Preliminary Exam
Constructed Field in Comparative Religious History

Answer THREE of the following five questions. Make sure to refer to specific historical works in formulating your answers.

1. Religion has often been a constitutive force in state formation and an influential factor in local and national political life in the United States and in the nations of Latin America. For this question please discuss the literatures on religion, politics and the state in the U.S. and in Latin America. Drawing upon representative works in each field, detail points of similarity and difference in the literatures as these may reflect different regionalist scholarly projects or on-the-ground differences between the cases. What are the benefits to scholars of bringing these literatures alongside one another?

2. Assess “Protestantism” as a dimension of comparison between religious phenomena in the United States and in Latin America. What has been the significance of Protestantism in scholarship on Latin America? What issues have been illuminated? What have been the limitations of these works? Drawing upon the significance of Protestantism in the religious history of the United States, what additional insights or questions come into focus regarding the religious history of Latin America or the United States?

3. In her 1997 work, “Women’s History is American Religious History,” Ann Braude argues that despite their numerical dominance and greater participation than men in American religions, women and women’s religiosity have been understudied in religious history. How have scholars of religion in Latin America and North America addressed gender and the roles of women in religion? What methods have been most useful to such inquiry, and how have they been shaped by women’s history more generally, as well as social and cultural history? What continuities and divergences in women’s participation in religious institutions, rituals, and practices does such scholarship show across religious institutions, regions, and historical periods?

4. How have scholars of religion in the Americas addressed the transnational character of their subject, and what difference has this made in their accounts? What concepts or methods from the study of transnational history have been most important to the transnational study of religion in the Americas? What dimensions of religious practices and experience do transnational perspectives most effectively illuminate? How has scholarship on these topics affected the research agenda for historians? Have histories of religion in Latin America and the US been similarly affected by transnational approaches? Why or why not? What are some weaknesses to transnational approaches to the study of religion in these regions—what do they tend to marginalize over overlook?

5. Popular religiosity has long been an important category for historians of Latin America and the United States. How have scholars of religion in each region defined “popular religion” and what debates over this term have developed within and/or across this scholarship? Has the term been defined differently across the two geographical fields, and if so, why and in what ways? How have the histories and practices of specific ethnic or racialized groups shaped the study of “popular religion” in these two regions?