

## Story of Religion in the Most Secular Country

**Instructor:** Petr Mucha

**Contact:** [mucha@nyu.edu](mailto: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 social, cultural and political characteristics of Central Europe in different periods. We will study the origin of medieval Christendom, cultural and political contexts, and societal impact of religious conflicts. Influences of modern social 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%

**Grading Scale**

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, Monastic Revolution**

##### **Source**

Collection of texts: Principles of Monasticism, Rule of Saint Benedict, St. Gall Plan Project.

Christianization film documentary.

##### **Presentation**

Agnes of Bohemia, integrating figure

##### **Excursion**

Monastery

### **Week 5**

#### **Mission Accomplished: Medieval Christendom**

##### **Source**

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

##### **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, various interpretations

#### **Excursion**

Reformation sites

## Week 7

### **Period of Conflicts, Religious Wars and Cultural Contest**

#### **Source**

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

#### **Presentation**

„Cuius regio, eius religio“ principle, consequences

#### **Excursion**

Klementinum

## Week 8

### **Emancipation of Reason, Rise of a 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**

Science and religion

#### **Excursion**

Prague's Marian Column

## Week 9

### **Totalitarianism 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.

#### **Presentation**

Judah Loew ben Bezalel

#### **Excursion**

Jewish Town

## **Week 11**

### **Religion 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**

Religious transformation and Vatican II

#### **Excursion**

Prague Academic Parish

## **Week 12**

### **Current Situation and Future Trends**

#### **Sources**

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**

Current religious forms and movements

## **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