your participation grade.

2. Unspecified number of unannounced quizzes 33.33%

Grading criteria: correct, precise answers to questions posed. Questions can relate to readings and material covered in class.

3. Paper 33.33%

In your paper, choose one of the cultural products we discussed in class and analyze it, responding to the question: How are the existential questions of faith, identity, community, *or* meaning raised and possibly answered in this film/graphic novel/song? How does their answer relate to the answers suggested by Christianity? In your analysis, make use of at least three texts read and discussed in class (to provide a theoretical framework, to motivate methodological decisions, or with regard to specific questions of analysis). The paper is due at noon on Sept. 27 (section I); please email it to me as a word file.

Length: 4 pages, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12pt, 1-inch margins. Please use Chicago Style for your references.

Grading criteria: use of at least three texts discussed in class; correct references and works cited (Chicago Style); content: correct, relevant, exhaustive; critical analysis and evaluation of arguments; organic organization of essay; language (word choice, spelling, grammar, punctuation); “wow factor”.

Course calendar

August 25: Introduction to the course and this section

no reading

August 27: Theological approaches to culture (Niebuhr, Tertullian)

Cobb, *Theology and Popular Culture*, ch. 3, 72-80; Tertullian, *de spectaculis* (excerpts)

September 3: Tillich, Thomas, Luther

Cobb, *Theology and Popular Culture*, ch. 3, 90-100

additional: Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ch. 4 and 6

September 8: Augustine, *Gaudium et spes*

Cobb, *Theology and Popular Culture*, ch. 3, 80-90; *Gaudium et spes*, §§1-4; 23-45

September 10: What is popular culture? Why study it?

Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture*, ch. 1 and 2 (1-42)

additional: Cobb, *Theology and Popular Culture*, ch. 1; Graham, “What We Make of the World”

September 15: God in a graphic novel

****Please bring laptop or tablet to class; download readings, no need to print them****

Eisner, "A Contract with God"

McGrath, "The Doctrine of God", 197-203 and 209-227

Abel, *What Is a Graphic Novel?*

additional: Bible, Book of Job; Jones/Lakeland, "God", pp. 19-45

September 17: God in a film

Bruce Almighty (Tom Shadyac 2003) [the film is available in course reserves in the library and through Amazon Instant Video – please watch the film *before* class!]

Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 55-81

additional: Jones/Lakeland, "God", 67-76 (Laurel Schneider); Marsh, "God", 47-59

September 22: Love in popular culture and Christianity

Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*, ch. 1, 1-23

Nick Cave, "The Secret Life of the Love Song" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTt_80L3_4Q)

additional: Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*, ch. 2, 25-44; Jones/Lakeland, "God", pp. 53-60 (Don Compier);

Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* (online)

September 24: Love in pop music

****Please bring laptop or tablet plus earphones****

****Please bring your favorite love song as file or on CD, including lyrics****

Cobb, *Theology and Popular Culture*, 238-242

additional: Brown, *God and Grace of Body*, 295-347; Hopps, "Infinite Hospitality and the Redemption of Kitsch"

Bibliography of required and additional readings

Abel, Jessica. *What Is a Graphic Novel?*. <http://dw-wp.com/2010/10/what-is-a-gn-pdf/>.

Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html.

Book of Job.

Brown, David. *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Bruce Almighty (Tom Shadyac 2003).

Cave, Nick. "The Secret Life of the Love Song". https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTt_80L3_4Q.

Cobb, Kelton. *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.

Cone, James H. *A Black Theology of Liberation. Twentieth Anniversary Edition*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990.

Eisner, Will. *The Contract with God Trilogy*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006.

Graham, Elaine. "What We Make of the World: The Turn to Culture in Theology and the Study of Religion." In *Between Sacred and Profane: Researching Religion and Popular Culture*, edited by Gordon Lynch, 63-81. London: I.B. Tauris, 2007.

Hopps, Gavin. "Infinite Hospitality and the Redemption of Kitsch." In *Theology, Aesthetics, and Culture. Responses to the Work of David Brown*, edited by Robert MacSwain and Taylor Worley, 157-168. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Jeanrond, Werner G. *A Theology of Love*. London: T&T Clark, 2010.

Jones, Serene, and Paul Lakeland. *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.

Marsh, Clive. *Theology Goes to the Movies: An Introduction to Critical Christian Thinking*. London: Routledge, 2007.

McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 5th ed. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2011.

Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

Tertullian, *de spectaculis*. <http://christogenea.org/references/de-spectaculis-tertullian>.

Tillich, Paul. *Theology of Culture*. Edited by Robert C. Kimball. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959.

Undergraduate Grading System

(<https://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/vpaa/studentservices/policies/grades.html>)

A A- B+	is the highest academic grade possible; an honor grade which is not automatically given to a student who ranks highest in the course, but is reserved for accomplishment that is truly distinctive and demonstrably outstanding. It represents a superior mastery of course material and is a grade that demands a very high degree of understanding as well as originality or creativity as appropriate to the nature of the course. The B+ grade indicates that the student works independently with unusual effectiveness and often takes the initiative in seeking new knowledge outside the formal confines of the course.
B B- C+	is a grade that denotes achievement considerably above acceptable standards. Good mastery of course material is evident and student performance demonstrates a high degree of originality, creativity, or both. The grade indicates that the student works well independently and often demonstrates initiative. Analysis, synthesis, and critical expression, oral or written, are considerably above average.
C C- D+	indicates a satisfactory degree of attainment and is the acceptable standard for graduation from college. It is the grade that may be expected of a student of average ability who gives to the work a reasonable amount of time and effort. This grade implies familiarity with the content of the course and acceptable mastery of course material; it implies that the student displays some evidence of originality and/or creativity, works independently at an acceptable level and completes all requirements in the course.
D D-	denotes a limited understanding of the subject matter, meeting only the minimum requirement for passing the course. It signifies work which in quality and/or quantity falls below the average acceptable standard for passing the course. Performance is deficient in analysis, synthesis, and critical expression; there is little evidence of originality, creativity, or both.
F	indicates inadequate or unsatisfactory attainment, serious deficiency in understanding of course material, and/or failure to complete requirements of the course.

THL 1000: Faith, Reason, and Culture

MW 1:30-2:45

THL 1000-017

THL 1000-018

THL 1000-019

MW 3:00-4:15

THL 1000-022

THL 1000-023

THL 1000-024

CONTACT INFORMATION

Dr. Mark Graham - mark.graham@villanova.edu 484-798-2822

SAC 243 - MW 12:30-1:15

Dr. Stefanie Knauss - stefanie.knauss@villanova.edu

SAC 234 Tues 4-6pm

Dr. Rachel Smith - rachel.j.smith@villanova.edu 610-519-3764

SAC 250 Mon 11-1, by appointment

Course Purpose

This foundational course introduces you to the sources, traditions, practices, and some major thinkers that have shaped Christian responses to God and to fundamental human questions. While taught from a Roman Catholic perspective (as you might expect at a Catholic university), we will also engage the wider tradition of Christianity as a living tradition of beliefs and practices that have developed over time in a range of cultural and religious contexts. We will analyze Christian truth-claims, themes, values, and witnesses as resources for critically evaluating contemporary cultural and personal challenges. This puts us right in the mainstream of the long history of Christian theology: ever since St. Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033–1109), theology has been defined as “faith seeking understanding.”

The course has three separate but interrelated sections, each employing a different approach to the study of the Christian tradition and each taught by a professor who is a specialist in a particular subfield. Professor Graham will teach ethics, Professor Knauss will focus on theology and culture, and Professor Smith will teach spirituality. Throughout these three sections, we will attempt to make sense of the Christian understanding of reality as manifested in doctrine and ways of life taken up by Christians of different cultural and historical contexts. The thread that we see tying all three sections together is the mutual interrelationship between Christianity and the cultural contexts in which it has taken shape over time.

We want you to know that it's hard to know how to approach a course like this. The participants in this course come from varied backgrounds, have diverse experiences, and hold various attitudes toward Christianity and religion in general. And so what approach should we take? What should we assume as common knowledge? Should we assume any common ground at all?

There's a further aspect to consider. What occurs in a university course on “religion” or “theology” is different from religious education on the high school level. Within a college liberal arts curriculum,

the study of theology and religious traditions is not catechesis (the teaching of religious doctrines for confessional purposes—e.g., instruction with the goal of conversion or in order to receive the sacraments). Rather, it is a critically reflective analysis, an attempt to “make sense” of religious beliefs, claims, and doctrines from our standpoint within contemporary culture.

None of this excludes Christian faith. Any theology course which doesn’t take these issues into account is doomed to failure—or even worse, to make itself irrelevant even before it starts. To do an adequate job of “making sense” of Christianity, it seems, we need to talk about nearly everything: politics, gender, economics, race, and so on. But we only have a semester to do our work. So we must set some limited goals.

The Christian Ethics section (Dr. Graham). A recurring theme throughout the history of Christian ethics is discipleship, or following Jesus. We will try to appropriate the ethical vision of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels at the beginning of the ethics section, and once we have identified some of Jesus’ bedrock ethical commitments, we will extend them to some uniquely contemporary ethical issues, focusing especially on the technological modification of our bodies.

The Theology and Culture section (Dr. Knauss). In this section of the course, we will focus on the interaction between Christian faith and contemporary popular culture, and analyze how questions of faith, identity, community, and meaning are posed and answered at their intersection. We will begin by looking at a variety of Christian attitudes and theological approaches towards culture, and then focus on how central existential questions are taken up, transformed or further developed in dialogue between theology and popular culture.

The Spirituality section (Dr. Smith). This section of the course will explore classical and contemporary approaches to the problem of God and human suffering, including scriptural, theological, philosophical and literary sources from the Christian and Jewish traditions. We will discuss the issues involved in relating the power and goodness of God to the reality of evil and suffering, explore various attempts to “solve” the problem of God and suffering (such as seeing suffering as a means of education, punishment, or personal growth). Finally, we will examine the relationship between how God is imagined and the experience of individual and communal suffering.

Course Objectives

A. The general objectives of THL 1000

After taking THL 1000, you will be able to:

1. Explain the interaction of Christian faith and culture in both contemporary and historical contexts, understanding how faith shapes culture and how culture shapes theological worldviews and expressions of faith.
2. Explain theological and cultural responses to fundamental human questions, including
 - a. The question of faith: In whom do I place my trust? What or who is the ground of my life?
 - b. The question of identity: Who am I?
 - c. The question of community: How are we related to one another and the environments we inhabit? Does faith make a difference?
 - d. The question of meaning: How do I find meaning and purpose in the midst of the irreducible diversity of economic, religious, political and cultural systems in an interconnected global community and in the midst of the

- overwhelming realities of suffering?
3. Develop critical skills for thinking, reading and writing about Christian theology in a variety of genres, including the ability to identify and evaluate assumptions in arguments advanced by theologians in texts including the following:
 - a. Scripture
 - b. Texts of the Catholic intellectual tradition
 - c. Case-studies, poetry, novels.
 4. Critically evaluate the significance of Christian beliefs and practices for personal, communal, societal, and global living

B. The specific objects of this course

For *Dr. Graham's* section: Students will be able (a) to articulate the salient elements of Jesus' ethical vision; (b) to apply this vision to contemporary ethical issues; and (c) to critique the ideas of the authors studied in class.

For *Dr. Knauss's* section: (1) To acquire a basic religious literacy that helps discover and critically analyze religious and existential issues in popular culture; (2) to develop a set of tools to analyze cultural products such as films or songs from a theological perspective; (3) to develop critical thinking and academic writing and presentation skills.

For *Dr. Smith's* section: (1) To develop critical skills for thinking, reading, writing, and speaking. (2) To engage with key questions raised by the problem of suffering and gain working knowledge of some key debates, figures, and doctrinal claims concerning evil and the goodness of God and the historical and cultural contexts in which these debates occur.

Course Requirements

Three papers	30%
In-class quizzes	30%
Class participation	30%
Final exam.	10%

Mid-term grade: Your mid-term grade will be whatever you have earned through Session I. No work from Session II will count toward your mid-term grade.

Three Papers: Each student will write one paper for each session of this course. At the beginning of each session, your professor will give you instructions for your paper. If you would like feedback on your paper, you are welcome to submit a rough draft at least one week before your paper is due, which your professor will read and comment on. You may then use your professor's feedback to revise your paper.

Your papers must be submitted on the due date, or you will receive a zero for that assignment. The granting of extensions is solely at your professor's discretion, and will occur only in the rarest of cases when circumstances are clearly beyond the student's control.

For your papers, please give page numbers of the course readings to cite direct quotations and to reference the passages you discuss. For other written assignments, use Chicago Style (go to http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=920Wt_zNeSI&feature=youtu.be for an online tutorial on the Chicago Manual of Style). In addition, see a recent blog post about the new online tutorial about how

to cite the Chicago style (<http://blog.library.villanova.edu/history-sociology/2012/07/31/new-online-tutorial-on-chicago-style-citations/>).

In-Class Quizzes: Unannounced in-class quizzes will be administered frequently, which are mostly designed to assess a student's familiarity with the assigned readings. Quizzes will be worth anywhere from 10 to 50 points. No makeup quizzes will be given. If you miss a quiz and your absence that day is considered excused, notify your professor via email within two days and that quiz will not count toward your final quiz grade. Circumstances making absence from class excused are the following: approved athletic participation or participation in approved academic events; official university business; approved field trips; certified serious illness; death in the immediate family; or approved placement activities. All other absences are considered unexcused.

Class Participation: Villanova University emphasizes student centered learning, which means that students should take an active role in the educational process. Learning does not consist in the passive acquisition of knowledge from another—the professor—but in the mutual exploration of ideas in which everyone contributes his/her insights, asks questions, critically examines ideas, and articulates reasons for or against certain positions. Therefore, you are expected to participate frequently and to be prepared to contribute positively to the classroom experience.

Final Exam: The final exam will be administered during finals week at the day and time set by the registrar's office. It must be taken during its scheduled day and time, unless there is a conflict recognized by university guidelines that allows a student to take it on a different date. Makeup exams will not be given, and any unexcused absence during an exam will result in the student receiving a zero for his or her exam grade.

A student with documented learning disability seeking accommodations must give his or her professor reasonable advance notice of such desire for accommodations. In the case of the final exam, this must be done at least two weeks before the final exam is scheduled to be administered.

Grading Scale

These are the letter grades and numerical equivalents operative in this course:

A = 4.0 = 100–96%; A- = 3.67 = 95 – 91%; B+ = 3.33 = 90–88%; B = 3.00 = 87–84%;
B- = 2.66 = 83–81%; C+ = 2.33 = 80 – 78%; C = 2.00 = 77–74%; C- = 1.66 = 73–71%;
D+ = 1.33 = 70–68%; D = 1.00 = 67 – 64%; D- = 0.66 = 63–60%; F = 0.00 = 59% and below

Required Readings

Except for one book for Professor Smith's session, no other books are required to be purchased for this course. Films to be viewed for Dr. Knauss's section will be in course reserves in the library. All other course readings will be made available either online through Blackboard on the University's website or distributed in class. Course participants are expected to have the readings with them in class when they are scheduled to be discussed.

Attendance

Attendance Regulations. The University requires that first-year students attend all classes. First-year students will fail a course in which unexcused absences reach a total of one more than twice the number of weekly meetings for the course. Therefore in this course four unexcused absences are

allowed; going beyond this limit earns the student an Y grade (failure for excessive absence). Absences that are considered excused constitute the following: approved athletic participation or participation in approved academic events; official university business; approved field trips; certified serious illness; death in the immediate family; or approved placement activities. All other absences are considered unexcused.

Since there are no hard and fast University regulations for upper class students, here are the expectations for this course: anything beyond four unexcused absences will result in failing the course. Students should exercise this privilege of selective absence with care and realize that it will be virtually impossible for them to succeed in this course without consistent attendance. If you are absent from class, you are responsible for whatever has occurred in the class (lectures, discussions, assignments, announcements, etc.) during your absence, and if your absence is to be considered excused, you must notify your professor via email within two days to have that absence excused.

Your professor will take the roll at the beginning of class. If a student is not present when the roll is taken, the professor will assume that the student is absent. If you arrive late after attendance has been taken, you must notify your professor after class that you were present.

Academic Integrity

When dealing with issues of academic dishonesty, this course is governed strictly by the University's policy regarding academic integrity. That policy reads, in part, as follows:

"Anyone who hands in work that is not his or her own, or who cheats on a test, or plagiarizes a paper, is not learning, is receiving credit dishonestly and is, in effect, stealing from other students. As a consequence, it is crucial that students do their own work. Students who use someone else's work or ideas without saying so, or who otherwise perform dishonestly in a course, are cheating. In effect, they are lying. Such dishonesty, moreover, threatens the integrity not only of the individual student, but also of the university community as a whole."

The University's code of academic integrity is published in the Enchiridion and is available at <http://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/vpaa/studentservices/policies/integrity.html>. Each student is expected to be familiar with the code and to adhere to it.

Classroom Etiquette

Electronic devices (laptops, smart phones, etc.) are not allowed during class, unless your professor gives you explicit permission to the contrary. Each violation of this policy will incur a final grade reduction of 3%.

Physical and Learning Disabilities

It is the policy of Villanova to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you have a disability, please (1) see us after the first class or during our office hours and (2) register with the Office of Learning Support Services by contacting the staff (at learning.support.services@villanova.edu or 610.519.5636) as soon as possible. Registration with the Office of Learning Support Services is required in order to receive these accommodations.

Recording

Audio or video recording of class lectures and discussions by any means is strictly prohibited. If you need to record the class because of a documented disability, you need to discuss this with the professors beforehand.

Session Rotation	<u>Graham</u>	<u>Knauss</u>	<u>Smith</u>
Session 1: Aug. 25-Sept. 24	Secs. 17&22	Secs. 18&23	Secs. 19&24
Session 2: Sept. 29-Oct. 29	Secs. 18&23	Secs. 19&24	Secs. 17&22
Session 3: Nov. 3-Dec. 10	Secs. 19&24	Secs. 17&22	Secs. 18&23

Important Dates

Aug. 25: **Session 1 begins**; introductory material.

Sept. 1: Labor Day – no class.

Sept. 29: **Session 2 begins**.

Oct. 13-17: Fall break – no classes.

Nov. 3: **Session 3 begins**.

Nov. 10: Theology and Religious Studies Undergraduate Colloquium – class meets in the Villanova Room, Connelly Center.

Nov. 24: No class (AAR conference for professors)

Nov. 26-28: Thanksgiving break – no classes.

Dec. 10: Class in Connelly Center Cinema – group final exam preparation.