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 712a, History of Early Christianity: Origins and Growth  
Teresa Morgan
This course introduces students to early Christianity from the first to the eighth century. This is an introductory course which does not assume any prior knowledge of the topic. We examine the social, political, religious, and cultural contexts in which early Christianity (or Christianities) emerged, and how "the faith" grew, was shaped by, and helped to shape the world around it. We explore practices of corporate worship and devotion; the development of doctrine and the idea of orthodoxy; the evolution of Church institutions; the formation of Christian scriptures; the impact of persecution and imperial patronage; the development of Christian material culture, art and architecture; and what it meant for people in different roles and situations to live as "the faithful" in everyday life. In dialogue with influential theologians of the period, we explore how Christian identities are formed and articulated and the role of power, conflict, and resistance in that process. Students encounter a wide range of primary sources, secondary literature, and historical methods and approaches, giving them the opportunity to sharpen their critical and historiographical skills. In many ways, this is the most formative and influential period of Christian history, and getting to grips with its broad outlines and key themes is both fascinating in itself and gives students vital contextual knowledge for understanding later developments in Christian history and thought. 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 Christians today. Area III. 3 Course cr

REL 713b, History of Medieval Christianity: Learning, Faith, and Conflict  
Volker Leppin
The Middle Ages have been defined by European culture as the period between 500 CE and 1500 CE. It 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. 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 evolving 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.  

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. Themes such as colonization, slavery, and the diversities of religious experience are examined. 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.  

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, 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.  

REL 723b, 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 726b, 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 737b, Clement of Alexandria: Culture, Theology, and the Stromateis  Teresa Morgan
Clement of Alexandria was one of the most creative and influential theologians of the early Church. A Christian convert with a high-level education in literature and philosophy and an admirer of his Jewish compatriot, Philo, he lived and worked in the incomparably rich culture and diverse society of Alexandria-by-Egypt. Among his pupils was another compatriot, Origen. His attempt to square Platonist philosophy with his adopted Christian faith changed Christianity forever, including the concept of "faith" itself. This course explores Clement in his social, cultural, and intellectual contexts, and we read some substantial sections of his greatest work, the Stromateis, to examine his thinking in some detail. The Stromateis is an extraordinary work—miscellaneous and systematic, charming and challenging—and full of insight into everything from the knowledge of God to Clement’s pronounced views on sex and martyrdom. Area III Prerequisite: REL 712 3 Course cr

REL 745a, Byzantine Art and Architecture  Vasileios Marinis
This lecture course explores the art, architecture, and material culture of the Byzantine Empire from the foundation of its capital, Constantinople, in the fourth century to the fifteenth century. Centered around the Eastern Mediterranean, Byzantium was a dominant political power in Europe for several centuries and fostered a highly sophisticated artistic culture. This course aims to familiarize students with key objects and monuments from various media—mosaic, frescoes, wooden panels, metalwork, ivory carvings—and from a variety of contexts—public and private, lay and monastic, imperial and political. We give special attention to issues of patronage, propaganda, reception, and theological milieux, as well as the interaction of architecture and ritual. More generally, students become acquainted with the methodological tools and vocabulary that art historians employ to describe, understand, and interpret works of art. Area III and Area V. 3 Course cr
REL 756a, 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 759a, Land, Ecology, and Religion in U.S. History  Tisa Wenger
This course explores the varied intersections among 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 767a, Gods, Goods, and the Goals of Life: Early Christian Ethical Thinking in Ancient World Contexts  Teresa Morgan
This course explores early Christian ethical thinking, to around the end of the second century, in its social and cultural contexts. In the process we encounter the differences among approaches to ethics in history, anthropology, philosophy, and theology and consider how they influence the way ethics are interpreted. We discuss some of the most important passages of the Hebrew Bible that frame later Jewish and Christian ethical thinking, and we consider how later Jewish writing relates especially to the Mosaic Law. We explore some classics of Greek and Roman philosophical ethics and popular morality, and how they influenced Christian thought. Against these backgrounds we read some of the key passages of ethical teaching in the New Testament together with a cross-section of non-testamental second-century writers. At every point, we are interested both in where Christianity is in continuity with the ethical discourses that helped to shape it and where it is distinctive. We discuss what ethical topics these writers talk about, and what they do not, and why. Where God is the ultimate moral authority, what aspects of God are invoked in ethical contexts? Where God is the ultimate authority, are ethics always deontological, or are there other reasons for doing the right thing? What is the relationship between divine command and human freedom? Where does evil come from? Can human beings argue effectively with God, or protest against God’s commands, or improve on them? What evaluative language do these texts employ—good and bad, good and evil, useful, necessary, beautiful, sweet—and what difference does it make? Why do ethical texts so often take the form of miscellanies? How do ethical writings contribute to our understanding of early Christian thinking about God, Christ, and the Church? What are the challenges as we draw on early Christian tradition to help us think ethically today? Area II and
Area III. Prerequisite: At least one course in Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Greek Philosophy, or Ethics. 3 Course cr

REL 774a, Exclusion and Dialogue with other Religions in the Middle Ages and the Reformation  Volker Leppin

Modern Christianity has long been aware that it is not the only system to understand God and world. And even as far back as antiquity, Christians knew about other philosophies and religions. During the Middle Ages, the questions for Christians focused mainly on the other monotheistic religions. These are the questions we address in this course as we examine different attempts of Christian theologians to understand and reject other religions. Part of the tragedy is that understanding and rejection usually came in tandem, i.e., attempts to understand other religions meant denigrating them as compared to Christianity. As the course surveys the theological landscape of the Middle Ages and Reformation, we investigate which theological convictions were most influential in forming the medieval mind’s perceptions of Judaism and Islam. That leads to some interesting insights, but students of the course should also be aware that some of the readings might be characterized by hatred and violent speech. Students are encouraged to speak out if they feel uncomfortable. This promises to make discussions even more fruitful as we grapple with Christianity’s evolving attitudes toward the other monotheistic traditions. Area III. Prerequisites: At least one of REL 712, REL 713, REL 714, or REL 715 and a course in theology, or sufficient background from previous studies and permission of the instructors. 3 Course cr

REL 775a, Luther and Zwingli: Reformation Conflict  Bruce Gordon and Volker Leppin

The history of the Reformation has traditionally been told around its major figures. More recent developments emphasize the plurality of religious, political, and social views in the sixteenth century. There is less emphasis on the normative teachings of the leading principles, rather an effort to understand the diversity of thought and practice that characterized the unpredictable events of the period. This course looks at two of the most prominent reformers of the period but does so by asking questions about the nature of a religious movement that transformed the western world. We investigate the lives and thought of Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli in order to explore how a movement took shape and why it fractured so quickly and decisively. Theological formulations are discussed in their historical contexts, reinforcing our understanding that nothing was inevitable. Luther and Zwingli offer ways to look at conflicting visions of the human and divine, while helping us to understand that the Reformation was never one thing or merely a set of ideas. Area III. Prerequisite: At least one of REL 712, REL 713, REL 714, or REL 715 and a course in theology, or sufficient background from previous studies and permission of the instructors. 3 Course cr

REL 777b, Preaching in the Middle Ages: Authority, Virtue, and Persuasion  Volker Leppin and Adam Eitel

At every stage of the history of Christianity, the Word of God was preached, and in the Middle Ages there even arose a separate order called the "Order of Preachers," better known as the Dominicans. The course examines theories of preaching and its practice. Beginning with late antiquity, it asks what significance was attached to preaching and how—due to the theology of ministry, usually men, but in individual cases also women—efforts were made to preach in a way that was understandable and instructive, edifying and pastoral. Area III and Area II. Prerequisite: One of REL 712, REL 713,
REL 714, or REL 715 and a course in Theology, or sufficient background from previous studies and permission of the instructors.  3 Course cr