



The Lilly Fellows Program seeks to strengthen the quality and shape the character of church-related institutions of higher learning. Three closely related initiatives have been designed to accomplish this mission: a National Network of Church-Related Colleges and Universities that sponsors a wide variety of activities and publications that explore the Christian character of the academic vocation; a Graduate Fellowship Program that supports graduate students who are exploring vocations in church-related higher education, and the two-year, residential Postdoctoral Teaching Fellowship. As of 2022-2023 the Program has awarded eighty-three two-year postdoctoral fellowships to teacher-scholars who seek to renew and enrich their intellectual and spiritual lives while preparing for teaching and leadership roles at institutions of church-related higher education. Fellows teach in the honors college (Christ College) and departments of the College of Arts and Sciences at Valparaiso University. In addition, Fellows conduct scholarship or creative work, participate in a two-year colloquium, and interact with representatives from a national network of 101 church-related colleges and universities.



Jacob W. Torbeck earned his PhD in Ethics and Theology from Loyola University Chicago in May 2022. Jacob is a constructive theologian with expertise in the history and theology of visual metaphors and practices of attention and contemplation in Christianity, especially in what is sometimes called the “divine ideas” tradition.

Stemming from his formation between art, philosophy, and theology departments, Jacob’s work engages both art history and phenomenology as a way of approaching mystical and doctrinal writings from the Christian tradition as well as secular forms of media, like literature, film, and games, that make use of Christian ideas. Both of these approaches can be seen in Jacob’s recent essays, appearing in *Ethics and Metaphysics in the Philosophy of Edith Stein* (ed. Michael Andrews and Antonio Calcagno, Springer, 2022), as well as *Fantasy, Theology, and the Imagination* (ed. Andrew D. Thrasher, Austin Freeman and Fotini Toso, Lexington Books, 2023).

His current book project, *Turn Not Thine Eyes: Holy Faces, Saving Gazes, and the Theology of Attention* argues that the history of Christian contemplation offers a helpful spiritual model of attention for an age where distraction is abundant, and the connection between spiritual theology and social justice seem tenuous. To show how these notions of contemplation and action can be inextricably linked and mutually nourishing, Jacob’s project puts historical mystical itineraries, like those from Bonaventure and Nicholas of Cusa, in dialogue with the justice concerns of 20th and 21st Century philosophers and theologians like Emmanuel Levinas and Simone Weil. The constructive theology of attention that results brings the fruit of traditional spirituality forward in such a way to demonstrate its relevance to issues pertinent to contemporary global ethico-political challenges, such as making space for marginalized / unattended persons and voices in religion and politics, reorienting spiritual attitudes toward ecology and the environment, and resisting technologies of distraction.

Jacob’s research on mysticism and attention also undergirds and infuses his teaching. His pedagogical approach incorporates contemplative practices of reading and thinking to equip students to engage texts, media, and the world with an eye toward the way spiritual meaning is received and re-communicated, even in non-religious contexts. Practices like beginning class in silence and empathetic close reading help students shake off distraction and connect with texts in a way that helps them reflect upon not only the content of the work but their own questions and those of others as well. Because the work of interpretation is communal, whether in-person or online, Jacob aims to apply his research to foster a classroom environment where students from disparate backgrounds all feel comfortable discussing the issues that are most important to them.