

AREA III: HISTORICAL STUDIES

The intent of Historical Studies is to foster and demand serious consideration by students of the essential historical substance of Christian faith and tradition. Two aspects of inquiry merge in this area of the curriculum: (1) the development of analytic capacities for the understanding of religious thought and practice in their cultural context, and (2) special studies in the cultural context itself that are deemed essential to competent ministry. Work in this area includes social and cultural analysis often focusing on issues that arise at the intersection of established disciplines. Area III thus includes subjects falling outside the domain of explicitly Christian thought.

REL 703a, Methods and Sources of Religious History Kenneth Minkema

This course introduces students to the study of sources, primary and secondary, relating to the history of Christianity. Students work with YDS faculty in the history of Christianity on materials from antiquity to our contemporary world. Students develop their projects over the course of the term under the guidance of their adviser and in workshops. The course prepares students to proceed toward thesis research. The course is not, however, limited to those intending to write a thesis. Prerequisites: Some background in history and permission of the instructor. 3 Course cr

REL 713b, History of Medieval Christianity: Learning, Faith, and Conflict Volker Leppin

The Middle Ages, defined by European culture as the period between 500 and 1500, is a period that witnesses the transformation of European Christianity into a Latin-speaking religious community under the Pope. It became increasingly separate from the developments in the Near East and Asia. For all too long this epoch has served in legitimating discourses of confessions, nations, and ethnic groups, such as in the nationalistic construction of the Germanic tribes. The course aims to draw a new image of these thousand years in terms of time, geography, ethnicity, gender, and culture. Medieval Christianity offers multiple possibilities for understanding both the perils and development of Christianity in an age of rapid change. On the one hand, the course examines processes of establishing power by exclusion, mainly of Jewish and Muslim believers, and of building strong hierarchies almost exclusively male. On the other hand, we find fascinating debates within Scholasticism about how to combine philosophical reason with Christian faith. Further, we explore the evolution of deep, inner spiritual practices among mystics, with special regard to female nuns, who were prolific writers. From this perspective we see how medieval Christianity is part of what we now experience as global Christianity, making a distinctive contribution to the emergence of a widely shared faith. Area III. 3 Course cr

REL 719a, Christianity and Coloniality in Contemporary Africa Kyama Mugambi

Missionary complicity with the colonial enterprise places Christianity at the heart of the problematic relationship between the African continent and the West. Simultaneously, Christianity has continued to grow rapidly in post-independence Africa. In much of Africa south of the Sahara, decolonization efforts coincided with the period of the greatest Christian expansion in history. Africa is now the continent with the highest population of Christians. This course examines this conundrum through critical engagement with theories, literature, and data from the continent. Students explore the historiographic, political, social, economic, and demographic dimensions of this

discussion. They engage with key theories regarding African Christianity in the context of a colonial history. The course surveys contemporary issues in urban, educational, social, and cultural spheres. Additionally, students consider gender perspectives on coloniality as it pertains to religion and politics. The course assesses the role of indigenous impulses in the development of Christianity within contemporary Africa. Through this course, students gain a more nuanced perspective as they examine and problematize critical arguments in the prevailing discourse on Christianity and coloniality in Africa today. Area III and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 7201a, Jews and/as Others in Mediterranean Antiquity Ra'anan Boustan

This course explores the dynamics of contact, entanglement, conflict, and differentiation between Jews and other religious or ethnic groups in the ancient Mediterranean world. We consider how Jews constructed the religious or ethnic “other” even as Jews were often themselves figured as “others” by those with whom they shared social and cultural worlds. But the course also challenges its own title as misleadingly clear cut, as the boundaries between groups were themselves continuously subject to revision and contestation. The course thus highlights the decisive impact that intergroup encounter had on the contours of Jewish identity and practice during this formative period and, more generally, the enduring role that such encounters have played in the creation and transformation of religious community and tradition from antiquity down to the present. 3 Course cr

REL 7205a, Eckhart and Tauler: Sermons on the Gospel of John Volker Leppin and Carolyn Sharp

The medieval practice of preaching experienced a remarkable shift in the early fourteenth century. Meister Eckhart and John Tauler, two German mystics, preached in vernacular rather than in ecclesiastical Latin. While they were not the first to do so, they shaped a new style that actively engaged their audiences. Metaphors inspired the listeners to embark on a spiritual journey toward God. The mystical framework which both preachers provided aimed to transcend temporal boundaries without dismissing earthly reality. The faithful were invited to view their lives as transcendent for the divine here and now. The preacher became a spiritual guide. Understanding these sermons requires situating them in their historical backdrop, 700 years ago, during a period when the Dominican Order – of which Eckhart and Tauler were members – flourished across Europe. A notable issue for the preachers was addressing women seeking religious knowledge. The sermons reveal that male priests not only taught them but learned from them as well. The old texts might sound foreign in our times. Yet these medieval sermons might encourage us to think more deeply about contemporary ways of preaching and the purposes of homiletical theology writ more broadly. Eckhart's and Tauler's sermons on the Gospel of John, as we find them here, are set up to disclose intangible spiritual mysteries and to encourage the faithful to experience God in transformative ways. Their message remains an inspiring call, even today. Prerequisite: REL 712, 713, or 714. 3 Course cr

REL 7207a, Protestantism and the Third Reich Volker Leppin and Bruce Gordon

This course explores the question of why virtually all German Protestants in the Third Reich either collaborated with National Socialism or chose strategies for survival over resistance. The eminent Protestant Professor of Theology Paul Althaus declared in 1933, “our Protestant churches have greeted the turning point of 1933 as a gift and miracle of God.” The roots of Protestant responses to the Third Reich lay in the Imperial

Christianity leading to WWI and the chaos of Weimar Germany. Recent scholarship has overturned older narratives of brave resistance and demonstrated that well-known figures such as Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer were anomalies in a Protestant culture of passivity and silence. German Protestant churches remained quiet as Jews were deported. Working with primary sources, students explore the mentalities of collaboration in churches (German Christians) and universities, as well as the character of the Confessing Church. The course concludes with the legacy of collaboration and non-resistance. 3 Course cr

REL 7208a, United Methodist History and Doctrine Adam Ployd

This course is designed to fulfill the ordination requirement that United Methodist ministry candidates study the History and Doctrine of The United Methodist Church. As such, it begins with a focused study on the origins of Methodism through the ministry of John and Charles Wesley in eighteenth-century England. Emphasis is placed on Wesley's development of his soteriology, particularly the role of grace and human freedom, the goal of perfection/sanctification, and the Methodist ethical ethos. The class then turns to the history of the Methodist movement in America with particular attention paid to the role of gender, race, and polity concerns in the movement from the early societies in the Americas through the creation of The United Methodist church in the mid-twentieth century. As we explore the history of American Methodism, we also engage current Wesleyan theological voices from around the globe, offering challenging perspectives from diverse contexts. 3 Course cr

REL 7210a, Marriage and Sexual Relations in Late Antiquity and Medieval Christian Ritual Practice Gabriel Radle

This course examines the historical practice of marriage formation in late antiquity and the Middle Ages. Beginning with ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman perspectives, it explores how different communities in the Mediterranean conceptualized and enacted nuptial kinship through a ritual process from betrothal through consummation and probes the anthropological and religious underpinnings of these practices. It then considers early Christian debates on the roles of marriage, sex, and family, and analyzes the early evidence for the Christianization of marriage ritual. Through original texts (available in translation), as well as visual and material sources, the course traces the development of these rites across medieval Christian traditions of the West (Italy, Gaul, Spain, etc.) and East (Byzantine, Coptic, Syriac, Slavic, etc.), and explores the diversity of theological visions and socio-cultural values they express. While focused on pre-modern Christianity, this course encourages frequent comparison to Jewish and Islamic traditions (including legal and ritual frameworks, as well as the calendrical regulation of sexual relations), invites comparison to other kinship rituals (such as medieval rites of "brother-making" or filial adoption), and also provides opportunities for students to engage with ritual developments of the Reformation and explore the legacy of historic marriage practices within contemporary religious, legal, and cultural traditions and debates. 3 Course cr

REL 731a, Origins of Christian Art in Late Antiquity Felicity Harley

This course examines the origins and development of Christian art in the visual culture of Roman late antiquity, ca. 200–ca. 500 CE. Its aim is to introduce students to key developments in the history of Christian art through the close study of images preserved on a range of objects in different media (including frescoes, glassware, sculpture, coins, textiles, mosaic) made for a variety of purposes. The course involves

visits to the Yale Art Gallery and focuses on the importance of situating objects within their larger social and cultural context through the analysis of primary source evidence, which may include archaeological, iconographic, epigraphic, and textual sources (Jewish, early Christian, and other contemporary Roman texts). Topics include the literary and archaeological evidence for early Christian attitudes to visual representation; contexts of manufacture; the social and economic basis of patronage; Roman political influence on Christian iconography; development of new genres of imagery; and the role of imperial patronage in the transformation of civic spaces. Area III and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 755a, A History of Byzantine Monasticism Vasileios Marinis

Monastics and monasteries constituted a quintessential element of Byzantine society. This seminar investigates Byzantine monasticism in its historical, theological, and social contexts from its origins in the third century to the codification of Hesychastic practice in the fourteenth. The course aims to familiarize students with the foundational texts of this tradition; inquire into lives of monastic saints as both rhetorical constructs and historical sources; analyze foundation documents that regulated liturgical and everyday life in Byzantine monasteries; explore the architecture of and artistic production in Byzantine monasteries; and understand the ways and means by which cults of saints were developed and cultivated in a monastic context. Area III and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 780a, African American Religion in the Modern Civil Rights Period Jamil Drake

African American religion played a significant role in the modern civil rights movement, 1954–1968. It represented one example in the modern historical period that reflected the centrality of religion in shaping political and social movements for and against racial segregation. The modern civil rights movement remains a landmark event in U.S. religious and political history and continues to influence policy debates, movements, and goals in our present moment. In fact, many pundits often privilege the modern civil rights movement as a barometer that determines the essence of Black religion in U.S. history. To be sure, it is impossible to understand the history of the modern civil rights movement without African American religion. Yet American popular narratives focus exclusively on a network of African American male clergy and their mobilizing social action for racial integration obscures a range of people and organizations and consequently theologies and political strategies that also highlight important aspects of African American religion in the historical period. Thus, this course critically examines the faith perspectives of a range of agents and organizations to illuminate the multiplicity and contentiousness that also marked African American religion(s) and the broader modern civil rights movement in the second half of the twentieth century. This course considers the role of Black religion in shaping competing political strategies and goals, leadership models, views on gender and sexuality, and class and urban poverty, from 1954–1968. The objective of this course aims to deepen our understanding of African American religion and the modern civil rights movement in the later twentieth century by critically engaging a range of historical figures, organizations, ideologies, and events. The course challenges popular, conventional frameworks of Black religion and the modern civil rights movement. Additionally, the course encourages students to rethink Black religion and the civil rights movement in light of our current political moment. Area III. 3 Course cr

REL 783a, Ideas of Salvation in Early Christianity Teresa Morgan

Salvation stands at the heart of the “good news” of Jesus Christ. The first followers of Jesus shared a life-changing experience that, through Jesus Christ, they had been reconciled with God, and it had been made possible for them to live in their right relationship with God as humanity had not done since before the Fall. That conviction still frames Christians’ understanding of God, Jesus Christ, human existence, and all human relationships. Although Christians have always been convinced that Jesus Christ saves, however, they have debated endlessly *how* Christ saves. From the earliest writings on, Christians have understood salvation as a form of sacrifice, ransom, rescue, redemption, reconciliation, supplicatory offering, exemplarity, and more. No one image or model has ever been regarded as orthodox at the expense of others, and each contributes something distinctive to the way Christians understand God’s action through Christ. This course combines history and theology to explore the rich diversity of early Christian images, stories, and models of how Christ saves that developed between the first and fifth centuries. We locate different ideas in their Jewish and gentile contexts, investigating where they come from and why they are powerful for different writers and communities. We consider the theological strengths and weaknesses of different ideas and ask why some are more popular than others now. We excavate one long-forgotten model from the New Testament and discuss whether it should be revived. We draw on some modern theologians to ask which ancient models best meet the needs of all those – both sinful and suffering – who need to be reconciled with God. Area I, Area II, and Area III. Prerequisite: at least one course in New Testament or early Christianity. 3 Course cr