

History 223: Religion and Conflict in Early Modern Europe

Course Description

In this course we discuss how religion functioned in the early modern world with special focus on various aspects of conflict in political, social, and cultural spheres. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—along with their religious conflicts—represent in many ways the birth of what we now call “modernity”: Major Christian denominations were solidified during this time, the political State began to take a recognizable form, and European exploration of the New World was combined with long-standing international rivalries.

It has often been said that one cannot separate religion from politics. This statement holds true for our period perhaps more than for any other. From the very beginnings of the Reformations of the sixteenth century to the end of the seventeenth, religious movements throughout Europe engaged political issues of jurisdiction, finance, and authority. To cite just one national example: In England, proto-Protestants of the fifteenth century (known as Lollards) held views stridently opposed to the established Church and State order; during the reign of the Queen Elizabeth in the late sixteenth century, Puritans continued the to challenge royal command; finally, during the Civil Wars of the mid-seventeenth century, conflict between religion and the establishment was perhaps more evident than ever before. Elsewhere in Europe, the French Wars of Religion, the Dutch Revolt in the Netherlands, and Spanish imperial efforts (in both Europe and America) were all major conflicts in large part on account of religious difference. In addition to these and other intra-Christian conflicts, the early modern Jewish experience and the persistent battle between Eastern Muslims and Western Christians will help to broaden the themes of the course.

Knowledge of European religious and political history during this time is fundamental to understanding what contemporaries then understood as a cosmic struggle between good and evil, between Christians and Antichrist, even if both parties to a conflict were Christian! Thus, one of the approaches of the course is to understand the European macrocosm by way of situating numerous microcosms in the wider European and transatlantic world. “Religion” as defined in the course will include multiple dimensions: assurance of faith and its secular effect; doctrine, ceremonies, and differences of degrees; mutual ideologies, spiritual brethren, and international confederacy against conspiracy. These and other aspects of early modern religion were part of a tradition of spiritual renewal, *semper reformanda* (ever reforming), that necessarily spilled over into the secular world. Thus the effects of religion often led to various forms of “conflict,” which will be understood to include many aspects: ideological and sociological; physically local and international; power-based and allegiance of conscience. Early modern European history provides a particularly clear picture of these issues and is relevant to many of same sorts of real-world questions posed today regarding religion, international relations, and conflict resolution.

Objectives

Over the course of the semester, students will learn not only about foundational events and personalities, but also how religion is an ever-present motivating force with sometimes drastic effects. We shall read primary sources from the early religious Radicals of the 1520s all the way to those advocating toleration in the late seventeenth century, situating readings in context with a view to a more holistic understanding of European and early Atlantic history. Coupling historical narrative with several weeks of thematic material, students will be exposed to both chronological developments and more subjective ideas in context. To offer students an

experience with the actual materials of the period, we shall meet in the Department of Special Collections, Memorial Library, where they will be able to examine original primary sources. In the final week of the course students will engage issues of historical methodology, research, and wrestling with sources. The course will appeal to students in departments of History, Religious Studies, Sociology, and Political Science.

Requirements

Attendance and participation in class; MWF, 1:20 - 2:10, Humanities 1217

Mondays and Wednesdays will be devoted to lecture; Fridays will be for discussion of the week's readings and situating them in context

Come prepared having read the assigned material, including online readings

Midterm Exam, Monday, March 1 (in-class)

Write one paper of 7-8 pages, including bibliography and notes, due Friday, April 16

Papers should utilize lecture material, course readings, and additional relevant works

Final Exam, Cumulative, Sunday, May 9, 10:05am – 12:05pm

*Tip: Students are advised to utilize my office hours (in [Der Stiftskeller, Memorial Union](#); Fridays, 2:15 - 4:15; 608.338.6889) and consult additional materials at the course website (<https://mywebspace.wisc.edu/dgehring/web/>). Here you will find guidance on writing papers, taking exams, and information on and images from the period.

Possible Paper Topics (If you'd like to choose a different topic, please consult with me.)

1. In what way should we understand "conflict" during the Reformations of the sixteenth century? Was it a war of ideologies? Political ambitions? Religious sincerity? Liberty of Conscience?
2. Were the Thirty Years War and the English Civil Wars products of latent religious conflicts remaining from the prior century? Or were these episodes just results of immediate political circumstances? How do these wars compare to previous conflicts in France and the Netherlands?
3. The notion of *semper reformanda* is central to an understanding of Christian history during the early modern period. What does this mean, exactly? Why did so many Christians feel the urge continually to reform themselves? How might we understand this impulse vis-à-vis the European Jewry and the Muslims to the east, and what are some of the similarities and differences between movements in Europe and those moving westward to New England?

Readings (Be sure to check online before buying at the bookstore!)

H.G. Koenigsberger, George L. Mosse, G. Bowler, *Europe in the Sixteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Longman, 1989). ISBN 0 582 49390 0 (Koenigsberger/Mosse)

Richard S. Dunn, *The Age of Religious Wars, 1559-1715*, 2nd ed. (Norton, 1979). ISBN 0-393-09021-3 (Dunn)

Additional readings on the Course Website (CW): <https://mywebspace.wisc.edu/dgehring/web/>

Grading

Attendance and Participation	15%
Paper, including sources	25%
Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	35%

Schedule of Lectures and Assignments

Week 1 (Jan. 20, 22): Introduction and the Medieval Inheritance

Setting the Scene: Overview of the course; Geography and social, political, and ecclesiastical structures; Medieval Christendom.

Reading: Koenigsberger/Mosse, Chapters 1 and 2 (“Introduction”; “The Sources”; Maps). CW, Clifford R. Backman, *The Worlds of Medieval Europe*, 2nd ed., Chapter 16 (“Changes in Religious Life”).

Week 2 (Jan. 25, 27, 29): The Call for Reformation

The Break with Rome for Authority or Doctrine?: Humanism and biblicism; anticlericalism, continental radicalism, and the challenge of maintaining order and authority for Catholicism.

Reading: Koenigsberger/Mosse, Chapters 6 and 7 (“Christianity, Popular Culture and Humanism”; “The Reformation”). CW, Simon Fish’s *A Supplicacyon for the Beggars*; Martin Luther’s *Ninety-Five Theses*.

Week 3 (Feb. 1, 3, 5): Themes—Manifestation of Faith, Practicalities, and Print Culture

Icons, Martyrdom, and the Letter Killeth: Why radicalism, iconoclasm, and death matter; the advent of print and the dissemination of dissent.

Reading: CW, Lee Palmer Wandel, *Voracious Idols and Violent Hands*, Chapter 1 (“The images in the churches”); Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, Chapter 6 (“Western Christendom disrupted: resetting the stage for the Reformation”); Andreas Karlstadt’s *On the Removal of Images*; excerpts from John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*.

Week 4 (Feb. 8, 10, 12): The Magisterial Reformations

Reform from Above and Resistance Below: The Henrician and Edwardian Reformations in England; Zwingli, Calvin and the Swiss example; “Cuius regio eius religio” in the Holy Roman Empire.

Reading: Koenigsberger/Mosse, Chapter 8 (“A Continued Reformation”). CW, Luther’s *Address to the Nobility of the German Nation*; for England, *The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*; excerpts from Calvin’s *Institutes*.

Week 5 (Feb. 15, 17, 19): The Catholic Reformation

Reform, Restoration, or Reaction?: From “Catholic” to “Counter” Reformation; Humanism, missionary work, and the Society of Jesus; the Council of Trent.

Reading: Koenigsberger/Mosse, Chapter 9 (“The Catholic Reformation”). CW, John W. O’Malley, *Trent and All That*, Chapter 1 and Conclusion (“How It All Began,” “There’s Much in a Name”); excerpts from Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*.

Week 6 (Feb. 22, 24, 26): Themes—Religio-Politics and International Relations

Domestic Nesting, but Problems Afoot: The establishment of Protestant and Catholic regimes; Protestant paranoia and antipapal fears of a Catholic Conspiracy; the French Wars of Religion, the Dutch Revolt, and competition in the New World.

Reading: Koenigsberger/Mosse, Chapters 12 and 13 (“Western Europe in the Age of Philip II”; “Political Theory and Religious Strife”). Dunn, Chapter 1 (“Calvinism Versus Catholicism in Western Europe”). CW, William Cecil and Francis Walsingham on anti-Catholicism; excerpts from John Jewel’s *Apology of the Church of England*.

Week 7 (March 1, 3, 5): Religion and Conflict at the End of the Century: A Reassessment

Midterm: Monday, March 1

Special Collections: Wednesday, March 3

Taking Stock: Varieties of Protestantism and Catholicism throughout Europe; aspects of elite and popular culture and conflict.

Reading: Koenigsberger/Mosse, Chapter 15 (“From Renaissance to Baroque: Art, Music and Science”). CW: Christopher Marsh, “Order and place in England 1560–1640: the view from the pew,” *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005).

Week 8 (March 8, 10, 12): Themes—Christianity, Judaism, Islam: 3 Faiths, 1 Continent

Conflict or Coexistence?: The Ottoman Turks and the Holy Roman Empire; the international Jewish experience; jockeying for power side-by-side.

Reading: CW, Molly Greene, *A Shared World: Christians and Muslims in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, Introduction; John Edwards, *The Jews in Christian Europe, 1400-1700*, Introduction and Chapter 3; Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, Chapter 11.

Week 9 (March 15, 17, 19): The Thirty Years War and Confessional Confederation

The Spiritual and Temporal Swords: The background of confederation; narrative and analysis of the war; religious idealism and political realities.

Reading: Dunn, Chapter 2 (“Political Disintegration in Central and Eastern Europe”). CW, selection on the destruction of Magdeburg, 1631.

Week 10 (March 22, 24, 26): Religious Ideology and Civil Wars in the mid-17th Century

Under Color of Religion?: Anarchy, revolt, and crisis from Scandinavia to Spain; Church/State relations in England during the reigns of James and Charles; Divine Right Theory and Absolutism.

Reading: Dunn, Chapter 4 (“Absolutism Versus Constitutionalism”). CW, Christopher Hill, *Century of Revolution, 1603-1714*, Chapter 5 (“Religion and Ideas”); Thomas Munck, *Seventeenth Century Europe*, Chapter 7 (“Provincial revolts, civil war and the ‘crisis of the 17th century’”); the “Root and Branch Petition.”

Spring Break

Week 11 (April 5, 7, 9): Themes—Radical Religion Redivivus

Religion Gone Wild: The Church Militant and God's Will; decline in censorship and the explosion of radical pamphlets; the diversity and significance of Radical Religion.

Reading: CW, Christopher Hill, *Century of Revolution, 1603-1714*, Chapter 10 ("Religion and Ideas"); *The Ranters Ranting*, and other Radical dissenter pamphlets.

Week 12 (April 12, 14, 16): 17th-Century Rationales for Flight and Transatlantic Pilgrims Papers Due Friday, April 16

Heading West to the City upon a Hill: The Puritan Migration and the beginnings of New England; theological and political reasons for a New America; political competition and the challenges of Christianity in the New World.

Reading: CW, Alison Games, *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World*, Chapter 5 ("Piety and Protest in the Puritan Diaspora"); Avihu Zakai, "The Gospel of Reformation: the Origins of the Great Puritan Migration," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 37 (1986); excerpts from *Governor William Bradford's Letter Book*.

Week 13 (April 19, 21, 23): Restoration of Normalcy, Toleration, and Skepticism

Reactionary Measures: The swing from Radicalism to Rationalism; toleration in the "modern" sense; skepticism, deism, and precursors to the Enlightenment.

Reading: Dunn, Chapter 5 ("The Century of Genius"). CW, Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Chapter 22 ("The Decline of Magic"); Rosalie L. Colie, "Spinoza and the Early English Deists," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959).

Week 14 (April 26, 28, 30): Popular Culture, Religion, and Witchcraft

Parish Conflict and the Meaning of Witchcraft: Explanation by divine intervention; the functions and fortunes of witchcraft; the tenacity of popular belief, religious fervor, and Salem, Massachusetts.

Reading: Dunn, 128-34, "Women and Witchcraft"; CW, Ian Bostridge, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations, c. 1650-1750*, Chapters 6 ("The Last Debate?"), 7 ("Afterlife"), and 9 ("Witchcraft Abroad"); excerpts from the *Malleus Malificarum*, documents on the Salem Witch Trials.

Week 15 (May 3, 5, 7): Themes—Summary and Skills

How Far Have We Come, and Now What?: Summary of themes from European and Colonial examples; thinking historically and exposing biases; research, theses, etc.

Final Exam (Sunday, May 9), 10:05am – 12:05pm