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 914a, Christian-Muslim Encounter: Historical and Theological Dimensions  Lamin Sanneh
This course is an introduction to Islamic theology through the framework of the Five Pillars, with special emphasis on the development of religious structures and institutions in the early centuries. In time the pillars of religion grew independently of Islam's political culture. Civil society offered a stable environment for religious life amidst political changes. This situation has similarities with New World ideas about society rather than the state as the proper locus of religion. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 916b, World Christianity: Religious and Cultural Factors  Lamin Sanneh
From its earliest origins the Christian movement has taken hold in diverse cultures and societies in equally diverse and complex ways, and this fact has been reiterated in the contemporary phase with particular sharpness. Across and beyond denominational boundaries, the Christian movement took a sharp and vigorous turn from the middle of the twentieth century, replacing the old paradigm of mission as a Western effort with mission as a post-Western development. The global response to the election of Pope Francis in 2013 has highlighted his Third-World roots in Latin America, demonstrating the new energy driving Christianity's post-Western transformation and the implications for a post-Christian West. The course explores the religious and cultural dimensions of the subject. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 919b, African Religions: Theological Inquiry  Lamin Sanneh
Sacrifice is a core feature of religious life and practice, and this course presents the subject through a variety of religious traditions. Using Evans-Pritchard’s classic study of Nuer religion, the course builds on the theme with comparative materials from other religions before considering Christian ideas of sacrifice in the concluding stages. A critical question in the inquiry is the relation between sacrifice and community, on the one hand, and, on the other, society and the individual. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 941b, Chinese and Japanese Christian Literature  Chloe Starr
What effect did Christianity have on modern Chinese literature, and what sort of Christianity emerges from Chinese Christian literature? Is Endo Shusaku the only Japanese Christian writer (and does Martin Scorsese’s film do justice to his novel Silence)? This course traces the development of a Christian literature in China and Japan from late Imperial times to the beginning of the twenty-first century, with particular focus on the heyday (in China) of the 1920s and ’30s, and on the Japanese side, on Endo’s postwar novels. Using texts available in English, the class examines how Christian ideas and metaphors permeated the literary – and revolutionary – imagination in East Asia. The influence of Christianity on literature came directly through the Bible and church education and indirectly through translated European and Western literature, but it is rarely clearly in evidence. The course tests the aesthetic visions and construction of the human being in the early Republic, among Japanese samurai in Mexico, and in the martyrs of Nagasaki. Area V. 3 Course cr

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

REL 910a, Philosophy of Religion  John Hare
This course is a general introduction to the philosophy of religion, including such topics as classical and contemporary arguments for the existence of God, the problem of evil, the significance of religious experience, the relationship between faith and reason, possible tensions between science and religion, whether God is important to morality, and the possibility of life after death. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 921b, Metaphysics and Epistemic Self-Trust  John Pittard
A consideration of arguments that purport to show that some worldview or metaphysical outlook is rationally incompatible with epistemic self-trust (either in general, or in some important domain like morality). Possible topics include skeptical worries posed by contemporary cosmological theories, by causal determinism, by atheistic and theistic multiverse theories, by materialist accounts of mind, by Darwinian evolution, and by theistic responses to the problem of evil. We also consider whether God might face irresolvable skeptical worries. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 922b, Theological Predications and Divine Attributes  John Pittard
An exploration of philosophical debates concerning the nature of theological language and the nature of God. Topics include theories of analogical predication, divine simplicity, God’s relation to time, divine impassibility, the nature of God’s love, divine freedom, the compatibility of foreknowledge and human freedom, and theories of providence. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 925b, Theology of Plato and Aristotle  John Hare
This course is about Plato's and Aristotle's views of the divine. Most of the important work of both philosophers on this topic is read. One aim of the course is to think about these philosophers as sources, sometimes congenial and sometimes not, for Christian reflection on a
range of questions including the relation between goodness and the divine, the nature of the soul, the origin or lack of the origin of the cosmos, and the relation between happiness and virtue. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 937b, Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion  John Hare
The course explores a number of texts by Kierkegaard, most of them pseudonymous, but also Works of Love, written under his own name. A focus is on what Kierkegaard intends us to think about the three stages of life: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. No background in philosophy required; some acquaintance with Kant and Hegel helpful. 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 976a, Kant's Philosophy of Religion  John Hare
This course looks at Kant's writings on the philosophy of religion and moral theology, from the Critique of Pure Reason to Conflict of the Faculties. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 988b, Virtue, Vice, and Epistemic Injustice  Clifton Granby
This seminar examines recent debates in the ethics and epistemology of testimony, giving special attention to the influence of social identity, the politics of power, and ongoing evasions of (in)justice. Prominent themes include the relationship between epistemic authority, credibility judgments, and speaker trustworthiness; epistemologies of ignorance (especially those involving race, gender, sex, and class); the promises and perils of virtue-based political praxis; the fostering of subversive practices of resistance; and the challenges that attend individual and communal transformation. We begin by examining accounts of interpersonal trust and social authority. Next, our focus shifts to how these relations become fraught under non-ideal conditions—institutional, individual, and otherwise. The second half of the course scrutinizes recent attempts to identify, resist, and transform unjust relations of power and inequality. We conclude by testing the serviceability of those proposals in specific contexts involving, but not limited to, narratives concerning space and place; racialized and gendered forms of punishment; charismatic authority; poverty and homelessness; and modes of address (and refusal) that involve silence, quiet, and retreat. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 933b, 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 933a, Religious Lyric in Britain  Peter Hawkins
This is a survey of the religious lyric in Britain from the seventeenth century (Donne and Herbert) to the present (Michael Symmons Roberts and Malcolm Guite). Poets to be read include those who address God from a standpoint of faith (e.g., Hopkins and R.S. Thomas) and those who do not (e.g., Hardy, Larkin, and Stevie Smith). Working within a British framework, the class traces a literary tradition that has a certain cultural and religious (i.e., Christian) coherence. By choosing lyric poetry, students look at short, nonnarrative, often emotive work that stresses the speaker’s personal thoughts or feelings. Whereas secular lyric often concentrates on human love, with all its ebb and flow, the religious lyric is concerned with the divine-human relationship—its presence and/or its absence. The class’s study mixes close textual analysis with attention to larger theological issues. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 942a, 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 950a, Dante's Journey to God I  Peter Hawkins
This is the first term of a yearlong course on the Divine Comedy in which we read the entire text in the light of what it purports to be—a journey toward the vision of God. Such an approach does not mean dissolving the narrative into allegory or ignoring literary considerations in favor of theology; it means taking full account of the poem as a path with a divine destination. Special interest is paid
to how Dante transforms his pagan sources, how deeply he assimilates the Bible and its interpretative traditions, and how boldly he attempts to establish his own text as a poema sacro (sacred poem). Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 951b, Dante’s Journey to God II  Peter Hawkins
This is the second term of a yearlong course on the Divine Comedy in which we read the entire text in the light of what it purports to be—a journey toward the vision of God. Such an approach does not mean dissolving the narrative into allegory or ignoring literary considerations in favor of theology; it means taking full account of the poem as a path with a divine destination. Special interest is paid to how Dante transforms his pagan sources, how deeply he assimilates the Bible and its interpretative traditions, and how boldly he attempts to establish his own text as a poema sacro (sacred poem). Area V. Prerequisite: enrollment limited to students who have successfully completed REL 950. 3 Course cr

REL 950b, 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, even of faith itself, are subject to scrutiny by religious and nonreligious people alike. With special reference to Christian faith, the course examines this phenomenon through the literary vision expressed in the fiction of three modern writers—Flannery O’Connor, Walker Percy, and Don DeLillo—considering the theological and literary implications of their work to modern quests for redemption. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 960a, Communities of Chant  Henry Parkes
An exploration of the social and cultural dimensions of liturgical chant in Western Christianity, focusing on the so-called Gregorian tradition as received from Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Introductory lectures furnish students with the necessary tools, vocabulary, and methodologies for navigating the field of chant history. The course then proceeds by way of six diverse case studies, historical and ethnographic, each of which is designed to shed light on the complex and rich interdependencies of chant, community, history, and identity. This course does not expect musical literacy, prior experience of chant, or knowledge of Latin. Singing ability is a welcome bonus. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 963a, Literature of Trauma  David Mahan
How can literary art respond to extreme suffering, particularly when it involves the trauma of large-scale violence and oppression, which seems to defy aesthetic response? How can literary artists fulfill a summons to bear witness and remember without vitiating the apparent senselessness of human atrocity? How do theological responses to trauma interact with those made by creative writers? This course examines these and other questions through the works of poets and novelists responding to the traumas of war (WWI poetry), genocide (Holocaust poetry and fiction), historic violence and oppression (African American, East European, and Latin American poetry and fiction), and the end of the world (apocalyptic fiction). This is not a course in clinical psychology or pastoral theology. The class focuses on the literary-critical and theological issues that arise through close reading of these texts. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 971a, Creative Faith: A Writing Course  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 some form of “spiritual” prose. This may take the form of spiritual autobiography, but it might also be more outward-focused, employing criticism, biography, or other method. This course is part seminar and part workshop. Half of the time is devoted to the reading and analysis of exemplary works of art, and the other half to discussing work done by students in the class. Area V. Enrollment limited to twelve students. Admission is at the discretion of the instructor. Interested students must e-mail a writing sample and a statement of interest in the course (details can be found in the course syllabus) to the instructor by August 29. Students will be notified of their acceptance in the course by August 31. 3 Course cr

REL 979a, Hymns and Their Music  Staff
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. 3 Course cr

REL 982b, Performance of Text: Poetry of T.S. Eliot  Peter Hawkins and Karin Coonrod
This course approaches the poetry of T.S. Eliot (1888–1965) both as literature to be studied and as texts to be performed. Although Eliot also wrote for the theater, we explore the dramatic power of his poetry, treating his often very difficult works not as puzzles to be solved but as states of mind and heart to be experienced as texts are vocalized and embodied. We begin with his early work and conclude with the last of his Four Quartets, “Little Gidding.” We are especially interested in Eliot’s religious development. Weekly class sessions combine textual analysis and oral interpretation. The course culminates in a performance on Friday evening, April 26, that incorporates work done in class week by week. Enrollment limited to twelve students, to be determined after the introductory session on Jan. 17, which all prospective students must attend. Because of the nature of the course, no absences allowed. Area V. 3 Course cr
STUDY OF SOCIETY

REL 905b, Resources for the Study of Religion  Suzanne Estelle-Holmer
Designed to help students develop skills for identifying, retrieving, and evaluating the literature or information required for research in religious studies and/or the practice of ministry. Information about the form, function, content, and organization of specific bibliographic and reference sources in religious studies and related disciplines (with an emphasis on the Christian tradition) is set in the broader context of the history of scholarship, publishing, and libraries. Area V. 3 Course cr

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 908a, 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’s role in defining and shaping exactly 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; it challenges the community and the 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 determine what the face of community-police-ministry relations looks like in the twenty-first century and beyond. Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 918Hb, Indigenous Traditions and the Environment  John Grim and Mary Tucker
Exploration of how particular indigenous peoples relate to local bioregions and biodiversity. Differences between and within indigenous societies, especially in cultural relationships to place. Ways in which values associated with physical places are articulated in symbols, myths, rituals, and other embodied practices. Area V. 2 Course cr

REL 927a, African American Religious and Political Thought  Clifton Granby
This course offers an overview of important sources, voices, and themes in African American religious and political thought. It highlights the ways in which this tradition has inspired practices of freedom, critics of domination, and visions of self and social care. Our task involves analyzing strands of black nationalism and separatism on the one hand, and liberal and democratic calls for egalitarianism and inclusion on the other. Special attention is given to sermons and spirituals, the role of autobiography, quests for education and respectability, vernacular and folk traditions, socialism, the civil rights movement, the Nation of Islam, black power and black theology, womanist and feminist voices, and post-civil rights politics. Various political and rhetorical strategies of African American preaching, organizing, and public appeal also receive attention. Representative thinkers include David Walker, Frederick Douglass, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Richard Wright, Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King, Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, Malcolm X, James Cone, Monica Coleman, and Imani Perry. Area II and Area V. 3 Course cr

REL 934a, 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 951b, Dante’s Journey to God II  Peter Hawkins
This is the second term of a yearlong course on the Divine Comedy in which we read the entire text in the light of what it purports to be—a journey toward the vision of God. Such an approach does not mean dissolving the narrative into allegory or ignoring literary considerations in favor of theology; it means taking full account of the poem as a path with a divine destination. Special interest is paid to how Dante transforms his pagan sources, how deeply he assimilates the Bible and its interpretative traditions, and how boldly he attempts to establish his own text as a poema sacro (sacred poem). Area V. Prerequisite: enrollment limited to students who have successfully completed REL 950. 3 Course cr

REL 954a, Sharing Sacred Spaces: Studies in Interfaith Engagement through Sacred Architecture  Staff
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: Border Crossing to El Salvador**  Joseph Cistone
This course is a border crossing study/travel seminar, a primary component of which is a one-week immersion experience in El Salvador, March 15–23, 2019. Students prepare for this experience before the trip by assessing their motives and expectations for the experience, and by reading and discussing assigned materials. Students study how a different cultural context affects biblical interpretation, theological thinking, and the formation of the life of the church. New learnings and experiences invite transformed ways of thinking and acting, including new ways for joining God at God’s work in the whole world for justice and peace. 1.5 credits per term; credit for the course requires registration for both the fall and spring terms. Area V. 1½ Course cr