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 historiography of religious history; to the history of methods, approaches, and problems in the field; and to techniques for using and citing primary and secondary sources in the study of religion. Seminars include lectures, common readings, writing exercises, and presentations by students and visiting scholars. Students develop research proposals related to their specific areas of interest. Area III.  3 Course cr

REL 710a, Pentecostalism  Erika Helgen
Pentecostalism is one of the fastest-growing religions in the world. This course examines the history and contemporary resonance of Pentecostalism in the United States and the world, paying special attention to how Pentecostals are renegotiating the relationship between religion, culture, and identity in the global South. Throughout the term, we address questions such as: How has Pentecostalism evolved and changed throughout history? How should we understand the experience of religious conversion? What is the impact of Pentecostalism on political and social movements? How does Pentecostalism address issues of race and gender? How do transnational networks affect the growth and impact of Pentecostalism? What does it mean to say that Pentecostalism is a “global religion”? Area III and Area V.  3 Course cr

REL 711b, Religion and Popular Culture in Latin America  Erika Helgen
This course examines the richness and diversity of Latin American religious culture, paying special attention to how religious practices and identities oftentimes defy boundaries and categories of religious denomination. We take an interdisciplinary approach to our subject matter, reading works of anthropology, history, sociology, literature, religious studies, and theology in order to bring multiple perspectives to questions such as: How should we define “popular” religion? How does the rise of religious pluralism impact the nature of Latin American religious culture? What can we learn from transnational expressions of religious identity? How does popular religious culture evolve and change in an era shaped by mass media and tourism? Area III and Area V.  3 Course cr

REL 712a, History of Early Christianity: Origins and Growth  Samuel Loncar
This course surveys how the Jewish messianic sect centered on Jesus of Nazareth became the most powerful, successful religion of the Roman empire and the foundation of later forms of Christianity and many institutions of medieval culture. Particular attention is given to the social world of early Christianity, its theological development and context, and the role of Jewish-Christian relations in shaping early Christian identity. The course chronicles developments up to the eighth century but focuses on the rise of distinctive practices and ideas concerning Jesus’ divine status, the Trinity, and the creation of Christian identity vis-à-vis Judaism and paganism. Area III.  3 Course cr

REL 713b, History of Medieval Christianity: Learning, Faith, and Conflict  Samuel Loncar
This course explores the diversity of Western Christianity from the end of antiquity to the start of the early modern period. Central themes include the development of theology, concepts of reform, mysticism, gender, and relations between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. In lectures and sections the class investigates a broad range of primary sources, including written texts, visual images, architecture, and music. The medieval age witnessed constant change and innovation in church and society and was transformed by its encounters with religions and cultures beyond Europe. Area III.  3 Course cr

REL 714a, History of Early Modern Christianity: Reformation to Enlightenment  Bruce Gordon
This course introduces students to the rapidly changing world of early modern Christianity, a period that ranges from the Reformation to the Enlightenment and the transatlantic worlds of the eighteenth century. This age saw the dramatic expansion of Christianity beyond Europe to Africa, Asia, and the Americas, and the course explores the global nature of the early modern world. Students are exposed to a range of primary sources and historical methods to examine rival interpretations and perspectives. The course focuses on the reading of a wide variety of primary sources from the period. Above all, it challenges students to consider the past both on its own terms and in how it continues to shape our present. Area III.  3 Course cr

REL 715b, History of Modern Christianity: American Encounters, Postmodern Transformations  Tisa Wenger and Erika Helgen
This class focuses on critical encounters among peoples who have contributed to the development of modern Christian cultures in the Americas from the eighteenth century to the present. It does not aim to provide an exhaustive history of religion (or even of Christianity) in North America and Latin America, but rather highlights key topics such as race, class, gender, and sexuality and the dynamics of imperialism, modernity, and postmodernity in religious history. Students are challenged to consider various methods for interpreting the past, to develop their own skills of historical interpretation, and to locate their own communities as products of the histories we consider. Area III.  3 Course cr

REL 723a / HIST 813a, The Liberation Theology Movement in Latin America: History and Sources  Erika Helgen
This course explores the history of liberation theology and liberationist Christian movements in Latin America, paying particular attention to the political, economic, social, and cultural ramifications of the emergence of the “Church(es) of the People.” The majority
of the assigned readings are primary sources that document a wide variety of liberationist experiences and actors. Students read about activists in peasant leagues, priests resisting authoritarian regimes, bishops coming together to outline new paths for the Latin American Catholic Church, women promoting feminist liberation theologies, laypeople leading ecclesial base communities, and more. The seminar examines and discusses a number of questions, including: How did the liberation theology movement change over time? What was the relationship between religion and politics in Latin America during times of war and dictatorship? How did the liberation theology movement subvert traditional notions of political and religious authority? What does it mean to build a “Church of the People,” and how did the liberation theology movement succeed and/or fail to build such a church? Area III and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 725b / ENGL 670b, Religion, Literature, and Politics in Early Modern Britain  Bruce Gordon and John Rogers
This course explores the protean expressions of religious belief, satire, and polemic in the literary cultures of early modern Britain by attending to the contested political and physical cultures in which they flourished. Through engagement with prose, theater, and music, students explore the diverse interrelationships of texts, images, and sacred architecture. On our visits to significant sites, we consider the ways in which literary and religious imaginations were woven together. We engage with and learn from some of the most creative and thoughtful literary, historical, and cultural scholars working on early modern Britain, who will help us to think in expansive and interdisciplinary ways about language, faith, and authority. Area III and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 732a / MDVL 631a, Origins of Christian Art in Late Antiquity  Vasileios Marinis and 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 747a, Islamic Art and Architecture in the Mediterranean  Orgu Dalgic
This course surveys the history of Islamic cultures through their rich material expressions beginning from the time of the Prophet Muhammed in the seventh century to the present and extending across the Mediterranean from Spain to Syria. The course aims to familiarize students with the major periods, regions, monuments, and media of the Islamic cultures around the Mediterranean; and with basic principles of Islam as they pertain to the visual arts, and in particular their interactions with the Christian world. It discusses architecture (mosques, madrasas, mausolea, etc.) as well as works of art in various media (calligraphy, illuminated manuscripts, textiles, ceramics, etc.) within both the Islamic and the larger, universal, and cross-cultural contexts. Area III and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 752a, Encountering the Bible: From Antiquity to Reformation  Joel Baden and Bruce Gordon
This two-term course (REL 752/REL 753) examines how the experience of encountering the Bible—as text, as material object, as liturgy, music, and art—has changed over the past two millennia. Through the lens of a series of significant individuals, students explore the shifting cultural contexts in which the Bible has been read and employed in ecclesiastical, social, and political circumstances. Even as its text has remained largely stable, the Bible has never been a static book. We ask such questions as: “What version of the Bible was being read?” “What cultural forces shaped a person’s interpretive mindset?” “To what social ends was the Bible put?” Beginning with the community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls and ending with President Obama, a series of experts lead the class in discussion of theological, exegetical, and cultural issues around each figure and their historical context. The course is part lecture, part seminar, with an emphasis on response and participation. Area I and Area III. Prerequisites: at least one of REL 712, REL 713, REL 714, or REL 715; and one year of either REL 503/REL 504 or REL 505/REL 506. 3 Course cr

REL 753b, Encountering the Bible: From Reformation to Contemporary Society  Bruce Gordon and Joel Baden
This two-term course (REL 752/REL 753) examines how the experience of encountering the Bible—as text, as material object, as liturgy, music, and art—has changed over the past two millennia. Through the lens of a series of significant individuals, students explore the shifting cultural contexts in which the Bible has been read and employed in ecclesiastical, social, and political circumstances. Even as its text has remained largely stable, the Bible has never been a static book. We ask such questions as: “What version of the Bible was being read?” “What cultural forces shaped a person’s interpretive mindset?” “To what social ends was the Bible put?” Beginning with the community that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls and ending with President Obama, a series of experts lead the class in discussion of theological, exegetical, and cultural issues around each figure and their historical context. The course is part lecture, part seminar, with an emphasis on response and participation. Area I and Area III. Prerequisites: at least one of REL 712, REL 713, REL 714, or REL 715; and one year of either REL 503/REL 504 or REL 505/REL 506. Completion of REL 752 is encouraged but not required. 3 Course cr