

## AREA V: COMPARATIVE AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Courses in this area are grouped as follows. *Comparative Studies*: The exploration of non-Christian traditions with special emphasis on comparative religious questions. *Philosophy of Religion*: The study of conceptual issues that bear upon method in theology and ethics, the philosophical clarification of religious concepts and categories, and the examination of philosophical worldviews that are alternatives to traditional Christian perspectives. *Religion and the Arts*: Studies concerning the nature of human imagination in visual, literary, and musical forms that have shaped the religious life and its cultural expression, both within and outside the Christian church. The inquiry is normally undertaken within the context of ministry. *Study of Society*: The employment of normative and social-scientific tools to comprehend and bring under ethical and theological scrutiny societal institutions (including religious ones) and ideational patterns.

### **REL 916a, Christ in Color: Exploring Indigenous Agency in World Christianity**

Kyama Mugambi

This course introduces students to the field of world Christianity studies, with a focus on indigenous agency as a key reference point. Students gain an appreciation for the geographic and demographic scope of Christianity across the globe today. They explore how world Christianity studies represent a rethinking of the nature of Christian expansion, the church, mission, and theology in a post-Western world. The course's attention to developments in the global South challenges the proprietorial control of mission studies by northern churches in theology, mission, history, and theological education. The readings begin with the influential theories of translation by Lamin Sanneh and Andrew Walls, which shaped the field of World Christianity studies in the late 1980s. From there, the course covers various themes, including history, migration, mission, and contemporary issues. Students also encounter aspects of indigenous Christian impulses from around the globe, providing insight into diverse expressions of faith. The final two weeks of the course are dedicated to student presentations, where participants will be invited to construct a project applying the readings to an area of the world church with which they are familiar. This hands-on component helps students engage deeply with the material and demonstrate their understanding. Through this course, students develop a comprehensive knowledge base of world Christianity as a field and its relation to mission studies. They gain a greater critical awareness of the diverse contemporary expressions of church around the world and the implications these have for Western church communities. The course encourages students to reflect on significant questions regarding the history of mission and its contemporary relevance to the future of the global church. 3 Course cr

### **REL 9206a, Text, Theory, Theology?** Adrian Emmanuel Hernandez-Acosta

This course surveys two twentieth-century histories of textual criticism – what are called “literary theory” and “Caribbean critique” – with a focus on the ongoing even if only implicit conversation each has sustained with operative categories for theology and religious studies more broadly (e.g., interpretation, authority, tradition, experience, translation, and the Other). The range of the course's selected readings aims at a degree

of representativeness that highlights the often-ignored historicity of literary theory and the equally denied generalizability of Caribbean critique. Given the level of abstraction at which most of the readings attend to language, in-class discussions include an analysis of Derek Walcott's poem "The Sea is History" as prompted by each week's readings to provide students with a consistent pedagogical object. Overall, this course asks about the significance of the dis/continuities of literary theory and Caribbean critique with operative categories for theology and religious studies. Prerequisite: at least one course in theological studies, or equivalent (consult instructor). 3 Course cr

**REL 924a, Foundations of Islam: Understanding Muslim Tradition, Practice, and Encounter** Abdul-Rehman Malik

What is Islam? This course provides a comprehensive introduction to understanding and engaging with Islamic tradition, practice, and culture that will enable students to offer answers to this far-from-straightforward question. In particular, the course engages with Islam as a living tradition – a vibrant faith that is constantly and dynamically being developed, challenged, practiced, and lived. Three core themes run through the course: tradition, practice, and encounter. The course is especially designed to provide M.Div. and M.A.R. students with the language, vocabulary, terminology, foundational knowledge, and perspectives to begin – or further – their study and engagement with Islamic theology, texts, and ideas in particular, and with Muslim life in general. Special attention is paid to how Islam has developed – and is developing – in the United States, particularly through the lenses of liberation theologies, gender, and race. Area V. 3 Course cr

**REL 927a, Religious Language** Peter Grund

What is religious language, and what makes certain ways of using language "religious"? What functions does religious language have for different communities of speakers and writers in different contexts and situations? How is religious language appropriated, exploited, and manipulated for political, commercial, and ideological reasons? How can we use frameworks from linguistics and language study to understand and further appreciate the nature, functions, and power of religious language in our own lives and in society in general? These are some of the questions that we explore in this course. Focusing on Christian traditions and the English language, we look at aspects of word choice, metaphor, and other language strategies of religious language, and we use online tools, text collections, and search software to see what makes religious language tick. We draw on genre analysis to see how prayers and sermons as well as eulogies and other genres are put together linguistically (both now and historically) and discuss how knowledge of "genre language" can inform our understanding of the parameters of certain genres as well as their creative flexibility. As we look at the details of language and language strategies, we also consider what role religious language plays in creating and maintaining communities (drawing especially on the concept of "communities of practice") and how the community function of religious language is exploited by individuals as well as groups for commercial and political reasons. The smaller assignments in the class allow students to explore aspects of religious language that are important to them, and the final project, which can take a number of different shapes, can be adapted to students' particular commitments, whether religious/congregational, non-profit, educational, creative, linguistic, or other. No prior coursework or knowledge of language studies is required or necessary. Area V. 3 Course cr

**REL 931a, Ethics, Imagination, and the Art of Living** Clifton Granby

This seminar examines the relationship between our capacities of imagination and the quality of our ethical lives. Through the writings of Howard Thurman, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison, we examine the role of imagination and perception in our attempts to love, listen, and live well. Area II and Area V. 3 Course cr

**REL 933a, Poetry and Faith** Christian Wiman

This course is designed to look at issues of faith through the lens of poetry. With some notable exceptions, the course concentrates on modern poetry – that is, poetry written between 1850 and 2013. Inevitably, the course also looks at poetry through the lens of faith, but a working assumption of the course is that a poem is, for a reader (it's more complicated for a writer), art first and faith second. "Faith" in this course generally means Christianity, and that is the primary context for reading the poems. But the course also engages with poems from other faith traditions, as well as with poems that are wholly secular and even adamantly anti-religious. Area V. 3 Course cr

**REL 953b, Critical Methods in Reading Poetry Theologically** David Mahan

This course explores poetry and the study of poetry as forms of theological discourse. Through the use of a variety of critical methods and close readings of individual poems and poetic sequences, students consider how the form as well as the subject matter of the poetry opens up new horizons for illuminating and articulating theological themes. With selections from twentieth and twenty-first-century poets, including works by Asian American and African American writers, this class examines how modern and late-modern poets have created fresh embodiments of faith perspectives and contributed to both the expressive and reflective tasks of theology. This course has no specific prerequisites, but a background in literary studies would be helpful. Area V. 3 Course cr

**REL 956a, Faith, Doubt, and Redemption in Twentieth–Twenty-First-Century Fiction** David Mahan

The pressures of secularization and other challenges in late-modern society have provoked widespread reconsideration of traditional expressions of faith. Notions of God, salvation, redemption, and of faith itself, are subject to scrutiny by religious and non-religious people alike. This course examines this phenomenon through the literary vision expressed in the fiction of several modern writers – including Flannery O'Connor, James Baldwin, Marilynne Robinson, and others – considering the theological and literary implications of their work to modern quests for redemption. Area V. 3 Course cr

**REL 964b, Imagining the Apocalypse: Scripture to Modern Fiction** David Mahan

This course explores the literary-theological and sociological facets of the apocalyptic, primarily through modern works of the imagination. Sessions begin with an introduction to various definitions and ideas of the apocalyptic, with special reference to biblical literature in the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the New Testament. From these distinctively theological/religious visions, in which God is the primary actor and God's people figure as the main subjects, the course explores how that framework for the apocalyptic has undergone significant transformations in the literary imagination of late-modern, particularly Western, societies. Through such prose works as *A Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter Miller, *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, the course considers how literary portrayals of apocalypse

contemplate themes that resonate with significant theological concerns. Area V.

3 Course cr

**REL 965a, Faith and the Will** John Pittard

An investigation of questions concerning the nature of religious faith, the relationship of faith to the will and to desire, and the merits of various prudential, moral, and existential arguments for and against religious faith. Questions to be treated include: Is faith in some sense “meritorious” (to use Aquinas’s language)? Do the commitments of faith essentially involve believing propositions? Can belief be voluntary? Can trust or hope be voluntary? Should we hold religious beliefs to the same epistemic standards that apply to more mundane beliefs? Or should we persist in faith even if these beliefs do not meet conventional rational standards? The course explores these questions through writings by Aquinas, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, James, Freud, Wittgenstein, and various contemporary philosophers. Area V. 3 Course cr

**REL 966a, Sensational Materialities: Sensory Cultures in History, Theory, and**

**Method** Sally Promey

This interdisciplinary seminar explores the sensory and material histories of (often religious) images, objects, buildings, and performances as well as the potential for the senses to spark contention in material practice. While course content focuses on United States things and religions (given the professor’s areas of expertise and academic appointments), the course also considers broader geographical and categorical parameters so as to invite intellectual engagement with the most challenging and decisive developments in relevant fields, including recent literatures on material agencies. The goal is to investigate possibilities for scholarly examination of a robust human sensorium of sound, taste, touch, scent, and sight – and even “sixth senses” – the points where the senses meet material things (and vice versa) in life and practice. Topics include the cultural construction of the senses and sensory hierarchies; investigation of the sensory capacities of things; and specific episodes of sensory contention in and among various religious traditions. In addition, the course invites thinking beyond the “Western” five senses to other locations and historical possibilities for identifying the dynamics of sensing human bodies in religious practices, experience, and ideas. Course is by permission of instructor; qualified undergraduates are welcome. In order to request permission, please email the professor ([sally.promey@yale.edu](mailto:sally.promey@yale.edu)) with responses to the following questions: (1) Why are you interested in taking this seminar?; (2) what educational, intellectual, artistic, or other experiences do you bring to the seminar’s subjects?; (3) how does the content of this course relate to your own career and/or personal aspirations? 3 Course cr

**REL 970a, Theory in Mourning: Readings in Race, Religion, Gender, and Sexuality**

Adrian Emmanuel Hernandez-Acosta

“I came to theory because I was hurting.” This is how the late bell hooks begins her 1991 essay, “Theory as Liberatory Practice.” Taking that opening line as its thematic cue, this course approaches key texts in Black feminist, queer, and trans theory with a mournful orientation. The course begins with three essays – mourning essays by Freud (1917), Klein (1940), and Fanon (1952) – to which subsequent texts respond in a variety of ways. The course then moves through key texts from the late 1980s to the present. The aim of this course is to familiarize students with key texts in Black feminist, queer, and trans theory, while cultivating appreciation for how texts considered theory are as much singular sites of experience as they are enabling of critical abstraction. The

course asks not only how mourning and theorizing (in)form each other, but also how mourning theory orients studies of race, religion, gender, and sexuality and vice versa. Lingering with these questions is crucial for academic and ministerial study committed to critically addressing challenges in today's world with care. Area V. 3 Course cr

**REL 983b, China Mission** Chloe Starr

The Day Missions Collection at YDS is one of the strongest mission collections in the world, comprising about one third of the Divinity Library's 600,000 volumes – and it is also the central repository in the United States for China-related mission papers. This course offers students the opportunity to complete an original research project in the library relating to mission in China, utilizing manuscript, microform, and monograph materials from the collections. For the first six weeks, we read intensively in mission history, theory, and practice, schematized through mission narratives. The next four weeks are “library lab” time: supervised reading time in special collection and archive materials within the library; and reading into and developing projects while help is on hand for deciphering handwriting, providing reference tools, etc. The final two weeks are dedicated to research presentations and evaluation, with each student offering findings to the class in their chosen media. Area V. 3 Course cr

**REL 990a, Taking Leave: Meditations on Art, Death, and the Afterlife from the Bible to the Twentieth Century** Jane Tylus and Bruce Gordon

This seminar seeks to contextualize leave-taking within the explicitly religious and artistic contexts of Western culture. We open with readings from ancient texts from Mesopotamian, Greek, Latin and Judaic cultures, and end with the U.S. Civil War. And in between we spend considerable time on the ways in which the advent of Christianity and, in turn, the Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and modern worlds influenced the practices and understanding of leave-taking. En route we explore how, for example, Catholicism sought to extend life into the third realm of Purgatory, why the Reformation sought to undo those imaginative excursions, and the extent to which the different faiths of figures such as Michelangelo, Shakespeare, and John Donne produced radically different kinds of finished – and unfinished – works. As we explore the transformative potential of the goodbye in literary and religious works, we also engage with more recent discussions from theologians, theorists, and therapists about grieving, transitions, and letting go. Our objectives are: to strive to understand the important role that leave-takings play in the history of Christianity and artistic expression, especially between 1300–1850; to probe the difference between religious faiths of early modernity with respect to rituals of saying goodbye and the afterlife; to sharpen our skills as readers, spectators, and listeners of works that engage with complex questions regarding the meaning of one's life and one's lifework; and to contextualize our readings within contemporary conversations about dying, grief, and letting go. Area V and Area III. 3 Course cr