Medieval Christianities
The Franciscan Revolution
REL 310 | Spring 2016

Teaching Team
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Approaches and Aspirations
The Franciscans revolutionized Christianity. They neither wholly created or wholly recreated it. They decreated it. They stripped it to its essential elements: as a way of simply living. In doing so, they changed it, profoundly and permanently. The Franciscans changed Christianity by doing Christianity differently. They incarnated, inhabited, lived a different Christianity. The Franciscan difference was simple. It was about simply living: about a way of living simply, in poverty and humility, with others. That was the way of their revolution. Leading this way was the first brother, Francis of Assisi. He stripped Christianity, to its heart. The Franciscan revolution happened because Francis found a new, revolutionary, total way of living Christianity—and others followed.

Our course traces the lives of Francis and the Franciscans, and their revolutionary effects, from 1205 to 1335. In these years, the Franciscans exploded. Their order, of Friars Minor, exploded, growing from 12 friars in 1209 to over 30,000 friars (plus sisters and seculars) a century later. And it exploded, shattering ossified Christian institutions. The Franciscans revolutionized medieval Christian traditions of piety, philosophy, morality, sanctity, society. Studying the Franciscan revolution in its contexts (philosophical, theological, spiritual, political, cultural, institutional, etc.) will give us a keen sense of the dynamics, and dynamisms, of vital medieval Christianities.

We will acquire this dynamic, of dynamics and dynamisms, by encountering and carefully considering for ourselves materials connected to particular medieval Christianities during a particular period. Our course will not be a survey of medieval Christianities. We will not attempt to “cover” every medieval Christianity between Augustine of Hippo (397) and Martin Luther (1517). Such an attempt would preclude us from acquiring a rich sense of historical detail. It would prohibit us from posing probing questions about the materials we encounter. It would prevent us from appreciating medieval Christianities’ complexities and complications—and from really doing religious studies. Instead of a survey that covers, our course will work to uncover medieval Christianities by studying in depth the Franciscan revolution.
Our study will track the Franciscan revolution as it plays out in 3 acts.

Act 1 will read Francis of Assisi’s texts in contexts, in relation to texts that preceded them and texts that followed them. We will organize our reading by genre: rules, letters, and prayers. We will also read Francis’s famous, final texts.

Act 2 will follow Francis’s lives and afterlives—in biographies, a chronicle, and a spiritual itinerary—in relation to the Franciscan order’s evolution and effects.

Act 3 will explore Franciscan revolutionary struggles with Christian traditions, structures, and experiences via acts of theological and ethical resistance, philosophical and political revolt, and sensational and mystical encounter.

Our course materials, discussions, and activities work together in the service of our course’s learning objectives:

1. to recognize better the textual, contextual, and practical significance of Francis of Assisi for medieval, and subsequent, Christianities;
2. to understand better how the Franciscan revolution related to Francis, how it developed, and how it affected Christian practices, traditions, and institutions;
3. to develop and demonstrate 5 key critical practices—of examination, interpretation, consideration, communication, and reflection—vis-à-vis medieval Christian materials;
4. to appreciate how to engage in a disciplined study of religion using multiple approaches and methods;
5. to improve your critical and self-critical skills of reading, thinking, and writing.

Critical Skills

Because our course is writing intensive, we put a particular premium on critical skills of writing—and, so, of reading and thinking. We can’t overestimate their value. Critical reading, thinking, and writing skills are probably the most important and most applicable skills you can learn in college. Because they (like our 5 key critical practices) are skills, they are learnable. But like any skill, they require practice. They can be learned, and ultimately mastered, if you are willing to devote time and effort to practicing them. Think of these critical skills as investments that require large initial deposits but that provide substantial returns with interest on those deposits.

Texts

Angela of Foligno, *Complete Works* (9780809133666)
Benedict of Nursia, *Rule* (9780814612729)
Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, *Defense of the Mendicants* (9781576591598)
Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, *Journey of the Mind to God* (9780872202009)
Francis of Assisi: Early Documents: The Saint (9781565481107)

Additional materials are available on Blackboard. Be sure to bring to class whatever text(s) we are discussing that day.

Course Format

At heart, our course is a series of conversations: among our course materials and among ourselves. Our class meetings stage these conversations as live opportunities for interactive learning, with as
many conversation partners as possible. Our course is ours, not only mine or yours. It is our responsibility to engage in these ongoing conversations with the materials and one another.

Scholarly Orientation
In our course, we will act as—and become—scholars, engaged in the study of religion. So we will adopt a scholarly approach to our work. Doing so calls for adopting the following orientations.

Reflexive awareness
Reflexive awareness means being mindful of our assumptions, convictions, and values, shaped by our historical and cultural locations. These assumptions, convictions, and values affect how we understand “religion.” Reflexive awareness also means recognizing that the study of religion can be unsettling, since other religions can unsettle our assumptions, convictions, and values. Other religions are other ways of imagining and inhabiting the world: other ways of being and doing, religiously. To study them responsibly, we must bracket judgment and engage their otherness.

Imaginative sympathy
Imaginative sympathy means taking seriously the world of a religious practitioner. It means assuming that a religious thought, activity, or object carries real meaning for a religious practitioner. Doing so involves imaginatively crawling inside this practitioner’s world and understanding how, for this practitioner, this world makes sense. It requires that we take seriously assumptions, convictions, values, stories, materials, rituals, and identities very different from ours.

Critical distance
Critical distance means raising questions that a religious practitioner might not raise about her or his religion. What are a religion’s acknowledged and unacknowledged assumptions, convictions, and values? How does a religious practitioner adopt them? What effects does a religious idea, activity, or object have on a religious practitioner—and on a society? In what ways is a religion significant and meaningful for its practitioners? How do its materials and practices conceive of botanical, animal, human, and divine beings and their interactions? What does a religion hold as fundamental to human well-being? Questions like these, and the issues they raise, are ones we should keep in mind as we study religion.

Guiding Principles
In our course, we take the following statements as among our guiding principles.
(1) None of us knows everything.
(2) Each of us is here primarily to learn.
(3) Each of us can contribute to our learning—our own and others’.
(4) Learning requires differences. Differences are how we learn.
(5) Questions are usually more illuminating, and more interesting, than answers.
(6) Answers are primarily ways of asking better next questions.

Community and Responsibility
A class is a community, in which any member’s actions affect other members. As members of this community, we share, and commit to, the following communal responsibilities.
Punctual attendance
We will be on time for and attend every class meeting from beginning to end. Attendance is a crucial component of learning, since it gives us opportunities to engage course materials and one another. If you miss a class meeting, you miss opportunities for these engagements: opportunities to learn and to develop and demonstrate your critical practices.

Shared respect
We will be respectful and responsible. Being respectful and responsible includes preparing for and attending class, listening to others, appreciating differences, refraining from eating and using electronic devices, and generally abstaining from any activity not productively contributing to our course. Anyone who does not behave respectfully and responsibly may be excused from class for the day.

Academic integrity
We will uphold academic integrity. Because academic integrity forms the foundation of a learning community, it is absolutely imperative that we be honest and honorable members of this community. Cheating, in any form and to any degree, is an affront to this community that will not be tolerated. Cheating includes giving or receiving aid when prohibited, plagiarism, fraud, falsification, collusion, or any related act of deception or dishonesty. Anyone who commits such an act will receive an XF grade for this course and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. For more information, see the Academic Integrity Policies and Procedures (http://academicintegrity.syr.edu).

Staying enrolled in this course will indicate your understanding of and agreement to its objectives, principles, policies, responsibilities, and requirements.

Activities and Assessment
In addition to careful reading and active participation, we will engage in the following activities that give you opportunities to deepen and to assess your learning.

Learning log
The learning log presents you with opportunities to learn, and to think and write critically about your learning, at different moments in our course. In doing so, the learning log links course contents, critical practices, and learning reflections. Each week by Friday at 12:45, you will record an entry in your learning log; you will submit in your Blackboard journal a response to a particular, proposed prompt. Each learning log entry should respond thoroughly to the prompt, support its claims and conclusions, refer to course readings, be written clearly and precisely, and show thoughtfulness, reflection, and insight.

Learning finale
Your learning in this course will culminate in our learning finale. It is the capstone of your learning in our course. It will give you a significant opportunity to demonstrate and use the knowledges, skills, and practices you have developed in our course.

Every week, you will receive feedback on your learning log. Every 3 weeks, you will also receive a status update (aka a progress report). These status updates will holistically view and review your learning. Anything you do in our course is relevant to your learning, and to our assessments of it. We invite you to share with us your ongoing self-assessments, to create a dialogue about your learning. By communicating with one another, we will work together to advance your learning.
We will assess, and finally evaluate, your learning and achievement according to our course’s learning rubric and its 5 key critical practices: examination, interpretation, consideration, communication, and reflection. Status updates will measure how well, at a particular moment in our course, your work demonstrates these critical practices. At our course’s end, in light of our learning finale, we will evaluate your learning and translate it into your course grade. Demonstrating thriving practice of all 5 key critical practices will earn an A. Demonstrating thriving practice of 4 critical practices will earn a B, of 3 a C, of 2 a D, and of 1 (or none) an F.

Office Hours
Office hours provide you with weekly opportunities to extend class discussions, ask questions, or seek assistance. We strongly encourage you to take advantage of these opportunities, especially if you are having difficulties. You can drop by without an appointment. You can email us anytime.

Learning Accommodations
If you think you might need accommodations for a learning disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (http://disabilityservices.syr.edu) to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. The Office of Disability Services is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will, as appropriate, issue accommodation authorization letters to students with documented disabilities. Since accommodations require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, contact the Office of Disability Services and discuss your situation with us as soon as possible.

Religious Observances
Given the diversity of religious traditions practiced by members of our academic community, Syracuse University protects our rights to observe our respective traditions’ holy days. You may make up any work missed due to a religious observance provided that you notify us through MySlice by 29 January 2016. For more information, see the Religious Observances Policy (http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm).

Tips for Success
(1) Read our course texts thoroughly, closely, and carefully.
(2) Read them again.
(3) Attend and participate in our class meetings.
(4) Ask questions.
(5) Reread the texts.
(6) Talk about our course texts and discussions with class members (including us).
(7) Ask more questions.
(8) Reread the texts again.

Words for Thought
“Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.” (Karl Marx)
Schedule of Meetings and Readings

20 January  Introduction

Revolution, Act 1

Rules

            Brian Patrick McGuire, “Monastic and Religious Orders”

27 January  Francis of Assisi, *Earlier Rule, Later Rule, Rule for Hermitages, Canticle of Exhortation for the Ladies of San Damiano*
            William Short, “The *Rule* and Life of the Friars Minor”

            Patrick Nold, “Pope John XXII, the Franciscan Order, and Its *Rule*”

Letters

3 February  Bernard of Clairvaux, Letter concluding *On Loving God*; Guigo II, *Ladder of Monks*; Francis of Assisi, *Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance (=First Letter to the Faithful), Later Admonition and Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance (=Second Letter to the Faithful)*

8 February  Francis of Assisi, *Exhortations to the Clergy, First Letter to the Custodians, Second Letter to the Custodians, Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples, Letter to a Minister, Letter to Brother Anthony of Padua, Letter to Brother Leo*
            Michael Robson, “The Writings of Francis”


Prayers

15 February  Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, §§10.1.1–10.6.8; Anselm of Canterbury, *Prayer to the Holy Cross, Prayer to Mary* (3); Francis of Assisi, *Exhortation to the Praise of God, Praises of God and Blessing (=Parchment Given to Brother Leo), Praises To Be Said at All Hours, Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Salutation of the Virtues*

17 February  Francis of Assisi, *Prayer before the Crucifix, Prayer Inspired by the Our Father*; Jacopone of Todi, *Lauds*, §§42, 44, 59–61, 71, 75, 80–84, 93
            Alessandro Vettori, “Theology of Ravishment”
22 February  Francis of Assisi, *Canticle of the Creatures* (=*Canticle of Brother Sun*)  
Ilia Delio, “Canticle of Brother Sun”

24 February  Francis of Assisi, Testament

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**Revolution, Act 2**

**Lives**

29 February  Thomas of Celano, *Life of Saint Francis*, §§1–87  
Michael Cusato, “Francis and the Franciscan Movement”

2 March  Thomas of Celano, *Life of Saint Francis*, §§88–151

Michael Blastic, “Francis and His Hagiographical Tradition”


14–16 March  Spring break

**Stigmata**

Arnold Davidson, “Miracles of Bodily Transformation, or How Saint Francis Received the Stigmata”

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**Itinerary**

30 March  Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, *Journey of the Mind to God*, §§5–7  
Bernard McGinn, “Early Franciscan Mysticism and Bonaventure’s Synthesis”; Dyan Elliott, “Raptus | Rapture”

**Revolution, Act 3**  
**Resistance**

4 April  Gerard of Abbeville, Sermon of 1 January 1269; Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, *Defense of the Mendicants*, prologue, §§1, 3  
Aidan Carr, “Poverty in Perfection according to Bonaventure”

6 April  Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, *Defense of the Mendicants*, §§7, 12

11 April  *The Sacred Exchange between Saint Francis and Lady Poverty*

**Revolt**

David Burr, “John XXII and the Spirituals”

**Encounter**

18 April  Angela of Foligno, *Memorial*, §§1–2  
Bernard McGinn, “Men and Women in the Franciscan Mystical Tradition”

20 April  Angela of Foligno, *Memorial*, §§3–6  
Caroline Walker Bynum, “The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages”

25 April  Angela of Foligno, *Memorial*, §§7–8  
*Meditations on the Life of Christ*, §§74–83

27 April  Angela of Foligno, *Memorial*, §9  
Bernard McGinn, “Unio Mystica | Mystical Union”; Karma Lochrie, “Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies”

2 May  Conclusion

10 May  Learning finale due by 12:45