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.

Comparative Studies

REL 914b, Islam and Christian-Muslim Encounters: Historical and Theological Dimensions  John Azumah
This course examines the historical and theological interactions and encounters between Muslims and Christians since the inception of Islam in the seventh century to the post-9/11 times. It analyzes case studies, key texts, views of notable figures and events that shaped the relations between Christians and Muslims, and the cumulative impact on contemporary relations between the two faith communities. Students are given the opportunity to examine their own perceptions of the Islamic world and how these affect interreligious relations. Particular historical, theological, and ecclesiastical approaches are examined, and guidelines for models of practical engagement are discussed. This course also allows students to discover a variety of models and principles of Muslim-Christian dialogue, with attention paid to Global North and Global South contexts. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 916a, World Christianity: Christianity as a Cross-Cultural Movement  John Azumah
The most significant religious change in our time is the axial shift of mass and direction of the center of Christianity from North America and Europe to Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific. In 1900 more than 80 percent of professing Christians were white and Euro-American. Today more than 60 percent of professing Christians live in areas in the non-Western world. The course surveys Christianity in its different cultural, geographical, and historical growth and expressions from the Jewish, Hellenistic, Early African (Coptic), Latin, Northern European, and now Global South manifestations. The serial, rather than progressive, growth of Christianity is highlighted. Particular attention is paid to indigenous agency in the translation and appropriation of Christianity in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The rise and expansion of Islam and its impact on the trajectory of Christian history and thought are examined. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 930b, Introduction to American Judaism: Religion, People, Culture  James Ponet
This course enables students of all religions and backgrounds to gain basic knowledge and insight into the various forms of present-day American Judaism, its religious as well as secular expressions. The course explores theological and atheological forms of Jewish commitment—such as Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Cultural, Zionist, and Renewal—and searches for traits shared by these traditions. The course is of particular interest to Christians who seek to develop their own sense of living relationship with Jews and Judaism. Questions with a place in class discussion include: Is there a shared Jewish-Christian narrative? Can Christianity be meaningfully understood as a form of Judaism? How might a Christian live with, and in response to, the history of Christian anti-Judaism? Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 940a, The Chinese Theologians  Chloe Starr
This course examines select readings from Chinese church and academic theologians (including Hong Kong writers and diaspora voices) to explore the nature of Chinese Christian thought. The readings cover late imperial Roman Catholic writers, early republican Protestant thinkers, high communist-era church theologians, and contemporary Sino-Christian academic theologians. Students read primary materials in English, supplemented by background studies and lecture material to help make sense of the theological constructions that emerge. The course encourages reflection on the challenges for Christian mission in a communist context, on the tensions between church and state in the production of theologies, and on the challenges that Chinese Christianity poses for global Christian thought. Area V and Area II. 3 Course cr

REL 985b, China Mission  Chloe Starr
The Day Missions Collection at YDS is the strongest mission collection in the world, comprising about one third of the Divinity Library's 500,000 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, students 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; reading into and developing projects while help is on hand for deciphering handwriting; providing reference tools for China, etc. The final two weeks are dedicated to research presentations and evaluation, with each student offering research findings to the class in any media chosen. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 993b, Interfaith Learning through an Exploration of Life-Cycle Rituals  Gregory Mobley
This is an exploration of interreligious learning through a focus on life-cycle rituals related to birth, coming-of-age, marriage, vocation, pilgrimage, and death. The primary focus is on Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, with attention also to Hinduism and African traditional religion. The focus on life-cycle rituals is intended to, first, provide a window into the larger “houses” of the respective religions and, second, prepare prospective clergy for liturgical mediatiorship in pluralistic communities. Area V. 3 Course cr
PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

REL 902b, Literary Appropriations: Writers and Philosophers in Conversation  John Hare and David Mahan
This course examines the relationship between literary authors and the philosophers (and theologians) who influenced them. In addition to exploring philosophical influences in the literary work, as a way of illuminating our understanding of it, the course considers how the literary work helps us understand the points the philosophers are making. We proceed with five pairs of conversations, each of which form two seminar sessions. These paired conversations include Plato and Iris Murdoch, Duns Scotus and Gerard Manley Hopkins, Julian of Norwich (with some reference to Karl Barth) and T.S. Eliot, Søren Kierkegaard and Walker Percy, and John Calvin and Marilynne Robinson. The course also features special guest lecturers for some sessions. Previous experience in the study of literature and/or philosophy or theology would be helpful background. Area V.  3 Course cr

REL 907a, Theological Aesthetics  John Hare
This course is about the intersection of theology and aesthetic theory. Students read theologians and philosophers from both the tradition and the present, though the emphasis is on trying to understand the different options in the tradition. The course also considers a number of works of art—visual, musical, and literary—to focus discussion. Area V.  3 Course cr

REL 990b, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus  John Hare and Adam Eitel
The purpose of this course is to read some texts of Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus in order to compare their different answers to key questions in theology. The course focuses on moral theology, but we also start with some texts in metaphysics to give context. We take the texts in rotation, starting with Thomas for chronological reasons. Area II and Area V.  3 Course cr

RELIGION AND THE ARTS

REL 912a, Sacred Music: Unity and Diversity  Markus Rathey
What is “sacred music”? The answer depends on the individual perspective, denominational affiliation, and also personal musical taste. The course takes an ethnographic approach and explores the use, understanding, and function of sacred music in different local congregations in New Haven. Work in the classroom provides the theoretical and methodological basis, while students each visit one local congregation from a denomination different from their own over several weeks. Students observe the musical practices and engage with members of the clergy and community about “the sacred in music” and the function of music in worship and devotional life. A particular focus of the course is on music that does not represent the Western musical canon. Students conduct and evaluate their research during the term and present their results in a small symposium at the end of the term. Area V.  3 Course cr

REL 942a, Performance behind Bars: Sacred Music, Sacred Texts, and Social Justice  Ronald Jenkins
The course meets in a maximum-security prison where students collaborate with incarcerated men on the creation of performances of theater and music inspired by their collective reading of Dante’s Divine Comedy. Students learn how to apply their skills as writers, performers, or musicians to community service even as they learn about the American criminal justice system and its relevance to Dante’s poem from a unique perspective behind bars. Area V.  3 Course cr

REL 942a / MDVL 663a, From House Churches to Medieval Cathedrals: Christian Art and Architecture to the End of Gothic  Vasileios Marinis
This course examines the art associated with, or related to, Christianity from its origins to the end of Gothic. It analyzes major artistic monuments and movements in a variety of regions, paying particular attention to how art shapes and is shaped by the social and historical circumstances of the period and culture. The class considers art in diverse media, focusing on painting, sculpture, architecture, and decorative arts. Trips to the Yale Art Gallery and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library are included. The course aims to familiarize students with key monuments of Christian architecture, sculpture, painting, and related arts, analyzing each within its particular sociocultural and theological perspective. The course stresses the importance of looking at works of art closely and in context and encourages students to develop skills of close observation and critical visual analysis. Additionally, students are encouraged to examine the ways parallel developments in Christian theology, dogma, and liturgy are influenced by art. Area III and Area V. Prerequisites: basic knowledge of Christian history and familiarity with the Bible.  3 Course cr

REL 952a, Reading Poetry Theologically  David Mahan
This course explores poetry as a form of theological discourse. Through 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. Beginning with selections from Gerard Manley Hopkins and concluding with studies of contemporary poets, this class examines how modern and late-modern Anglo-American poets have created fresh embodiments of a Christian perspective and contributed to the public tasks of theology and the formation of a theological poetics. Area V.  3 Course cr

REL 962b, Imagining the Apocalypse: Scripture, Fiction, Film  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 970a, Human Image: Classical and Biblical  Peter Hawkins
The perennial questions of who we are, of how we relate to the divine as well as to one another, are as ancient as literature itself. They are also the concerns of epic. The course moves from what is perhaps the oldest such story we have, Gilgamesh, to Homer’s Odyssey, Virgil’s Aeneid, Augustine’s Confessions, and Dante’s Inferno. Because these texts (with the exception of Gilgamesh) build on one another, we pay attention to continuities and reinvention as we move from one formulation of the human condition to another. Each (including Gilgamesh) includes the hero’s confrontation with the life to come, a vision of the afterlife that informs the text’s presentation of mortal existence in the here and now. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 971a, Creative Faith: Poetry  Christian Wiman
An assumption of the course is that the act of creating and the act of believing are intimately related. Indeed, for many artists they are inseparable. Students work on different forms of poetry, leading toward a longer final project that incorporates poetry and prose. We use a variety of prompts, imitation exercises, and small-group work to generate new material. This course is part seminar and part workshop. One third of the time is devoted to the reading and analysis of exemplary works of art, and the rest to discussing work done by students in the class. Enrollment limited to twelve students. Admission is at the discretion of the instructor. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 970a, Hymns and Their Music  Carl Daw
This is a survey course intended to familiarize students with the development of Christian hymnody from its beginnings to the present day as well as to foster their ability to analyze and evaluate the literary and theological properties of hymn texts, the musical properties of hymn tunes, and the effective use of hymns in a variety of worship contexts. Students’ progress toward these competencies will be objectively measured by their ability to (1) make a literary analysis of hymn texts in both technical and lay terms; (2) make a musical analysis of hymn tunes in both technical and lay terms; (3) make a biblical and theological analysis of hymn texts; (4) demonstrate comprehension of the contextual dimensions of hymnody in any given historic period and locale; (5) demonstrate familiarity with printed, electronic, and online resources for hymnological scholarship; and (6) suggest and demonstrate creative and effective ways of using hymns in congregations, including strategies for improving the singing of hymns. Area V. Prerequisites: ability to read music and familiarity with the mechanics of literary analysis. 3 Course cr

REL 981b, Visual Controversies: Religion and the Politics of Vision  Vasilicos Marinis
This interdisciplinary seminar explores the destruction, censorship, and suppression of pictures and objects as motivated by religious convictions and practices in medieval Europe and in the United States from colonization to the present. In such episodes, religion does not operate in a vacuum but draws attention to other cultural pressure points concerning, for example, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Already in the third century in Europe, and as early as the seventeenth century in the geographic area that is now the United States, individuals and groups practiced a range of behaviors we might meaningfully, though often figuratively, label “iconoclastic.” This course focuses most specifically on the emergence of Christian art and architecture in dialogue with (or in competition with) Greco-Roman religions and Islam, and on variations of Protestant Christianity. At the same time, the course also directs attention to case studies within Byzantine Orthodoxy, American Judaism, Islam, and Catholicism and looks to comparative situations and episodes of contention elsewhere in the world. Topics likely considered include the conversion of “pagan” temples into Christian churches in late antiquity; iconoclastic interventions on Christian floor mosaics in Palestine after the Muslim conquest; destruction of images during Byzantine Iconoclasm; attitudes toward images during the Protestant Reformation; American Puritan uses of a theology of figuration to justify genocide as an “iconoclastic” act in the Pequot War; Shaker constructions of elaborate visionary pictures as forms of “writing” rather than “art”; sculptor Rose Kohler’s determination to define and regulate “Jewish art” in her work with the National Council of Jewish Women; recent adjudication of the public display of the Ten Commandments or Christian nativity scenes; the Western contexts of the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas; and international culture wars and the specific uses of “blasphemy” charges to restrict the visual practices of religions. Area V and Area III. Prerequisite: permission of the instructors. 3 Course cr

REL 991b, Shakespeare in Theological Context  Staff
In England the Renaissance and the Reformation were simultaneous. During this period a robust international literature developed around a new religious anthropology fascinated by the felt life of the soul in the world, especially by memory, imagination, will, and, above all, by conscience. It was propagated by men of great learning in treatises, poetry, pamphlets, and sermons. This rich and neglected context sheds light on Shakespeare’s very searching characterizations, on the uniquely popular and elevated quality of his work, and on the receptivity of his audience. Milton virtually personifies this movement, a fact that bears on interpretation of Paradise Lost. The course focuses on Hamlet, King Lear, and Paradise Lost. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 992b, The Politics and Culture of Russian Sacred Art  Vera Shevzov
As devotional, material object, political symbol, and art commodity, Russia’s sacred art—the icon—has been revered as sacred, vilified as reactionary, embraced in revolt, displayed as masterpiece, discarded as obsolete, and destroyed as dangerous. Engaging the fields of religion, material and visual culture, ritual studies, and politics, this course examines the complex and multifaceted world of the Russian icon from its Byzantine roots to its contemporary reemergence in post-atheist, post-Soviet space. Consideration is given to the diverse meanings and functions of sacred imagery; iconographic vocation and craft; beauty and the sacred; devotions and rituals; political theology and national identity formation; the icon and avant-garde art; controversial images and protest culture. In addition to art and icons, sources include historical, devotional, theological, philosophical, and cinematic materials. No prerequisites. Undergraduates are welcome. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 994a, Visual Cultures of the Sacred in the Pre-Columbian and Colonial Andes  Staff
This seminar focuses on visual and material cultures of the Andes, with a special focus on modalities of the sacred from the Inca empire (ca. 1438–1534) to the period of Spanish colonial rule (1532–1821). The first part of the course focuses on pre-Hispanic expressions of
the sacred through the built environment, exploring Inca practices of place-making through the construction of shrines and religious architecture. The remainder of the course considers the persistence of Andean ontologies in the articulation of localized, syncretic forms of Catholicism. We trace the literature, architecture, and visual and material cultures of the colonial encounter, from evangelization efforts of the sixteenth century to the adoption of “popular” and vernacular religious representations on the eve of Independence. The course focuses primarily on the Cuzco region of Peru due to its special status as capital of the Inca empire and cultural hub for indigenous artistic and religious expression from the colonial period into the present day. Nevertheless, we also touch on other areas of the Andean world, including modern-day Bolivia and northern Chile. We analyze a range of visual material, including textiles, paintings, architecture, sculpture, and manuscripts, to understand the intersections between religiosity and visual expression in the Andes. Readings are drawn from an array of disciplines, including art history, visual culture studies, literary studies, and anthropology. Area V.  3 Course cr

STUDY OF SOCIETY

REL 906Hb, American Environmental History and Values  John Grim and Mary Tucker
This course provides an overview of major figures, ideas, and institutions in American environmentalism. The course explores the development of environmental awareness in America as distinct historical strands with diverse ethical concerns. It begins with an examination of Native American perspectives on land and biodiversity and then focuses on writings by Thoreau and Emerson to explore early American voices in the discourse on “nature.” Readings from Pinchot, Muir, and Leopold have been selected to investigate the emergence of conservation and forest management. The beginnings of urban and park planning are considered in relation to these positions on the management of nature. Students survey the environmental movements from the 1960s onward in readings from the social sciences and humanities. The course explores the major debates in environmental ethics and the broader reach for global ethics. Writings celebrating biodiversity are examined along with the emergence of conservation biology as an example of engaged environmental scholarship. New efforts to widen the interdisciplinary approaches toward environmental issues are introduced in investigating world religions and ecology as well as cosmology and ecology. Area III and Area V.  3 Course cr

REL 908Aa, The Changing Face of Community-Police-Ministry Relations in the Twenty-First Century  Anthony Campbell
Last year millions of smartphones were sold in the United States, and increasingly police officers equipped with body-worn and car-mounted cameras have been the subject of government, public, and media scrutiny thanks to a large number of high-profile, and usually race-related, police-public interactions. As policing in America changes, the roles and responsibilities of the community must change. Perhaps the greatest change should be seen in the community of faith’s role in defining and shaping what “good community policing” must look like in today’s world. This course explores the changes that have taken place, but more importantly it explores the changes that are happening now within the framework of law enforcement. In addition, the course challenges the community and clergy (those in ministry) with questions as to how they can be effective agents of change and significantly increase their power to influence the changing landscape of law enforcement and thereby help shape the face of community-police-ministry relations in the twenty-first century and beyond. Area V.  3 Course cr

REL 912Hb, Journey of the Universe  John Grim and Mary Tucker
This course draws on the resources created in the Journey of the Universe project: a film, a book, and a series of twenty interviews with scientists and environmentalists. Journey of the Universe weaves together the discoveries of evolutionary science with cosmological understandings found in the religious traditions of the world. The authors explore cosmic evolution as a creative process based on connection, interdependence, and emergence. The Journey project also presents an opportunity to investigate the daunting ecological and social challenges of our times. This course examines a range of dynamic interactions and interdependencies in the emergence of galaxies, Earth, life, and human communities. It brings the sciences and humanities into dialogue to explore the ways in which we understand evolutionary processes and the implications for humans and our ecological future. This is a six-week, two-credit course with a three-credit option. Area V.  2 Course cr

REL 931Bb, 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, Ralph Ellison, 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 934Aa, Ecological Ethics and Environmental Justice  Clifton Granby
This seminar examines historical sources and recent debates within environmental and ecological ethics. It gives special attention to the influence of religious and theological worldviews; practices of ethical and spiritual formation; the land ethic; environmental movements for preservation and conservation; eco-feminism and womanism; and quests for economic, global, and environmental justice. The course draws from a range of intellectual and interdisciplinary approaches, including theology, philosophy, literature, sociology, anthropology, and postcolonial studies. Questions concerning race, place, empire, gender, and power are integral to our examination of these topics. Area V.  3 Course cr

REL 954Aa, Sharing Sacred Spaces: Studies in Interfaith Engagement through Sacred Architecture  Vanessa Avery
This course is an opportunity to investigate notions of the sacred and sacred space across religious traditions through both readings and actual interfaith engagement. In the classroom, we engage critically with readings about the nature of the sacred, the “construction” of the sacred, meanings and movement in the built environment, and the intersections between spirituality, culture, and architecture as they manifest in specific world religions. The second aspect of this course is active participation in interfaith dialogue with religious communities throughout the greater New Haven area. Four field trips to local houses of worship provide opportunities to reflect on sacred spaces in an interfaith context and alongside the communities through whom those spaces attain meaning. Area V.  3 Course cr
REL 980a or b, Travel Seminar: Kenya: A Sacred Encounter  Joseph Cistone and Gregory Mobley
An immersive learning experience organized around a trip to Kenya in January 2020. The theme is “Kenya: A Sacred Encounter.” Realms encountered include African religion; the Maasai Mara National Reserve in humanity’s first home, the Rift Valley; sub-Saharan African society, an improvised pageant of conviviality and competition performed daily on the public stages of streets, markets, villages, farms, cities, and riverbanks; and the prophetic impulse as manifested by individuals and communities in contemporary Kenya who speak to power on behalf of women’s rights and for economic justice. Credit is earned through campus class sessions and immersive learning in the field. Students must register for the course in both the fall 2019 and spring 2020 terms. 1.5 credits each term. Area V. 1½ Course cr