

Story of Religion in the Most Secular Country

Instructor: Petr Mucha

Contact: mucha@nyu.edu

Office Hours: upon request

Course Description

Czech Republic is characterized as one of the most atheistic societies. At the same time, however, cultural and architectural faces of the country demonstrate very strong influence of religion throughout its past. This course will search for answering this paradox and its complexities.

Religious influence is principally evident in cultural richness of Prague that mirrors the drama of European religious history. Implementing cross-disciplinary approaches we will explore influences of religion on cultural, political and economic characteristics of Central Europe in different periods. We will study the origin of medieval Christendom and societal impact of religious conflicts. Influences of modern emancipation and totalitarian periods on current low level of religiosity will also be examined. Throughout the semester, we will visit and interpret many unique religious and historic sites in Prague.

Course Objectives

The course will provide students with an understanding of the most important religious phenomena and their influence in history. It will also enhance their skills of contextual analysis of mutual interactions between religion, culture and politics.

Course Structure and Requirements

Sessions are composed of presentations and lectures, class discussions on study sources (readings, films), and guided tours to relevant sites in Prague.

The course is open to all students and there are no special prerequisites. Students are expected to study assigned class sources (available on-line) and participate actively in all class activities, including discussions and guided tours. Other requirements include oral presentation and final paper.

Grading policy

Class participation 20%

Oral presentation 20%

Final paper 35%

Multiple-choice test 25%

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend every class and they have to comply with the attendance policy of the UPCES program. One excused absence is tolerated; more than one absence has significant consequences. Students are responsible for catching up with the material they have missed.

Letter Grade	Percentage	Description
A	93-100	Outstanding work
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	Good work
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Acceptable Work
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D+	67-69	Work that is significantly below average
D	63-66	
D-	60-62	
F	0-59	Work that does not meet the minimum standards for passing the course

UPCES Non-Discrimination/Harassment Policy

The UPCES program in Prague promotes a diverse learning environment where the dignity, worth, and differences of each individual are valued and respected. Discrimination and harassment, whether based on a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or other legally protected characteristic, are repugnant and completely inconsistent with our objectives. Retaliation against individuals for raising good faith claims of harassment and/or discrimination is prohibited.

UPCES Diversity Policy

UPCES fully embraces diversity and strives to create a safe and welcoming environment for students from all backgrounds. Prague is a wonderfully diverse community and UPCES is no different. All students should feel at home while studying abroad and UPCES will do its utmost to make sure that becomes a reality. Although unique challenges may arise, we believe that students from all walks of life will encounter wonderful opportunities for enrichment as they explore a new culture while studying abroad.

Course Schedule:

Week 1

UPCES Orientation Lecture Series

Lectures and site visits on subjects of history, culture, politics, and the economies of the Czech Republic and Central Europe in order to establish a common interdisciplinary background and vocabulary for all courses.

Week 2

Course Introduction. Czechs – The Most Atheistic Nation?

Source

David Václavík, Dana Hamplová, Zdeněk Nešpor, "Religious Situation in Contemporary Czech Society," *Czech Sociological Review*, 2004, Vol. 40, 277–295.

"Unlike Their Central and Eastern European Neighbors, Most Czechs Don't Believe in God," Pew Research Center, 2017.

Week 3

Religion and Roots of European Civilization

Source

Lonnie Johnson, "Central Europe and the Roman Christian West," in *Central Europe*, Oxford University Press, 2011, 16-25.

Tomáš Halík, "Religion in European Context," Lecture at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, 2006.

Excursion

Christianization site

Week 4

Building a New Society and Monastic Revolution

Source

Collection of texts: Principles of Monasticism, Rule of Saint Benedict and St. Gall Plan Project. Film documentary on Christianization.

Presentation

Agnes of Bohemia, integrating figure

Excursion

Monastery

Week 5

Mission Accomplished: Medieval Christendom

Source

Collection of texts: Christianitas and Medieval Society, film documentary on Principles of Cathedrals.

Presentation

Charles IV, concepts and visions

Excursion

Medieval Religious Prague

Week 6

Cracks in the System – Crisis and Reformation

Source

Lonnie Johnson, "The Bulwarks of Christendom," in Central Europe, Oxford University Press, 2011, 64-75.

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, "Jan Hus and the Czech Reformation," in The Meaning of Czech History, University of North Carolina Press, 1974, 3-14.

Presentation

Jan Hus, different interpretations

Excursion

Reformation sites

Week 7

Period of Conflicts, Religious Wars and Cultural Contest

Source

Collection of texts: Thirty Years War, Recatholization, Cultural Contest between Catholic and Protestant Societies.

Presentation

„Cuius regio, eius religio,“ principle and consequences

Excursion

Klementinum

Week 8

Modernity: Emancipation of Reason and Nation, Dawn of Apostasy

Source

Nikki Keddie, "Secularization and Secularism," University of California, Los Angeles.

Lonnie Johnson, "From Nations to Nationalism," in Central Europe, Oxford University Press, 2011, 127-140.

Presentation

Freud and Marx on religion

Excursion

Prague's Marian Column

Week 9

Communist Totalitarianism in Central Europe and Atheisation

Source

Zuzana Kusá, "Persecution of Churches under the Communist Regime in Czechoslovakia," Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1998.

Presentation and film

Religion under Communism

Week 10

Glory and Tragedy – Prague's Story of Jews and Judaism

Source

Collection of texts: Jewish History in Bohemia, Franz Kafka and His Context, Anti-Judaism and Anti-Semitism, Holocaust.

Presentation

Judah Loew ben Bezalel

Excursion

Jewish Town

Week 11

Religion in European Context and Postmodern Paradigm

Source

Collection of texts: Peter Berger and Jose Casanova on Secularization Theories, Grace Davie on European Religiosity.

"Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe," Pew Research Center, 2017.

"Being Christian in Western Europe", Pew Research Center, 2018.

Presentation

Second Vatican Council and Aftermath

Excursion

Prague Academic Parish

Week 12

Current Religious Situation – Globalization and Future Trends

Source

Dana Hamplová, Zdeněk Nešpor, "Invisible Religion in a "Non-believing" Country: The Case of the Czech Republic," Social Compass, 2009, Vol. 56, 581-597.

Tomáš Halík, "Religious Situation in East-Central Europe During the Post-Communism," Lecture at Charles University, Prague, 2010.

Presentation

Forum 2000 and Interfaith Dialogue

Week 13

Final test, closing discussion, final paper due.

Additional Readings

Demetz, P.: Prague in Black and Gold, 1997. Penguin, London. ISBN 978-08090-1609-9

O'Grady, D.: The Turned Card, 1995. Gracewing, Leominster, Herefordshire. ISBN 1-86371-606-8

Wandycz, P. S.: The Price of Freedom, 2001. Routledge, London. ISBN 0-415-25491-4