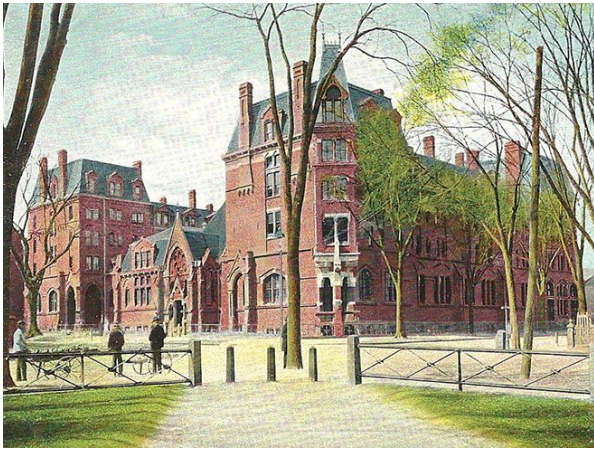


The Teaching of History and World Christianity at YDS: A Bicentennial Perspective

Italicized text is from [*"This Grand Errand": A Bicentennial History of Yale Divinity School*](#) (YDS, 2022) by Ray Waddle.

Overview



YDS in the 1870s, near the New Haven Green

Yale Divinity School's original focus on theology and Bible began to broaden by the 1860s. The emerging scholarly discipline of church history found a permanent place at YDS beginning in 1867 when the School appointed its first Titus Street Professor of Ecclesiastical History. For decades after, themes centered on the importance of the Reformation to the spread of Christianity, individualism, and democracy, while absorbing new methods of historical criticism. With the arrival of Roland Bainton in the 1920s, church history widened

at YDS, reflecting the field's expanding interest in themes of religious tolerance, dissent, the role of women, and the psychology of belief. ([Here](#), see Titus Street Professor Bruce Gordon's overview of how Reformation history has been taught at YDS since the 19th century.) Across recent decades, Bainton's successors diversified the discipline further. By now church history at YDS examines a global faith phenomenon, urged on by the inclusion of new voices of renewal, fresh interrogations of the legacy of colonialism and slavery, the role of power, memory, gender identification, material culture, and community-making.

YDS had a world missions emphasis from its earliest years: the School produced missionaries who pursued vocations whether in the expanses of the pioneer western US, abroad in Africa or Asia, or in New Haven among the captives of the *Amistad*. By the 1890s, graduates such as Orishatukeh Faduma were reformulating the world missionary enterprise, supporting indigenous Christian efforts instead of abiding Western impositions. The Day Missions Library, created in 1891 by first YDS Dean George Day and his wife, Olivia Hotchkiss Day, soon drew attention from scholars across the world for its unique collections.



Interior of the original Day Missions Library

As a scholarly discipline, the modern history of missions enhanced the YDS curriculum in the early 20th century. The D. Willis James Professorship of Missions and World Christianity was established in 1912 and under its first incumbent, Harlan Page Beach, the School quickly became preeminent. Beach's successor, Kenneth Scott Latourette, authored multi-volume studies of world Christian missions that made him arguably the world's leading missions historian. Lamin Sanneh, who was named to the D. Willis James chair in 1989, signaled a new post-Western Christianity perspective as a scholar who was raised Muslim in Gambia and converted to Catholicism. Today YDS faculty who focus on world Christianity pursue research that takes them deep into the dynamism of faith across the globe, including Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

Titus Street Professors of Ecclesiastical History

The Titus Street Professorship was established in 1867 with a gift of \$50,000 from New Haven-born philanthropist Augustus Russell Street, who named the chair after his father, Titus Street (1758–1842).

George Park Fisher



George Park Fisher was born in Massachusetts in 1827, received a BA from Brown University, and studied at YDS and Andover Theological Seminary, graduating from Andover in 1851.

From there he made the decision, unusual for an American at the time, to study in Germany to learn the new historical methods unfolding there ... Many in America looked with suspicion at these new European ways of examining religious verities, but Fisher's German training made him passionate about the potential of historical scrutiny to reveal liberating truths about Christian tradition and human nature. A strong belief in divine providence deepened his confidence that believers had nothing to fear from historical approaches to ancient Christian sources.

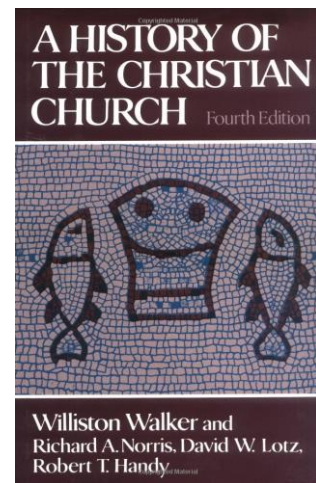
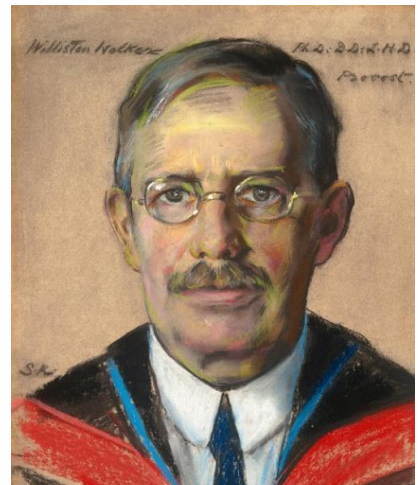
Fisher returned to Yale in 1854 as College Pastor, was appointed as the first professor of church history in 1861 and as Titus Street Professor after 1867. He taught at YDS for forty years, also serving as dean from 1895 to 1901.

Williston Walker

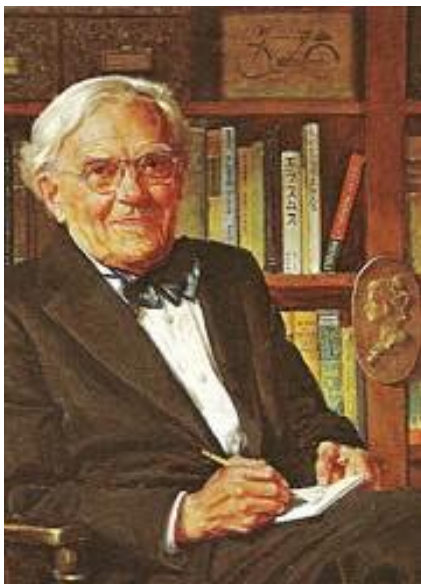
Williston Walker succeeded George Park Fisher in 1901 as Titus Street Professor of Ecclesiastical History. The Maine-born Walker was also the last Yale faculty candidate to be quizzed about his religious faith and character under the 1861 Yale statute, which was repealed in 1906. Walker reflected a stout optimism about the Protestant roots of democracy—the Reformation as the birth of modern freedom of thought, social progress, and church unity. ... In 1920, Walker became Yale's first provost and helped reorganize the University. His death two years later, at age sixty-two, was a profound loss to Yale.

Walker's work, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), was a standard textbook for decades. Its fourth edition (1985) was extensively revised by three scholars from Union Theological Seminary in New York in order to reflect advances in scholarship in more recent years.

Williston Walker's papers ([Record Group 51](#)) are held at the Yale Divinity Library.



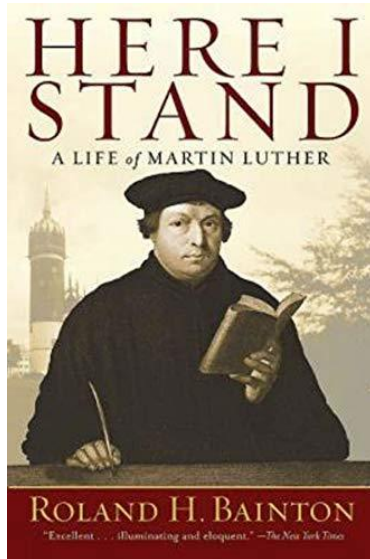
Roland H. Bainton



Following on from the forty-year tenure of George Park Fisher and twenty-year tenure of Williston Walker as Titus Street Professors of Ecclesiastical History was Roland H. Bainton, who joined the YDS faculty in 1923 and was appointed Titus Street Professor in 1935.

Bainton was born in England and emigrated with his family to Canada and then the U.S. He was a graduate of Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, in 1914, then headed to YDS for his BD before serving in a unit of the American Friends Service Committee during World War I. Bainton received his BD from Yale in 1917 and a PhD degree in Semitics and Hellenistic Greek in 1921.

For waves of students across four decades, Professor Roland Herbert Bainton (1917 BD, 1921 PhD) personified YDS itself. From 1920 until his 1962 retirement, he demonstrated an extraordinary combination of classroom mastery and warm personal interest in students. The author of thirty-two books, he was a conversationalist in the hallways, a humane Reformation scholar, a sketch artist who could produce charming caricatures of students and faculty on the spot, and a nimble presence on his bicycle around town.



Bainton's biography *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950) is still in print and has sold more than a million copies. Other notable publications include *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1971) and *Women of the Reformation in France and England* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1973). Bainton's *Yale and the Ministry* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957) was the most comprehensive history of the Divinity School until the recent *"This Grand Errand": A Bicentennial History of Yale Divinity School* (New Haven: Yale Divinity School, 2022.)

Roland Bainton's papers ([Record Group 75](#)) are held at the Yale Divinity Library.

Jaroslav Pelikan

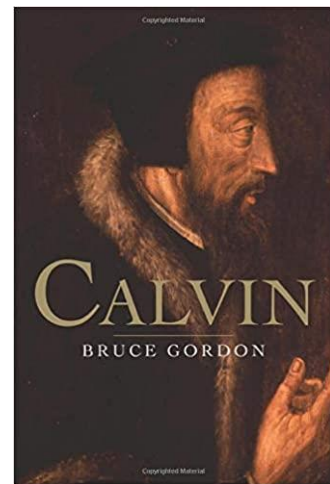
Roland Bainton's successor as Titus Street Professor was Jaroslav Pelikan, who joined the Yale faculty in 1962. Previously he had taught at Valparaiso University from 1946 to 1949, Concordia Theological Seminary from 1949 to 1953, and the University of Chicago from 1953 to 1962. Pelikan was named Sterling Professor of History in 1972 and retired in 1996. Author of more than thirty books, his magnum opus was the five-volume *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (1971–1989). The Yale tribute to Pelikan at the time of his death in 2006 called him one of the world's foremost scholars of the history of Christianity. "Jaroslav Pelikan was a scholar of incomparable erudition and brilliance," said Yale President Richard C. Levin. "His devotion to learning, his family, and his faith inspired us all. And his sparkling wit enlivened every occasion."



Bruce Gordon

Following the tenure of Jaroslav Pelikan, the Titus Street Professorship was designated as a chair in theology while held by Serene Jones and Rebecca Chopp, then the chair reverted to the Titus Street Professorship of Ecclesiastical History with the appointment of Bruce Gordon in 2009. Like Pelikan, Gordon has a joint appointment with the Divinity School and the University. He earned his BA at King's College of Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, an MA at Dalhousie University, and a PhD at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, where he taught from 1994 until coming to Yale. Gordon is a specialist in late-medieval and early-modern religious history. His particular interests include the Swiss and German Reformations, Bibles, devotional literature, the clergy, death and the dead, historical writing, and historiography.

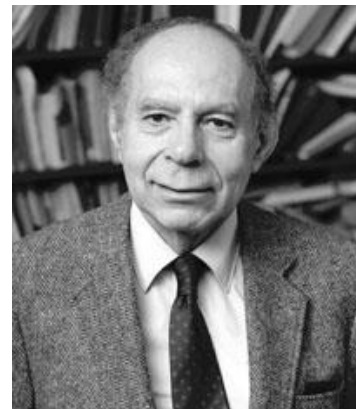
His numerous publications include *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) and *Zwingli: God's Armed Prophet* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).



Other professors in the field of religious history

Deno John Geanakoplos

Deno John Geanakoplos was a renowned scholar of Byzantine cultural and religious history and Italian Renaissance intellectual history who held a joint appointment with the Divinity School and the University, serving as Bradford Durfee Professor of Byzantine History, Renaissance History, and Orthodox Church History. After completing his PhD at Harvard in 1953, Geanakoplos taught at the University of Illinois from 1954 until coming to Yale in 1967. He retired in 1987. Among his many publications was *Interaction of the "Sibling" Byzantine and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance (330–1600)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).



Professors of American religious history

Sydney E. Ahlstrom



Minnesota native Sydney E. Ahlstrom received his BA from Gustavus Adolphus College in 1941. Following service in the U.S. Army during World War II, he received an MA from the University of Minnesota and a PhD from Harvard. He was a Fulbright fellow at the University of Strasbourg, France, and an instructor at Harvard before serving on the Yale faculty from 1954 until 1984, appointed Samuel Knight Professor of American History and Modern Religious History in 1979. Ahlstrom's major work, *A Religious History of the American People* (1972), received a National Book Award. Ahlstrom's papers ([Record Group 83](#)) are held at the Divinity Library.

Harry S. Stout

Harry "Skip" Stout received his BA from Calvin College, and an MA and PhD from Kent State University. He taught at the University of Connecticut from 1974 until joining the Yale faculty in 1986, where he held a joint appointment with the Department of Religious Studies and the Divinity School, retiring in 2022 as Jonathan Edwards Professor of American Religious History.

He has published on a broad range of topics, including evangelicalism, Puritanism, the U.S. Civil War, and capitalism. As general editor and director of Yale's Jonathan Edwards Center, housed at YDS, he was instrumental in making the works of Jonathan Edwards accessible to scholars worldwide. Today, Kenneth P. Minkema is director of the Edwards Center as well as editor of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*.



Tisa Wenger



Tisa Wenger received a BA from Eastern Mennonite University, MA from Claremont Graduate University, and PhD from Princeton. She taught at Arizona State University prior to joining the YDS faculty in 2009. Her work includes the cultural politics of religious freedom and the interplay of race, religion, and empire in American history. Wenger's books include *Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). Most recently, with Sylvester Johnson, she co-edited *Religion and U.S. Empire: Critical New Histories* (New York, New York University Press, 2022).

Jamil Drake



Jamil Drake joined the YDS faculty as Assistant Professor of African American Religious History in 2022, having previously taught at Florida State University. He specializes in American religious history with a particular interest in 20th century African American religion and politics. His writings include *To Know the Soul of a People: Religion, Race, and the Making of Southern Folk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

Todne Thomas



Todne Thomas is a socio-cultural anthropologist who joined the Yale faculty in 2023 as Associate Professor of Divinity and Religious Studies, with a joint appointment at YDS and Yale College. She was previously Associate Professor of African American Religious Studies at Harvard Divinity School. Thomas conducts ethnographic research on the racial, spatial, and familial dynamics of black Christian communities. Her most recent publication is *Kincraft: the Making of Black Evangelical Sociality* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2021).

Walter H. Gray Professors of Anglican Studies

Rowan Greer



Rowan Greer, an Episcopal priest, received his BA from Yale in 1956 and his doctorate in 1965. He joined the Yale faculty in 1966 as assistant professor of New Testament, was named associate professor of New Testament in 1971, associate professor of Anglican studies in 1975, and eventually professor of Anglican studies in 1981, retiring in 1997 as Walter H. Gray Professor of Anglican Studies. His teaching interests included biblical interpretation, the early church, and the desert fathers. His publications included *Broken Lights and Mended Lives: Theology and Common Life in the Early Church* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), and *The Fear of Freedom: A Study of Miracles in the Roman Imperial Church* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989).

Christopher Beeley

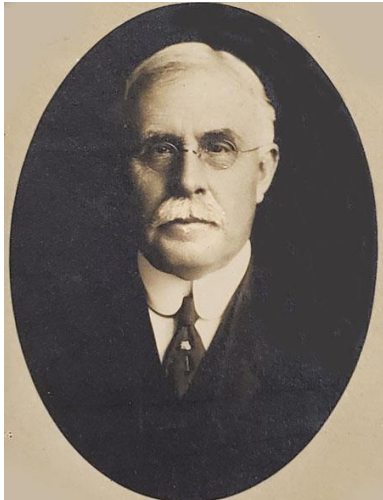


Greer's successor as Walter H. Gray Professor was Christopher Beeley, who received his BA from Washington and Lee University, followed by an MDiv from YDS and diploma in Anglican Studies from Berkeley Divinity School at Yale. He was ordained as an Episcopal priest and served a parish in Austin, Texas, for two years before returning to study at Notre Dame for a PhD in theology and joining the YDS faculty in 2002 as Walter H. Gray Assistant Professor of Anglican Studies and Patristics. His work at Yale focused on the interrelation of historical theology and church leadership. Leaving Yale in 2018, Beeley went first to Duke and then to the parish ministry in Texas.

D. Willis James Professors of Missions and World Christianity

In 1912 a \$100,000 gift from D. Willis James, an American industrialist, made possible an endowed chair of missions. The Department of Missions established at YDS was the first of its kind in an American divinity school.

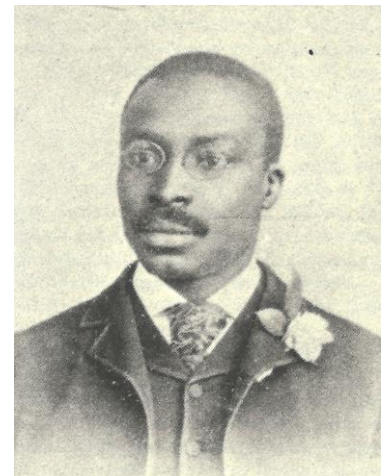
Harlan Page Beach



After receiving his BA from Yale and a BD from Andover Theological Seminary, Harlan Page Beach served as a missionary to China from 1883 to 1890 and as the head of the School for Christian Works in Springfield, Massachusetts, from 1892 to 1895, when he became educational secretary of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions. He joined the YDS faculty in 1906 and was the first incumbent of the D. Willis James Professorship. His writings included *Dawn on the Hills of T'ang: or, Missions in China* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1898).

When Beach joined the YDS faculty in 1906, the overall study of missions was undergoing strenuous reassessment:

... the philosophy of Christian missions, traditionally a Western-oriented initiative aimed at the rest of the world, was coming under severe scrutiny. Mainline Protestant churches, rethinking the sort of Christianity they wanted to export, were embracing alternative models where Indigenous congregations were free of Western control. YDS alumnus Orishatukeh Faduma was in the thick of reformulations of the missionary enterprise in Africa. Beach was reportedly alert to many of these trends, rejecting a parochial Westernized denominationalism abroad. "In the Far East he was fully alive to incipient nationalism and to the desire of the indigenous churches for independence," historian Roland Bainton wrote. "He was particularly insistent that missionaries should not present an occidentalized Christianity."



YDS alumnus Orishatukeh Faduma

Kenneth Scott Latourette

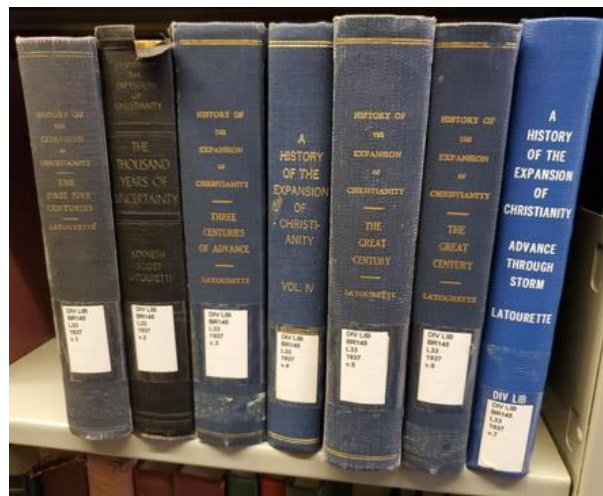


Kenneth Scott Latourette (1906 BA, 1909 PhD) accepted the D. Willis James Professorship of Missions in 1921 with some trepidation—he was succeeding the history of missions' preeminent expert, Harlan Page Beach. Latourette nevertheless solidified the School's reputation as the leading purveyor of Christian missionary history.

Born in Oregon, Latourette was inspired by his evangelical faith to become active in the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions and, in 1910–1911, spent an eventful two years in China under the auspices of Yale-in-China. Severe illness sent him back home to Oregon. After a two-year convalescence, he commenced a teaching career, first at Reed College, then Denison University before his arrival at Yale.

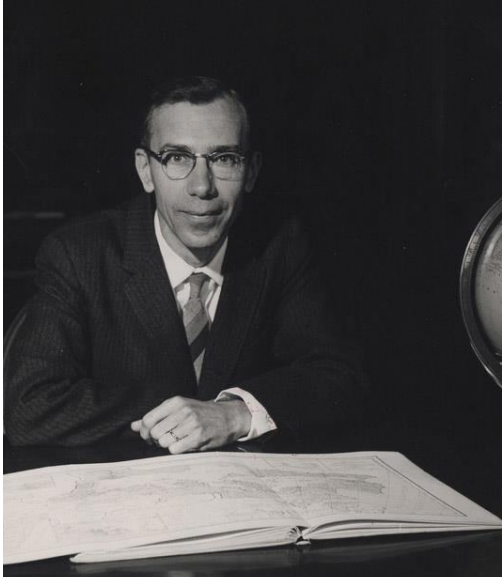
His YDS years yielded a herculean writing output: in his thirty-two years there, he drew on the great holdings of the Day Missions Library to write his seven-volume History of the Expansion of Christianity and five-volume Christianity in a Revolutionary Age: A History of Christianity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. He was named Sterling Professor of Missions and Oriental History at Yale in 1949.

Latourette was a bachelor who lived on the Divinity Quadrangle until his retirement in 1953 and served as a mentor to many students. He left a generous bequest to the Yale Divinity Library that has enabled the Library to build one of the world's most comprehensive collections of world Christianity documentation, with material from six continents. Latourette's bequest also funded the Library's [Latourette Initiative](#) to preserve and make accessible archival material held elsewhere.



Kenneth Scott Latourette's papers ([Record Group 3](#)) are held at the Yale Divinity Library.

Charles W. Forman



Latourette's successor was Charles W. Forman, who was born in India in 1916, the son of missionaries. He received his BA and MA from Ohio State University, a PhD from the University of Wisconsin, and a BD and STM from Union Theological Seminary in New York. Following service as a Presbyterian missionary to India, teaching at North India United Theological College from 1945 to 1950, Forman joined the Yale faculty in 1953 and was Professor of Missions until his retirement in 1987. While at YDS Forman was active in social justice advocacy and served as Acting Dean from 1961 to 1963. The Forman Family Papers ([Record Group 110](#)) are held at the Divinity Library.

Lamin O. Sanneh

Lamin Ousman Sanneh, hired as D. Willis James Professor of World Christianity in 1989, brought a personal history that spoke to the times. Raised Muslim in Gambia, he converted to Christianity as a teenager, eventually becoming Roman Catholic, and studied in the U.S. and England. ... Sanneh wrote about the emergence of a vibrant "post-Western Christianity" in Africa and elsewhere as a global religious force. He cautioned against Western disengagement from the West's own religious heritage, the attempt to hold a cultural consensus together "based only on a cultural memory of the faith."



Sanneh was co-founder of the [Yale-Edinburgh Group on World Christianity and the History of Mission](#). He served as Willis James Professor of World Christianity until his death in 2019. His writings included *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), the autobiographical *Summoned from the Margin: Homecoming of an African* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2012) and *Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition in West African Islam* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2016)

In 2024 YDS faculty teaching the history and theology of world Christianity include:



Chloë Starr

Chloë Starr joined the YDS faculty in 2009, coming from the University of Oxford, where she taught classical Chinese literature. Her courses explore a range of approaches to East Asian theology, including theological survey, Chinese and Japanese Christian literature, China Mission, and Asian American theologies. Her most recent publication is *Modern Chinese Theologies: Volume 2* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2023).

Erika Helgen

Erika Helgen received her PhD in History from Yale University in 2015 before joining the YDS faculty in 2016, where she serves as Associate Professor of Latin American and Latinx Christianity. Her most recent publication is *Religious Conflict in Brazil: Protestants, Catholics, and the Rise of Religious Pluralism in the Early Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

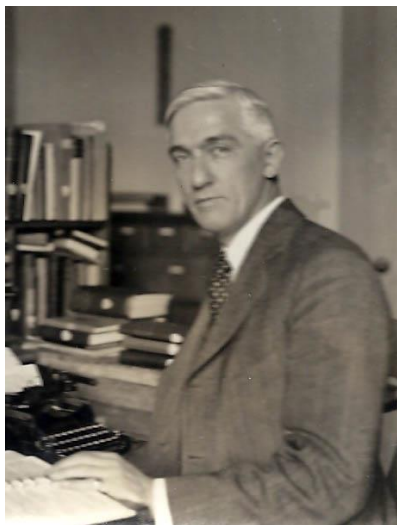


Kyama Mugambi

Kyama Mugambi serves as Assistant Professor of World Christianity, with a focus on Africa. His 2020 book, *A Spirit of Revitalization: Urban Pentecostalism in Kenya* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press) traces the history of Pentecostalism in Kenya.

Professors of comparative religion

Today, religions other than Christianity are taught primarily by the University's Religious Studies department, but comparative religion courses were taught at YDS for many years.



John Clark Archer

John Clark Archer (1914 BD, 1922 PhD) was Hooper Professor of Comparative Religion at YDS from 1915 to 1950. His publications included *The Sikhs in Relation to Hindus, Moslems, Christians, and Ahmadiyyas: a Study in Comparative Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946).

Norvin Hein

Norvin Hein (1946 BD, 1951 PhD) taught comparative religion with a focus on Hinduism for 35 years, from 1950 until 1985. Hein authored and contributed to more than a dozen books and published more than two-dozen scholarly articles and reviews. Among his more enduring scholarly contributions was the 100-page section on Hinduism that he wrote for the well-known textbook *Religions of the World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983).



Norvin Hein's papers ([Record Group 310](#)) are held at the Divinity Library.

Exhibit prepared by Martha Lund Smalley with assistance from Ray Waddle.

For more exhibits highlighting aspects of Yale Divinity School's history, see:
<https://web.library.yale.edu/divinity/exhibitions>.