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  Tisa Wenger
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 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  Kevin Lord
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 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 717a, Witchcraft and Witch-hunting in Early Modern Europe and America  Kenneth Minkema
This seminar examines witchcraft and witch-hunting in Europe and America from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century through reading and discussion of primary documents and classic and recent studies in the field—including social, cultural, and intellectual history, gender and women's studies, anthropology, psychology, sociology, and town and environmental studies. Students learn about the interaction of religious beliefs relating to witchcraft and the occult with social and cultural conditions and shifts, the history of the interpretation of witchcraft and witch-hunting, and the continuing relevance of witchcraft studies as a laboratory for new approaches and methods. Area III.  3 Course cr

REL 723b / HIST 813b, 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 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 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 philosophical 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 740a, Religion and Rebellion in Latin America  Erika Helgen
The 2013 election of Pope Francis and the pontiff’s subsequent emphasis on the Catholic Church's preferential option for the poor has brought the “rebellious” history of liberation theology into the global spotlight. The media frequently portrays liberation theology as a simple fusion of religious beliefs and political ideologies, particularly Marxist ideologies, and observers often assume that the movement represented an abrupt break with the region’s conservative religious past. However, Latin America has a long and complex history of religious “rebellion” or “resistance” (terms whose very meaning will be interrogated in this seminar), especially among marginalized members of Latin American society, such as indigenous persons, Afro-Latin Americans, women, and the poor. In the more than 500 years since Christopher Columbus first arrived in Caribbean waters, indigenous religious leaders spearheaded rebellions against colonial authorities, Muslim African slaves coordinated revolts against their masters, a Brazilian “holy man” convinced the impoverished inhabitants of rural Brazil to confront the armed forces of an entire nation, and Mexican Catholics shouted ¡Viva Cristo Rey! as they rose up against what they believed to be an oppressive and godless regime. The history of religious rebellion in Latin America is as diverse as it is extensive. Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Vodou, and indigenous religions all played parts in rebellions that could be progressive, conservative, nationalist, or separatist in nature. This seminar draws upon this diverse religious history to examine and discuss a number of questions, including: How do we identify and define religious resistance? When and why do we declare a religious rebellion successful? How has the notion of a Latin American utopia changed over time, and how has this affected the nature of religious rebellion? Has the growth of religious pluralism in Latin America intensified or diluted efforts of religious resistance? 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 748b, Death and Remembrance: The Black Death to World War I  Bruce Gordon
This course explores the relationship between death and dying and cultures of memory and remembrance. Drawing on historical, literary, material, and visual texts, students examine the varied ways in which the dead have continued to be present with the living. The beginning and end points of the course are two traumatic moments of mass death that profoundly altered and shaped cultures of memory: the Black Death of the fourteenth century and the mechanized slaughter of the First World War. The course explores the ways in which commemorations of the dead took physical and spiritual forms, looking at questions of sacred space and time, gender, as well as issues of secularization and modernity. Area III. Prerequisite: one graduate-level history course (such as REL 712, REL 713, REL 714, or REL 715). 3 Course cr
REL 749a, Global Catholicism  Erika Helgen
In 1979 Karl Rahner declared that the Second Vatican Council had initiated an entirely new epoch in Catholic history: it was the moment when the Church ceased to be identified solely with European culture and came to be known as a “world church.” What did Rahner mean by this statement, and what are its implications for how we view the past, present, and future of the Catholic Church? This course examines the history of the Catholic Church's global growth, paying close attention to how diverse actors, cultures, and events both shaped and were shaped by Catholic institutions and lived expressions of Catholic faith. Area III and Area V. 3 Course cr
REL 750a, The Cult of Mary: Early Christian and Byzantine Art  Vasileios Marinis and Felicity Harley
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 757a / HIST 625a, Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Early Modern World  Bruce Gordon and Carlos Eire
The late medieval and early modern periods saw a dramatic rise in religious violence and persecution. Heresies—such as the Hussites, Waldensians, and Lollards—unsettled religious and political authorities, leading to armed conflict and attempts to suppress movements with violence. Across northern Europe, the late Middle Ages witnessed increasing numbers of pogroms as Jewish communities continued to be eradicated. At the same time, the period saw a flourishing of the veneration of saints and the canonization of holy men and women. These conflicting trends were only heightened by the Reformation, in which martyrdom and sainthood played central roles. This course
explores the willingness to die and kill for one's faith, and the extraordinary growth in religious heroes, both Protestant and Catholic, who defined emerging confessional identities. The course examines a broad range of texts and visual material considering martyrdom and sainthood in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Area III. Prerequisite: REL 712, REL 713, REL 714, or REL 715. 3 Course cr

REL 759a, Land, Ecology, and Religion in U.S. History  Tisa Wenger
This course explores the varied intersections between land, ecology, and religion in U.S. history and situates American religion within a broader history of the Anthropocene. How have religious ideologies and institutions worked to shape American spaces, places, and landscapes? In an age of accelerating ecological crisis, how have diverse religious groups interacted with, participated in, or reacted against the environmental movement? How have race, gender, settler colonialism, and other intersectional social formations shaped these histories? How are the social formations we call religions implicated in and reinvented by the climactic transformations of the Anthropocene? Area III. 3 Course cr

REL 761b, Gregory Nazianzen: Theology, Questions, and Retrieval  Gabrielle Thomas
This course explores the theology and pastoral ministry of Gregory of Nazianzus (a.k.a., “the Theologian”) through primary texts in English translation. Gregory lived and worked in the fourth century during a period of highly charged debates about the meanings of Christian, Jesus Christ, Trinity, and, in particular, the Holy Spirit. Against the backdrop of Gregory’s sociopolitical environment, the course examines core aspects of his theological method; interpretation of Scripture; doctrine of Trinity, Christology, and pneumatology; theological anthropology; approach to evil; and pastoral ministry. We explore how Gregory integrated theology and pastoral ministry and discuss the relevance of Gregory’s thought to contemporary theology and ministry. We probe the ethics of retrieving his theology by attending to and identifying questions of power, race, class, slavery, and gender as they arise in the primary texts. Area II and Area III. Prerequisite: REL 712 is useful but not essential. 3 Course cr

REL 766b, Reading Calvin’s Institutes  Bruce Gordon
This course works through almost the whole of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Students work together as a group to focus on the structure, arguments, and contexts of the work. Particular attention is given to analysis of the theological, literary, and historical aspects of the book, and students are challenged to formulate their analysis of Calvin's methods and intentions. Area II and Area III. 3 Course cr

REL 768b, Religion, Art, and Resistance to Empire  Joyce Mercer and Tisa Wenger
This course explores religious and artistic modes of resistance to U.S. imperialism, using the Philippines as the primary case study. We attend to the collaborations forged between religious and political actors in the interests of colonial expansion, and to the practices of resistance that emerged in response. As an interdisciplinary study in religion and theology, history, and the arts, the course focuses particular attention on practices of indigenous music, art, and liturgy as performances of resistance to imperialism. It includes a two-week trip during spring break to sites of historical, artistic, and religious significance in Filipino colonial history. During the trip we also meet with artists, theologians, and musicians to explore their ongoing engagements of artistic and ritual practice as challenges to empire. Participants are responsible for leading or co-leading a discussion/debriefing time during the travel portion of the course. The seminar meets less frequently after break; a final paper is due at the end of the term. Area III, Area IV, and Area V. 3 Course cr