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  Willie Jennings
The aim of this course is to introduce students to Christian theology, or better, Christian theological perspectives. Through short readings and varied writing assignments, students develop the theological literacy needed to take part in cultural contestations over religion, to engage in church debates, and/or to inform their own decisions about faith and practice. 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. No particular faith commitment or background is assumed. Area II.  3 Course cr

REL 626b, Systematic Theology  Willie Jennings
The aims of this course are (1) to learn the craft of doing theology by close reading of five theologians from ecumenically and socially diverse perspectives and significant trends in contemporary theology; and (2) to reflect critically on the task of theology. We pay special attention to how these theologians' visions of flourishing life are rooted in the life and person of Jesus Christ; are set in the larger story of God's relation to the world; and are informed by Scripture as the primary source for doing theology. Area II. Prerequisite: One bible and one theology course.  3 Course cr

REL 629a, Theology and Medicine  Mark Heim and Benjamin Doolittle
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 class meetings at Yale New Haven Hospital 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. Prerequisite: One term of graduate-level study of theology is assumed.  3 Course cr

REL 634b, Friedrich Schleiermacher's Christian Faith  Kathryn Tanner
The course involves a close reading of the whole of The Christian Faith, one of the greatest works in Christian theology by one of the most influential and controversial theologians of the modern period, Friedrich Schleiermacher. Students come to understand the text both comprehensively and in detail, and to understand its general significance for the history of modern Christian thought. Area II. Prerequisite: REL 600 or REL 626 or the equivalent.  3 Course cr

REL 638a, Latinx Theologies and Spiritualities  Staff
This course introduces students to the rich variety of theological and spiritual traditions among U.S. Latinx communities. While primary attention is paid to major Christian denominations and movements, the course also examines Latinx engagements with Islam, Indigenous spiritualities, and religions from the African diaspora. In order to unsettle the idea that Blackness and Latinidad are mutually exclusive, this course critically interrogates gender formations and sexualities within various Afro-Latinx spaces and explores the complex intersections—and interactions—between Blackness, Indigeneity, Latinidad, gender, class, sexuality, and nationality. Throughout the course, students explore how theology and spirituality serve as important resources for Latinx liberation movements and for broader struggles against empire, colonialism, and capitalism. Area II and Area V.  3 Course cr

REL 639a, Suffering  Miroslav Volf
For much of human history, suffering, though unwelcome, was seen as an inescapable part of human life. The Christian faith, along with other great spiritual and philosophical traditions, maintained that at least some suffering can be meaningful and salutary. In the course of modernity, we have come to believe, more tacitly than explicitly, that suffering is an unmitigated evil which can and ought to be eliminated. In this course we use philosophical and theological engagements with suffering in order to explore how to respond to
REL 644a, Christianity and Social Power  Kathryn Tanner
This course examines intersections between Christian theology and issues of sociopolitical equality through the study of historical cases. Cases include Christian justifications of hierarchical rule in the early church, medieval arguments over the status of women in church and society, controversies over “New World” colonization, leveling movements in the English civil war, arguments for and against slavery in the United States, nineteenth-century reactions to democratic reform movements on the continent, and contemporary controversies over the ordination of women and queer people. The course helps equip students to answer the following general questions: What is the relation between Christian belief and action? When is Christian belief being used ideologically, to serve independent interests in gaining and maintaining power? On what basis can one judge between conflicting uses of the same Christian beliefs? Area II. Prerequisite: REL 600 or REL 626 or the equivalent. 3 Course cr

REL 659b, God in Modern Thought  Miroslav Volf
In this course we explore some influential modern reconceptualizations of the classical thinking about God. We pay special attention to the relation between God and the world. Prior completion of a basic theology or historical theology course is recommended. Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 678a, Remember Your Death: Memento Mori Practices in Comparative Perspective  Kathryn Tanner
This course explores memento mori practices in a variety of religious traditions in order to assess how the remembrance of death affects everyday life and the degree to which the diversity of these implications for everyday life is conditioned by religious context. Prior course work in theology or philosophy is recommended. Area II and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 680b, Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism  Kathryn Tanner
This course investigates finance-dominated capitalism, its effects on people’s understanding of themselves and their relations with others, and how Christian beliefs and practices might throw light on conditions of contemporary economic life. What new form is capitalism taking today? Does this new form of capitalism have a particular culture or “spirit”? What might be said about it from a Christian point of view? Area II. Prerequisite: REL 600 or REL 626 or equivalent. 3 Course cr

CHRISTIAN ETHICS

REL 615b, Introduction to Christian Ethics  Jennifer Herdt
This course is an introduction to Christian moral norms, ideals, and practices, and to some classical and contemporary disputes over their substance and application. Drawing upon a variety of historical and contemporary sources, we ask what difference Christian commitments make for assessing the ends that human beings pursue, the actions we permit and prohibit, and the traits of character we praise, tolerate, and admonish. We consider the ways in which Christian moral thinking is shaped by the Hebrew Bible and New Testament before considering interlocking questions concerning the ethics of the use of force, the economy, property, prison abolition, immigration, families, disabilities, environmental justice, and food. Area II and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 624b, Experience in Ethics  Clifton Granby
This course offers a critical examination of the category of experience, with special attention to its conception and deployment in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American philosophical, religious, and political discourse. The course focuses on some influential, if limited, appraisals of experience by classical pragmatists such as William James and John Dewey. It also engages the work of contemporary critics like Victor Anderson, Katherine McKittrick, and Sara Ahmed. The course pursues various lines of inquiry related, but not limited, to presupposition and philosophical method; religious sentiment and political praxis; mysticism and divine encounter; black geographical mappings and gendered spatiality; and the politics of enclosure, authority, and difference. Area II and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 631a, Christian Ethics Seminar  Clifton Granby and Adam Eitel
This course grapples with some of the basic and most 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 in 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; conceptions of sacred value, virtue, tradition, and vocation. Area II and Area V. Prerequisite: REL 615. Students with a demonstrated background in theological and/or philosophical disciplines may be admitted with instructor approval. 3 Course cr

REL 632a, Creaturely Agency and the Contestation of the Human  Jennifer Herdt
What it is to be human is often defined by way of contrast to animality. This contrastive definition of the human is peculiarly salient when it comes to the ethical: human beings are moral agents, persons, characterized by self-ownership, responsibility, and accountability; other animals are outside the ethical. Theologically, these claims to human exceptionalism are bound up with the doctrine of the imago dei and with the Incarnation; philosophically, with claims regarding human dignity. But “the human” is now under fire from multiple directions: posthumanism, animality studies, race and animality studies. Meanwhile, cognitive ethology, comparative psychology, and evolutionary anthropology are revealing new things about the agency of human and nonhuman animals. How ought we think about agency and responsibility, both human and nonhuman, in light of all of these developments? And what possibilities emerge for the doctrine of the imago dei and for the confession of Christ as fully and perfectly human, moving forward? Area II. 3 Course cr
REL 642a, Virtue Ethics  Jennifer Herdt
Virtue ethics today is an important site for reflection on intention and human acts, exemplarity and tradition, resistance and liberation, emotion and reason, flourishing and happiness. Virtue ethics is also a key site for reflection on the ways in which practices, communities, and social structures form character and in turn are formed by the character of the persons who inhabit them. Within theological ethics, the retrieval of virtue has issued in an emphasis on the formation of Christian character in relation to scripture, worship and other practices. In this course, we examine that terrain, exploring the roots of the twentieth-century retrieval of virtue ethics, the ways in which Christian thinkers worked in the past to baptize pagan virtues, and some of the most significant sites for reflection on the virtues today. Along the way, we attend to moral luck, internalized oppression, and moral injury, and explore how virtue ethics is informing contemporary environmental and technology ethics. We take up these and other questions in the course of reading texts by Julia Annas, Jean Porter, Robert M. Adams, Alasdair MacIntyre, John Bowlin, Stanley Hauerwas, Lisa Tessman, and others. Area II and Area V. Prerequisite: REL 615 or REL 632 or their equivalent.  3 Course cr

REL 645b, 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 MacIntyre, 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 is desirable.  3 Course cr

LITURGICAL STUDIES

REL 677b, Natural Disasters in the Christian Tradition: Ritual and Theological Responses  Mark Roosien
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 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

REL 682a, Foundations of Christian Worship  Teresa Berger
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, the contemporary migration of liturgical practices into digital social space, and the ecological emergency of our time and its impaction practices of worship. Area II.  3 Course cr

REL 687a, Books of Common Prayer: Anglican Liturgy in History, Theology, and Practice  Andrew McGowan
This course traces the development of Anglican liturgy from the time of Henry VIII through the English prayer books of 1549–1662, and then the books and practices of the Episcopal Church and the wider Anglican Communion to the present day. Attention is given to the Reformation, the first American liturgies, the aftermath of the Oxford Movement, and the twentieth-century Liturgical Movement. Theologies and practices in present Anglican worship, including sacramental theology and issues of enculturation, are also addressed. Area II and Area III. Prerequisite: M.Div. students should normally have taken REL 682.  3 Course cr

DENOMINATIONAL COURSES

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

REL 609a, Theology of the Lutheran Confessions  William Rusch
Through lectures, assigned readings, and class discussion, this course examines the Book of Concord of 1580 and certain other documents that served as sources for the Book of Concord. The objectives of the course are twofold: to develop a knowledge and understanding of the Lutheran Confessions in their original context and to gain an appreciation of the contemporary importance and influence of these Confessions for Christianity in the twenty-first century. Given the nature of Lutheranism, what resources does it have in this century to proclaim the Christian faith and provide guidance for the Christian life? Area II.  3 Course cr

REL 662b, The Anglican Way I  Justin Crisp
This course explores the origins and development of the Anglican way of being Christian, focusing attention on two case studies: the Church of England and the Episcopal Church, from the English Reformation (sixteenth century) through “The Colenso Affair” (nineteenth century). The course is a companion to REL 663, making a two-term study of the historical evolution and theological traditions of the Anglican way of being Christian. The primary aim of the course is to analyze and make a constructive theological
assessment of early Anglican traditions and to explore these as a pastoral and spiritual resource for Christian life and ministry. We do this by engaging in the study of both well-known and lesser-studied texts and figures. In addition to lectures, each week we discuss the respective texts, interrogating them with respect to the distribution of power, questions arising from colonialism, and issues relevant to the formation of the global Anglican Communion. We ask the questions: What does it mean to be Christian in the Anglican Way, and how do we do Anglican theology? How do we approach the study of the Anglican story in light of the dialectic between the Catholic and contextual, secular and Church, universal and particular, the global and the local? To what extent is the Anglican Way an exercise in depolarization? Area II and Area III. 3 Course cr

REL 663a, The Anglican Way II: Continuing Depolarization  Justin Crisp
This course explores the continued development of the Anglican way of being Christian in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, giving particular attention to the continued evolution of the Episcopal Church and emergence of the Anglican Communion, as well as the controversies that face Anglicans in their postcolonial situation. It is a companion to REL 662, making a two-term study of the historical evolution and theological traditions of the Anglican way of being Christian. The primary aim of the course is to analyze and make a constructive theological assessment of modern Anglican traditions and to explore these as a pastoral and spiritual resource for Christian life and ministry. We do this by engaging in the study of both well-known and lesser-studied texts and figures. In addition to lectures, each week we discuss the respective texts, interrogating them with respect to the distribution of power, questions arising from colonialism, and issues relevant to the formation of the global Anglican Communion. These questions guide us: What does it mean to be Christian in the Anglican Way, and how do we do Anglican theology? How do we approach the study of the Anglican story in light of the dialectic between the Catholic and contextual, secular and Church, universal and particular, the global and the local? To what extent is the Anglican Way an exercise in depolarization? Area II and Area III. Prerequisite: REL 662. 3 Course cr

REL 691a or b, 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 2022–2023 sections are Baptist, Disciples of Christ, and Presbyterian. Other sections offered, most in alternate years, include Lutheran, Methodist, A.M.E. Zion, UCC, Unitarian Universalist, and Roman Catholic. Area II. 3 Course cr