

Christianity in the Reformation Era

Class 1

The Landscape of Early Modern Christianity

Overview

- We will review the landscape in 3 major categories.
 - Demographics
 - Where are the people - what do they do - what did they experience.
 - Social Arrangements
 - The hierarchical structure - social classes - wealth realities.
 - Political Relationships
 - How was society politically organized? - locally, regionally, and larger scale.

Demographics

- The majority of the population worked the land, but the few cities were disproportionately important economically and intellectually.
 - Depending on the region 65 to 90% of the people were peasants or small farmers.
 - The few urbanized areas were in Northern Italy, the Southern Low Countries, and Southern Germany.
 - Based on population very few true cities existed.

Demographics (2)

- Physical suffering and death were persuasive elements of life.
 - Between 15 and 35% of infants died before their first birthday.
 - Another 10 to 20% die before the age of 10.
 - Lacking adequate medical care, and exposed to famine, epidemics, the ravages of war, the vast majority of the population found life very hard.

Demographic Crises 1500-1694

W-War F - Famine P - Plague

Year(s)	Location	Type	Year(s)	Location	Type
1500-29	Northern Italy	W	1606	Scotland	P
1527	England	F	1606-07	Sicily	F
1531	France	F	1610-11	Switzerland,-Eng.	P
1556-7	Europe	F	1615-16	Switzerland	P
1540-55	Germany	W	1618-48	Germany	W
1560-98	France	W	1621-48	Netherlands	W
1563-6	Europe	P	1625	London	P
1568-1609	Netherlands	W	1629-31	Switzerland	P
1575-7	Italy	P	1630-31	Italy	P
1579	England	P	1636-37	London	P
1590-1	Sicily	F	1647-8	Scotland	P
1590-1	Italy	P	1656	Italy	P
1593	London	P	1660-2	France	F
1594-97	England	F	1665	London	P
1597	England	P	1667-8	Switzerland	P
1599	Spain	P	1680	Sardinia	F
1603	London	P	1693-4	France	F

.... the life of man - solitary,
poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”

Thomas Hobbes

“Leviathan” published in 1651

Social Realities

Stratification and hierarchy were not only realities, but ingrained habits of thought.

A mutually reinforcing relationship of paternalism and obedient deference, combined with an appeal to the “common good” maintained the social order.

In rural areas the fundamental divide was between peasants and lords – the landowners.

Towns were socially stratified by status and occupation linked to wealth.

Social Realities - Rural

For those who survived the plagues the century after the Black Death (1350-1450) was actually the best of times for medieval peasants.

The Black Death made agricultural labor much scarcer, giving surviving peasants more bargaining power over noble landowners.

Then after 1450 rapid population growth allowed nobles to once again force peasants into a lower standard of living again leading to growing tensions.

Social Realities - Urban

At the top of urban hierarchies were wealthy patricians and merchants, followed by urban professionals, then members of craft guilds, domestic servants, and wage laborers.

Below the laborers, and representing sometimes 15-20% of the population were the indigent poor.

But towns were disproportionately important in Europe as the centers of economic exchange, higher education, the circulation of ideas, and some social mobility.

Political Relationships

Local urban political institutions were usually mayors and city councils with members from the patrician class as well as members from merchant and craft guilds.

Only male heads of households could participate.

Clergy were exempt from all civic obligations.

Political Relationships (2)

Relations between local and central political authorities were delicate and precarious. Towns fiercely guarded their independence and privileges – central authorities were constantly striving to enlarge their influence.

The largest political institutions were either monarchies (Tudor England) or territorial conglomerates (Holy Roman Empire).

Political Relationships (3)

Internationally – there was one major political rivalry in Europe in the early 16th century – the clash between the Holy Roman Empire and France.

Charles V – the Holy Roman Emperor
1519-1556

Francis I – King of France 1515-1547

Next Class – Sept 25

Late Medieval Christendom
Beliefs, Institutions, Practices