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 711a, Religion 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 often defy boundaries and categories of religious denomination. This course explores how Latin American religious culture has grown and evolved throughout history, asking 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  Gabrielle Thomas
This course introduces students to early Christianity from apostolic times through the eighth century. It examines the social, political, and religious context of early Christianity; its expansion and Imperial adoption; the character of its life, worship, and mission; the formation of the Christian scriptures; the articulation and defense of a central body of doctrine; church councils and creeds; the monastic movement; and early Christian art. In conversation with influential theologians of the period, we ask questions about ways in which early Christian identities are formed and explore how power is used and distributed in this process. Students are exposed to a range of primary sources and modes of historical study. This course serves as essential preparation for the study of Christian history and theology in later historical periods. Above all, it provides an opportunity to consider early Christianity on its own terms and to discover how it continues to shape the lives of Christian communities today. Area II and Area III.  3 Course cr

REL 713b, History of Medieval Christianity: Learning, Faith, and Conflict  Staff
This course is a general survey of the intellectual, political, and cultural developments that influenced the development of the Christian Church, primarily in the West, covering roughly the period from the end of the Roman Empire (ca. 476 CE) to the beginnings of the Reformation (ca. 1500 CE). Its goal is to help students preparing for ministry to understand the forces that shaped Christian doctrine and the institutional and liturgical structures of today. We explore together questions related to the arrival of Christianity in England, the Carolingian Renaissance, the impact of monastic reform movements, struggles between church and state at the time of the Investiture Controversy, the crusading movement, the rise of papal monarchy and canon law, intellectual movements such as scholasticism and nominalism, lay reforming moments, the Conciliar experiment, and popular piety and mysticism. Special attention is given to the timely topic of the impact of the Black Death pandemic on the church’s structure and spirituality. Area III.  3 Course cr

REL 714a, History of Early Modern Christianity: Reformation to Enlightenment  Russell Gasdia
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 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 724b, Religion and the Cold War  Erika Helgen
This course examines the intersection of religion and politics in the global Cold War. Topics include the rise of the anticommunist Christian Right in the United States, the development of Christians for Socialism and liberation theology in Latin America, the intersection of black internationalism and religion in the Civil Rights movement, the role of religion in the Vietnam War, and more. Area III and Area V.  3 Course cr
REL 726a, U.S. Catholic History Remapped  Erika Helgen
In 2010, historian Timothy Matovina called for a “remapping” of U.S. Catholicism, allowing previously overlooked places, people, and events to shape the broader narratives of Catholic history. This course examines how such remappings have been taking place within U.S. Catholic historiography as scholars aim to highlight the dynamism and diversity of the U.S. Catholic experience. Topics include the long history of Catholicism in the Southwest and South; the intersection of race and Catholic culture throughout the United States; the influence of the Catholic Church in the U.S. imperial project; the role of Catholic lay and religious women in the growth and leadership of the U.S. church; the emergence of Catholic lived religion in Italian Harlem; Catholic activists fighting for civil rights, labor rights, and liberation in Latin America; and more. Area III and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 727b, The Bible in English: Origins to Global Book  Bruce Gordon
This course introduces students to a history of the English-language Bible as the product of many hands working in diverse intellectual, historical, and social contexts. It examines the emergence of the Bible in its vernacular expressions through considering questions of form, translation, interpretation, readership, and reception. The Bible was never one book: it had many lives across a range of historical and cultural settings. We focus on the multitude of ways in which the sacred text was interpreted as a book that created radically different narratives and divergent identities. The course follows the evolution of the Bible as a book and the debate it has engendered from the Middle Ages to our own time, ranging from the era of the heretical Lollards through the publication of the King James Bible to the contemporary age of global communities. Area III. Prerequisite: prior basic course work in the Bible or the history of Christianity. 3 Course cr

REL 728a, Religion and U.S. Empire  Tisa Wenger and Zareena Grewal
This course draws on theoretical perspectives from anthropology, American studies, religious studies, and postcolonial studies to interrogate the varied intersections between religion and U.S. empire. It asks not only how Christianity and other religious traditions have facilitated imperialism and how they have served as resources for resistance, but also how the categories of “religion” and the “secular” have been assembled as imperial products alongside modern formations of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Through response papers, seminar discussions, and (for graduate students) a final historiographical paper, students develop the analytical and writing skills that are the building blocks of all scholarship in the humanities. Area III. 3 Course cr

REL 730a, Native Americans and Christianity  Tisa Wenger
This course examines the complex and often painful history of American Indian encounters with Christianity in colonial North America and the United States. Moving from the early colonial period to the present, and with particular attention to Native American voices, we explore a variety of indigenous responses to Catholic and Protestant missions and the development of distinctively Native Christian traditions. Along the way, the course interrogates and historicizes key trends in the study of indigenous Christianity, including Red-Power era critiques of missions, the influence of postcolonial theory, and the recent emphasis on indigenous Christian agency. Students build critical awareness of the historical intersections of colonialism and Christianity; apply postcolonial frameworks to understand the role of Christianity in indigenous communities; and develop skills in historical analysis. Area III and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 738b, Jonathan Edwards and American Puritanism  Kenneth Minkema and Harry Stout
This course offers students an opportunity for intensive reading in and reflections upon the significance of early America's premier philosophic theologian through an examination of the writings of the Puritans, through engagement with Edwards's own writings, and through selected recent studies of Euro-Indian contact. Through primary and secondary literature, the course familiarizes students with the life and times of Edwards and encourages reading and discussion about his background, historical and intellectual contexts, and legacy. Area III. 3 Course cr

REL 742b, Reformed Christianity: Origins to Today  Bruce Gordon
This seminar examines the emergence of Reformed religion from its origins in the Reformation in the 1520s to contemporary expressions in the writings of Allan Boesak, Marilynne Robinson, and Oliver Crisp. Rather than attempting a survey of churches or doctrine, we examine theological, historical, visual, and literary manifestations of such themes as church and society, biblical interpretation, divine and human freedom, sin and redemption, political authority, and secularism. The emphasis is on the various genres through which Reformed Christianity has and continues to express itself, and on how a creation of the sixteenth century has become a diverse, global body. Area III and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 747b, 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 Muhammad 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. We discuss 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 755b, An Introduction to Byzantine Monasticism  Vasileios Marinis
Monasticism 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 756b, The Cult of Mary: Early Christian and Byzantine Art  Vasileios Marinis
This course examines the origins and development of the veneration of Mary as the Mother of God, focusing specifically on the treatment of Mary in the visual and material culture of early Christianity and Byzantium. Its aim is to introduce students to key points in the history of the cult 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. This visual material is analyzed in conjunction with relevant literary, theological, and liturgical evidence for the development of the cult. It is designed as a seminar for students who have interest or background in the material, textual, and religious culture of early Christianity. Area III and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 779b, American Religion in the Archives  Tisa Wenger
An advanced seminar on archival research methods for historians of American religion. We begin with readings theorizing the archive, with an eye to the study of American religion. What counts as an archive? How are archives constituted and by whom? What are the limits and pitfalls of archives—and the construct of “the archive”—for research in this field? Over the course of the term, students are guided through the process of writing an archivally grounded research paper using Yale Divinity School Library Special Collections and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Area III. 3 Course cr