AREA II: THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

The work of this area includes analysis of the development, thought, and institutional life of the Christian community in various periods and contexts, and training in the substance and forms of theological positions and argumentation.

1. The comprehensive purpose of the courses designated Theological Studies is to foster an understanding of the classical theological tradition of Christianity, acquaint students with contemporary theological thought, and develop the skills necessary to engage effectively in critical analysis and constructive argument.

2. The comprehensive purpose of the courses designated Christian Ethics is to foster an understanding of the classical theological tradition of Christian moral thought, acquaint students with contemporary Christian moral reasoning, and develop the skills necessary to engage effectively in critical analysis and constructive argument.

3. Liturgical Studies is intended to foster a serious and scholarly engagement with the origins and historical evolution of inherited patterns of worship, and to prepare students to lead the worship of contemporary Christian communities with competence and sensitivity.

4. The Denominational Courses are offered primarily, although not exclusively, for the constituencies of particular denominations. Distributional credit in Area II will be granted for only one denominational course.

THEOLOGY

REL 600a, Introduction to Theology  Mark Heim
The aim of this course is to introduce students to the vocabulary, topics, and history of Christian theology. Students develop the theological literacy needed to take part in cultural contestations over religion, in church debates, or in their own decisions about faith and practice. No particular faith commitment or background is assumed. The course makes use of historical and contemporary theological texts, art, and other resources to think about questions of doctrine, meaning, suffering, history, race, materiality, and transcendence. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 602a, Work, Debt, and Christian Witness  Kathryn Tanner
The course examines the changing nature of work and the growing role of debt within the U.S. economy. A variety of theoretical resources for understanding these changes is explored, along with theological perspectives on them. Area II. Prerequisite: REL 600, REL 626, or the equivalent. 3 Course cr

REL 612a, Christ and Being Human  Miroslav Volf and Dane Collins
This course explores the ways in which Christ—as a character in the gospel narratives, an object of Christian theological reflection, and a living presence in the life of the Church—informs Christian visions and practice of (individual, communal, and cosmic) flourishing. Students engage a thematic reading of the Gospel of Luke, organized around the Gospel’s core themes and touch-points with key concrete phenomena of human experience. The guiding questions are: What does it mean for Christ to be the key to human existence and flourishing? And what does flourishing look like if Jesus Christ is taken to be the key? Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 616a, Introduction to East Asian Theologies  Chloe Starr
This course introduces a range of theological themes and key thinkers in twentieth- and twenty-first century Japan, Taiwan, and Korea. It surveys different theological movements within these countries (such as “homeland theology,” Minjung theology, the “no-church” movement, etc.) and encourages a critical response to the challenges that these theologies raise for Christians in Asia and elsewhere. The course considers contextualization and inculturation debates in each of these societies, as well as regional responses to Christianity. We read primary texts in English, with background reading for context, and students are encouraged to develop their own responses to the authors and their thought (e.g., students may submit theological reflections to count toward their grade). Area II and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 617a, An Intellectual History of U.S. Liberation Theology  Benjamin Valentin
Liberation theologies are modes of theological discourse that rethink the meaning and purpose of religious thought and practice by placing attention on distinctive experiences of injustice and inequality encountered by different individuals and social groups. Although the liberation theology movement is now a global one, the United States has been the birthplace of a good number of liberation theologies. This course examines the emergence, development, emphases, and methodologies of five of these, including African American/black theology of liberation, feminist theology of liberation, Latinx theology of liberation, ecological theology of liberation, and LGBTQ theology of liberation. Besides offering students a solid introduction to liberation theology, the course also analyzes basic concepts underlying theories of injustice, domination, and oppression. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 623b, Theologies of Religious Pluralism  Mark Heim
This course explores the primary theological perspectives through which Christians interpret the fact of religious pluralism and the substance of diverse religious traditions. It also introduces students to the area of comparative theology. The primary aim is to allow students to develop a constructive theology of religious pluralism to support leadership for religious communities in pluralistic societies, participation in interreligious dialogue, and engagement with the reality of multiple religious practice and belonging. Area II and Area V. 3 Course cr
REL 626b, Systematic Theology  Miroslav Volf
The purpose of this course is to explore varieties of the Christian “story of everything” and the kinds of visions of the flourishing life that they render plausible and motivate. We do this by examining the work of five key late-twentieth-century theologians from different Christian traditions—Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant—who reflect on the Christian faith by asking the question: What does it mean to think and be a Christian in the context of modernity? We pay special attention to the character and systematic connections of the central elements of their “story of everything” and their bearing on the vision of flourishing life. In conversation with the readings, lectures, and one another, students are encouraged to formulate their own account of flourishing life and the “story of everything” that motivates it. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 628b, Screening Theology: Theology and Hollywood Movies  Benjamin Valentin
Highlighting the possibility and potential of a theology of culture, this course explores the ways in which recent Hollywood movies can be used as resources to think about and even rethink the meanings of such key theological concepts as God, human nature, sin, Christ/human redemption, and eschatological hope. Through lectures, reading materials, movies, and class discussions, students are encouraged to consider how an appreciative and critical engagement with popular culture could nourish theological construction. Area II and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 629a, Theology and Medicine  Mark Heim
Team-taught with a member of the Yale School of Medicine faculty, this course explores the challenges of contemporary medicine from a theological perspective. It considers theological resources relevant for the practice of medicine and examines the practice of medicine as a resource for deepening theological reflection. Topics of traditional interest in both fields—suffering, illness, healing, and well-being—are addressed in interdisciplinary terms. The focus is not on chaplaincy ministry but on a conversation among those who reflect on the application of physiological science and religious wisdom to human need. Key to this conversation is recognition that doctors and theologians share a need for the healing and spiritual health they hope to nurture in others. There are several field trips to and class meetings at Yale New Haven Hospital. Students attend rounds with medical teams, explore laboratory settings, and meet with faculty who practice in settings where the spirit and body intersect, through cooperation with the Program for Medicine, Spirituality, and Religion at Yale School of Medicine. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 641a, Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics  Kathryn Tanner
A close reading of representative selections from the Church Dogmatics, to enable students to grasp both the crucial specifics and the grand scope of this major work in modern theology. Area II. Prerequisite: REL 600 or REL 626 or the equivalent. 3 Course cr

REL 643a, Music and Theology in the Sixteenth Century  Markus Rathey
The Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century was a “media event.” The invention of letterpress printing, the partisanship of famous artists like Dürer and Cranach, and—not least—the support by many musicians and composers were responsible for the spreading of the thoughts of Reformation. But while Luther gave an important place to music, Zwingli and Calvin were much more skeptical. Music, especially sacred music, constituted a problem because it was tightly connected with Catholic liturgical and aesthetic traditions. Reformers had to think about the place music could have in worship and about the function of music in secular life. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 644a, Theology of Martin Luther  Miroslav Volf
This course is an introduction to the theology of Martin Luther, with a special focus on Luther’s anthropology and theology of grace. The course stresses close reading of select theological treatises, especially Luther’s commentary on Genesis, and critical engagement of some recent Luther scholarship. Enrollment limited to fifteen students. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 647b, Scientific Thought and Christian Theology  Mark Heim
This course does not attempt a comprehensive survey of the history of relations between science and theology, the areas of scientific research that raise religious issues, or theological doctrines that can be reconsidered in dialogue with science. The course provides a brief overview of major issues arising from physics (cosmology and quantum phenomena), biology (evolution and biogenetic processes), and cognitive science (neurological function) in relation to divine action, incarnation, theological anthropology, salvation, and eschatology. Each year the course focuses extensively on some selected topics. This year the focus is theological interaction with scientific explanations of religion itself, stemming from the cognitive science of religion on one hand (“What is religion doing in our brain?”) and evolutionary biological analyses of religion (“What is religion doing in our evolutionary history?”) on the other hand. Area II. Prerequisite: a background in theology at least equivalent to REL 600. 3 Course cr

REL 652b, Agency, Character, and Complicity  Adam Eitel
We live in a fallen world, one created in goodness but nevertheless full of harm, suffering, and loss. We bring about some of these lamentable conditions directly and on our own; others are mediated by social, economic, and political forces to which our perceptible contribution is vanishingly small. Many instances of harm elicit our sorrow, even if no one is to blame; others are rightly called wrongs and elicit our anger—to say nothing of repentance, resistance, and reproach. Yet, a number of puzzles intrude when it comes to making such distinctions. What are the sources of wrongdoing? Is wrongdoing necessarily irrational? What distinguishes instances of wrongdoing from lamentable yet blameless instances of harm? Are we morally responsible for the distant harms spawned by our participation in structures that we are powerless to avoid? Can we be fairly censured for vital pursuits that unavoidably contribute to others’ trouble and woe? With a view toward exploring these questions, this seminar examines classical and contemporary work on agency, character, and complicity. Area II. 3 Course cr
REL 657b, U.S. Latinx Theologies  Benjamin Valentin
In the United States, feminist and African American/black theologies have received much-deserved recognition for their original contributions to the task of theological construction. However, it is necessary to note that alongside these liberation theologies, though with less publicity until recently, Latinx theologians have been developing a distinctive form of contextual and liberation theology written from the perspective of their lives in the United States. Although influenced in certain respects by the mode of liberation theology that emerged in Latin America, and also by feminist and African American/black liberationist theologies in the United States, these theologians have created an inimitable theological expression that has sought to analyze the existential conditions of U.S. Latinx/Hispanic American life and to rethink Christian thought and practice in light of these conditions. The course examines this theological expression, offering an overview of the historical development, key figures, core themes, and methods of U.S. Hispanic/Latinx theology. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 658a, Flesh Made Word: The Making and Remaking of Christology  Benjamin Valentin
Arguably, there is no more important subject in Christian theology than Christology—that is, disciplined reflection on the person and the enduring religious significance of Jesus of Nazareth. This course explores the history of Christology, including its origins in early Christianity, its evolution from the second through the fifth century, and its more recent reformulation at the hands of contemporary theologians. It begins, however, with study of the historical Jesus, offering a look at the emerging picture of Jesus arising from present-day historiography, archaeology, and literary analysis of the earliest Christian writings. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 665b, Martin Luther, His Life and Work  William G. Rusch
This course consists of lectures, readings in English translation of selected works of Martin Luther, readings in secondary literature on Luther’s life and thought, and class discussion. The course presupposes a basic knowledge of church history and European history, especially medieval and sixteenth-century history in the West. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 677b, Natural Disasters in the Christian Tradition: Ritual and Theological Responses  Staff
Natural disasters are uniquely productive sites of ritual action and theological reflection, cutting to the core of a group’s identity and threatening the stability of theological systems. In the Christian tradition, natural disasters have been critical moments in which the relationship among humans, God, and the world are negotiated, both in ritual action and theological reflection. This seminar explores natural disasters in the Christian tradition by examining ritual and theological responses to environmental catastrophe from early Christianity to the present. The questions raised by the course are: How does environmental instability affect the practice and theory of Christianity? What continuities and discontinuities can be seen in Christian responses to natural disasters across time and space? What resources can the history of disaster responses provide for contemporary religious practice? Students are expected to participate actively in class discussions and write a 10–12-page research paper related to the themes of the course. Students present their work to the class, conference style, in the final two weeks of class. Area II and Area V. 3 Course cr

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

REL 615b, Introduction to Christian Ethics  Eboni Marshall Turman
This course is an introduction to Christian moral norms, ideals, and practices, and to some perennial disputes over their substance. Drawing upon a range of historical and contemporary sources, the course examines what difference Christian commitment makes for moral assessment—for considering the ends that human beings endorse, the actions we permit or prohibit, the traits of character we praise, tolerate, or admonish. The course takes as its point of departure some recent and influential work on the moral vision of the New Testament canon. On this basis, the course then asks how different Christians throughout the ages have looked to scripture for help thinking about the tightly interlocking issues of war, poverty, and politics. Throughout, the course brings these matters to bear on our own social moment, asking: How shall Christians love God and neighbor, show hospitality to strangers, and speak truth to power in this present age? Area II and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 631a, Theological Ethics  Adam Eitel
This course grapples with some of the basic (albeit deeply contested) ideas by which Christian moral discourse is governed. We examine theological accounts of what it means to live well, focusing mainly on classical and contemporary works of relevance to central problems in Christian moral thought and modern religious thought more generally: the relations between divine excellence, human flourishing, and love; the sources of human action, the conditions of moral transformation, competing standards of moral assessment, and the significance of divine commands; and rival conceptions of sacred value, virtue, tradition, and vocation. Area II. Prerequisite: REL 615. Students with a demonstrated background in theological and/or philosophical disciplines may be admitted with instructor approval. 3 Course cr

REL 654a, Social Practices and Ethical Formation  Jennifer Herdt
One of the striking features of the contemporary intellectual landscape is a pervasive concern with the normative features of social practices. This seminar is a critical investigation of some of the influential forms this has taken (neo-Aristotelian, Hegelian, Wittgensteinian, post-structuralist) and of their theological refractions. Broad agreement on the significance of social practices masks significant disagreement on questions of moral agency, authority, and truth. Readings include texts by Bernard Williams, John McDowell, Jeffrey Stout, Alasdair Maclntyre, Stanley Hauerwas, Michel Foucault, Pierre Hadot, Michel de Certeau, Judith Butler, and Kevin Hector. Area II and Area V. Prerequisite: REL 615, REL 631, or the equivalent. 3 Course cr

REL 694a, Finitude, Vulnerability, and Risk  Linn Tonstad
Finitude, vulnerability, and risk are inescapable conditions of existence. Yet, while all beings are vulnerable, vulnerability is also unequally distributed among humans, especially along lines of race, class, and histories of colonialism. Many philosophers and theologians have
argued that human desires to escape finitude drive these inequitable distributions of vulnerability: rather than accepting vulnerability, some humans deny their own vulnerability by projecting it onto others in order to shore up their own sense of mastery. The solution, they suggest, might be to accept and even affirm the necessity and potential of vulnerability and risk for finite life. This course examines these concerns in conversation with philosophers, theologians, and theorists. The course asks what vulnerability means and how it is distributed; how finite creatures can affirm the conditions of our vulnerable and fragile lives; about the social life of vulnerability, especially in terms of race; and about the potential of risk for individual and social change. It asks, in other words, about how vulnerability is lived and concretely encountered, and about how one lives on in the aftermath of inequitable distributions of vulnerability. Area II. Prerequisite: at least one graduate-level seminar in theology, philosophy, or ethics, or permission of the instructor. 3 Course cr

LITURGICAL STUDIES

REL 601b, Eastern Orthodox Worship and Thought  Mark Roosien
This course is intended to be an introduction to the Eastern Orthodox (Chalcedonian) tradition by examining the history and theology of its worship. The course proceeds chronologically, beginning in the early centuries of Christianity and tracing the development of Orthodox liturgy and theological reflection up to the present day. Along the way, we consider various aspects of Orthodox worship: music, iconography, female bodies, dogmatic developments, etc. The course has two main assignments. First, each student writes and presents in class a book review of a classic text of modern Orthodox theology or modern scholarly analysis of an aspect of Orthodox worship. Second, all students write a 10–12-page research paper. In the last two weeks of the class, students present their work to the class, conference style. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 610a, Foundations of Christian Worship  Melanie Ross
This is the core course in Liturgical Studies. The course focuses on theological and historical approaches to the study of Christian worship, with appropriate attention to cultural context and contemporary issues. The first part of the course seeks to familiarize students with the foundations of communal, public prayer in the Christian tradition (such as its roots in Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament; its Trinitarian source and direction; its ways of figuring time, space, and human embodiment; its use of language, music, the visual arts, etc.). The second part offers a sketch of historical developments, from earliest Christian communities to present times. In addition, select class sessions focus on questions of overall importance for liturgical life, such as the relationship between gender differences and worship life, and the contemporary migration of liturgical practices into cyberspace. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 611b, Understanding American Evangelical Worship  Melanie Ross
This course examines the history and development of American Evangelical worship from the eighteenth century to the present day. Topics include the shift in sacramental theology between the First and Second Great Awakenings, the liturgical legacy of early-twentieth-century Fundamentalist-Modernist controversies, Pentecostal contributions to evangelical worship, ways in which race and gender have shaped evangelical identity, and evangelical approaches to liturgical renewal at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 615b, Baptism and Eucharist in Ecumenical Dialogue  Melanie Ross
This course engages students in recent conversations around the theology and practice of baptism and eucharist. Beginning with the 1982 World Council of Churches document Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry, we read texts that have emerged from ecumenical sacramental dialogues in the past three decades and discuss major issues such as mutual recognition of baptism, patterns of Christian initiation, who may administer the sacraments, and open communion. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 620a, Worship, Cosmos, Creation  Teresa Berger
This course explores the manifold intersections between practices of Christian worship and understandings of creation and cosmos. The specific intersections highlighted during the term include biblical, historical, visual, and musical materials as well as contemporary theological and pastoral reflections on practices of worship. The course seeks to engage the many voices of a “green” Christian faith that have emerged among scholars and practitioners of worship during a time of unprecedented attention to ecological and cosmological concerns. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 621b, Understanding American Evangelical Worship  Melanie Ross
This course is intended to be an introduction to the Eastern Orthodox (Chalcedonian) tradition by examining the history and theology of its worship. The course proceeds chronologically, beginning in the early centuries of Christianity and tracing the development of Orthodox liturgy and theological reflection up to the present day. Along the way, we consider various aspects of Orthodox worship: music, iconography, female bodies, dogmatic developments, etc. The course has two main assignments. First, each student writes and presents in class a book review of a classic text of modern Orthodox theology or modern scholarly analysis of an aspect of Orthodox worship. Second, all students write a 10–12-page research paper. In the last two weeks of the class, students present their work to the class, conference style. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 687a, The Books of Common Prayer  Bryan Spinks
A historical introduction to Anglican liturgical tradition from the sixteenth century to the present. After considering the origins and development of the first Books of Common Prayer during the Reformation, the course traces the English and American prayer book tradition, including the impact of the Tractarian and Liturgical Movements. The later part of the course includes the 1979 Book of Common Prayer and its supplementary materials, as well as the history of prayer book revision across the Anglican Communion in the twentieth century and to the present. Area II and Area III. Prerequisite: REL 682. 3 Course cr

REL 688a, Catholic Liturgy  Teresa Berger
This course offers an introduction to Roman Catholic liturgical traditions and practices. Given the breadth of the subject matter (2,000 years of history; complex dogmatic developments; numerous rites, rituals, and rhythms; contemporary tensions), the course attempts to range broadly, yet has to do so quite selectively. One focus is on key liturgical documents of the past hundred years. And throughout the course, attention is paid to the broader cultural realities in which worship always finds itself, e.g., gender constructions, ethnic identities, and, more recently, media developments (for example, the migration of Catholic liturgical practices into cyberspace). REL 682, concurrent or completed, will be an asset. Area II. 3 Course cr
REL 690a, Liturgical Theology  Melanie Ross
This seminar proposes for scholarly inquiry key texts and themes in theological reflections on Christian worship. We probe some of the voices that initially defined the field in the twentieth century, asking: What is “theological” about this reflection on worship? How is the relationship between Christian faith and cultural context understood? What has been occluded in most traditional definitions of “liturgical theology”? Who is absent, and who cannot be rendered visible, within the traditional framework? We also keep our eyes open to theologies of worship embedded in actual, local congregational practices. These practices are integrated into the work of the seminar through visits to distinctly different worshipping communities during the course of the term. Area II.  3 Course cr

DENOMINATIONAL COURSES

Note: Denominational colloquia are listed near the end of this chapter under Courses without Area Designations.

REL 618a, Anglican Theology and History I: Great Britain  Staff
This course explores the major developments in British Anglican theology, church history, and ecclesiology from the sixteenth through the twenty-first century. The course is a companion to Anglican History and Theology II: ECUSA and the Anglican Communion (REL 619), making a two-term study of the historical evolution and theological traditions of Anglicanism. The two courses may be taken in either sequence. The primary aim of the course is to analyze and make a constructive theological assessment of classical Anglican tradition and its modern forms, and to explore these as a pastoral and spiritual resource for Christian life and ministry. The course does this by engaging in the study of both well-known and lesser-studied texts and figures. In addition to lectures, each week the course examines the respective texts, interrogating them with respect to the distribution of power and other issues relevant to the formation of British Anglican tradition; namely, is there a “golden thread” that runs throughout the tradition as it develops? Area II and Area III.  3 Course cr

REL 619a, Anglican Theology and History II: ECUSA and the Anglican Communion  Cathy George and Ian Douglas
This course explores the origins and development of the Episcopal Church and the global Anglican Communion. The class considers the development of the Episcopal Church from colonial origins to a multinational and increasingly multicultural church, with attention to various theological voices and present polity. The vocation, identity, and history of the Episcopal Church are considered within a missiological framework for the church in America. The Anglican Communion is explored as an emerging postcolonial network of provinces, subject to contests over the character and identity of Anglicanism that continue to the present. A prevailing question is the relationship between unity and diversity within the Body of Christ. Area II.  3 Course cr

REL 691a, Ecclesiology, Ministry, and Polity  Staff
Lectures on comparative ecclesiology, doctrines of the ministry, and patterns of church polity in Western Christianity. Sections are arranged to enable students to study the history, doctrine, worship, and polity of their own denominations. The 2019–2020 sections are United Church of Christ and Lutheran. Other sections offered, most in alternate years, include Baptist, Unitarian Universalist, A.M.E. Zion, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and United Methodist. Area II.  3 Course cr

REL 696a, United Methodist History  Morris Davis
This course covers the history of Methodism from its eighteenth-century beginnings to the present. While basic doctrinal and theological history are covered, the focus is on institutional and cultural developments. Because it is designed for UMC students, the course encourages and develops study and reflection that make connections between history and present institutional concerns. Area II.  3 Course cr