

# Tolerance and Intolerance in Medieval Europe 500 to 1500

## Weeks 2 to 4: Jews, Heresy, and Inquisition

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### Week 2: Jews in Christian Europe

Remember...persecution occurred in specific places and times for specific reasons. Bottom up? Top down? What changed? R.I. Moore emphasizes the desire and capacity of institutions to search for, define, and exclude perceived enemies: record keeping, education, and the state understood in Christian terms. Today, we will look at the intertwined histories of Jews and Christians to better understand why the relationship deteriorated in the Middle Ages.

### Background: Jews and Christians in the Roman Period

- **Intertwined histories** Christianity began as a sect of Judaism; Jesus and all his early followers were Jews. Following his execution by the Romans, followers of Jesus increasingly became increasingly non-Jews.
- **The theological challenge** The existence of Jews was a theological challenge to Christianity. Shared scriptural foundations: whose Bible was it? Who was the “true Israel”? Competition over authority and the boundaries of community.
- **The Christian response** The *Adversus Iudaeos* tradition (“against the Jews”): claims of Jewish blindness and the eternal falseness of Judaism; appropriation of the Hebrew Bible, now the Old Testament, interpreted Christologically; anti-Jewish use of the prophets; accusations of deicide, as in Melito of Sardis.
- **Christianity and the Roman state** From Constantine I (emperor 306 to 337 CE), Christianity and the Roman state became increasingly intertwined. Early Christian criticisms of Judaism became state policy: Jews must be inferior to Christians. Restrictions developed on public office, military service, and proselytising; apostasy from Christianity could be punishable by death.

### Augustine and the Legacy of Antiquity

Augustine of Hippo (354 to 430), the most influential Latin theologian and Christian thinker of the period, developed the doctrine of Jewish witness. Jews were “the living letter of the Law”: their survival testified to the historical truth of Christianity. The legacy was deep social, cultural, and theological prejudice. But, thanks to Augustine’s position, Jews were to be a disliked minority, not subject to forcible conversion or physical violence. Toleration and hostility became the framework inherited by medieval Christian Europe. The Sicut Iudaeis tradition held that Jews could live and worship within Christian society, but in a subordinate position.

### Into the Middle Ages

The western empire was replaced by successor states in the fifth and sixth centuries. Jews lived in southern France and, increasingly from the tenth century, in northern France, the Rhineland, and England. Kings encouraged Jewish settlement and offered protection. Speyer, Worms, and Mainz became thriving communities and a centre of the Ashkenazi world. What changed?

## a) The Problem of Jewish Disbelief

Jewish disbelief had always been a problem for Christians, but it was exacerbated by shifts in Christian popular piety and education.

- **Popular piety** Growing emphasis on Jesus' suffering; development of the Marian cult. Who caused this suffering? Also, the Crusades! From 1096 onwards, crusading enthusiasm could intensify popular hostility to Jews.
- **The twelfth century Renaissance** An influx of Greco-Arabic philosophy, especially Aristotle, brought a new emphasis on reason and logic: scholasticism. Universities grew in influence. Rational doubts about religion; reason as the marker of humanity. Christianity is rational, so failure to believe is irrational, according to medieval Christians.
- **Why do Jews refuse to believe?** Christian writers argued that rabbinic teaching blinded Jews to the truth of their own scripture: the Talmud as a violation of "Jewish witness". Disputations and Talmud trials. Supernatural explanations also became prominent: allegations that Jews were allies of the devil and witches, and false accusations of ritual murder and host desecration.

## b) Jewish "Usefulness"

Early medieval monarchs encouraged Jewish settlement. Charters granted protection for trade and moneylending. Christians were restricted from lending at interest (usury); Jews faced restrictions on landholding and exclusion from guilds. Where these restrictions applied, money and other forms of moveable capital became particularly important. Christians needed liquidity or credit! Lending was often small scale and household based, and could be practised by women as well as men.

After 1100 CE, relations between kings and Jews shifted from protection towards exploitation. Kings were stronger; the money economy and credit were more important than ever. Tax the Jews! Then expel them! Then recall them... The rise of Christian, mostly Italian, banks in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries made Jewish lending less "useful" to some rulers.

## c) Changing Political Ideology

Early medieval kingdoms were closely identified with their kings and peoples: regnum Francorum. From around the tenth century, a shift towards the state as an abstract idea: Francia. From the twelfth century, growing bureaucracy, taxation, and new political ideologies to justify the state.

The community or state as a single body; growing emphasis on sacral monarchy, with the king as God's representative on earth. Louis IX's Sainte Chapelle (1248), built to house the crown of thorns, illustrates this connection. As Christian identity became tied to political identity, Jews were increasingly viewed not only as religious outsiders, but as threats to the unity of the community.

## Week 3: Origins of Heresy

Finish up Jews in the Middle Ages; introduce Christian heresy and heretics. Christianity as a religion cares about belief! Salvation is tied directly to what you believe; true salvation comes in the next world, not in this world.

### Ancient Heresy

Until the sixth century, major aspects of Christianity remained debated! Orthodoxy: the winners. Heretics: the losers. What is heresy and what is orthodoxy was decided by people in history. As “orthodoxy” was debated, defined, and enforced, those left behind became heretics from the perspective of the “winners”. No one thought they were a heretic!

The application of Roman law, including the Theodosian Code (438 CE) and Justinianic Code (529 to 534 CE), made heresy a legal category subject to severe penalties: exclusion from office and legal privileges; bans on worship and assembly; confiscation of property; exile; and, in some cases, death.

### You Might Be a Heretic If...

- **You are a Christian.** Your views contradict accepted articles of Christian faith, as defined by those who decide what is orthodox.
- **You persist.** Having been told that your views are erroneous, you continue to espouse them or teach them to others.
- **You are successfully labelled as such.** Opponents claim that you look or act “weird”, have conversations with the devil, or sacrifice children. Arguments, vilification, marginalisation... But who is doing the labelling?

### Early Medieval Heresy?

After the major debates over the Trinity and the nature of Christ in Late Antiquity, relatively little “heresy” appears in the surviving record for centuries. The Church was decentralised, and there was no comparable centralised way of observing and enforcing correct belief. This does not mean people were imperfectly Christian!

## **Week 4: Medieval Heresy, Society, and Reactions**

After centuries of relative silence, new heretics! Dualists: the Cathars. Apostolic imitators: the Waldensians. Reaction: preaching, inquisition, and the mendicant orders. The themes today are wealth and power.

### **Context: Later Medieval Society**

- **Growth of towns, trade, and money** Rising lay literacy; new wealth and changing communities.
- **Gregorian Reform** From the eleventh century: purify the Church. Abolish simony; end lay investiture; enforce clerical celibacy; assert the primacy of Rome.
- **Good Christians?** Medieval people were increasingly concerned to be good Christians. But what does this mean? Anxiety about sin and salvation; concern with a rich, corrupt Church.

### **Dualists: The “Cathars”**

Also called “Albigensians”, or the Good Men and Good Women. Twelfth to fourteenth centuries; southern France and northern Italy. Our sources describe a dualistic theology: the physical world is evil; the spiritual world is good.

The perfecti, spiritual elites, were men and women who had received the consolamentum. Ritual purity, poverty, wandering preaching, abstinence from sex, and strict dietary restrictions. Killing was bad; products of sex were bad. Sounds weird? Actually, a radical but totally comprehensible version of Christianity...

Local versus wider power? The Roman Church and kings of France confronted communities embedded in local society. Early efforts to oppose them were hampered by local and international politics: the papacy and empire; the counts of Toulouse and Trencavel; the kings of France and local challengers.

### **Apostolic Imitators: The Waldensians**

Peter Waldo (Valdes), a wealthy merchant from Lyon, commissioned a translation of the Bible into the vernacular. “I read my Bible! This world doesn’t look like the one described by Christ! I want to live the *vita apostolica*!” He gave away his money and embraced poverty and preaching.

Waldensians began as orthodox preachers who wanted to fight heresy through preaching. But preaching required episcopal approval. A question of authority: who had it? Scripture? The institutional Church? Do priests have to be good people? They failed to secure approval for continued preaching and were declared heretical; increasingly radical ideas developed.

### **Challenge and Response**

The problem was not that people were less Christian; they wanted to be more Christian. Lay preaching and piety; growing literacy; the *vita apostolica*. The Roman Church and secular authorities disrupted local, decentralised communities of belief and practice. Growth of towns, merchants, and money disrupted traditional models of society.

Two answers: monastic reform and preaching; and inquisition!

### **What Do We Need? Reform! When do we Need it? NOW!**

Benedictine monks took vows of obedience, stability, and conversion (*conversatio morum*). Monasteries were “factories of prayer”, generally isolated from the world. Gradually, they attracted wealth and people for reasons other than piety. What do we need? Reform!

Cluny (910): papal protection, strict discipline, and reform. Success brought daughter houses across Europe, then wealth and power. Reform again! Carthusians (1084); Cistercians (1098). A simple life: work, prayer, self-denial, poverty. Again, growth brought wealth, authority, and influence.

## **The Mendicants!**

In the context of heresy, urbanisation, and wealth, a new kind of religious life was needed. Successful applicants would exemplify the *vita apostolica*, credibly preach against the Church's enemies, and live in cities or be able to travel. Both education and poverty! Mendicare means "to beg".

- **Franciscans** Initial papal approval in 1209. Order of Friars Minor, or Greyfriars. Francis of Assisi (1181 to 1226): rich guy! Gives it up! Preaching! Remind you of anyone?
- **Dominicans** Papal approval in 1216. Order of Preachers, or Blackfriars. Dominic de Guzmán (1170 to 1221) encountered the "Cathars"; their mission was anti-heretical from the start.

Both embraced asceticism, learning, and purity; lived in urban areas; travelled; preached; and operated under papal authority. They quickly established themselves in emerging universities as theologians and lawyers. Problems: growing wealth, power, and influence. Communal poverty? We don't own anything, but can I "use" your yacht? Some Franciscans insisted on more radical poverty; groups were condemned as heretical.

## **Inquisition: A History of Law and Power**

Inquisitio is a judicial method: inquiry or investigation. Episcopal inquisition developed after 1184 (*Ad abolendam*); papal inquisitors were appointed in the 1230s. Later forms included the Spanish Inquisition (1478) and Roman Inquisition (sixteenth century). To understand, we must nerd out on the history of law! The Dangers of Heresy

The heretic's soul was at risk; the "infection" of heresy could spread. Orthodoxy meant obedience, a virtue. Social, religious, political, and economic concerns were intertwined: a challenge to one was a challenge to all. This required investigation! Specialist inquisitors identified, examined, and prosecuted suspected heretics. Open violence also played a role: the Albigensian Crusade (1209 to 1229), beginning with Béziers in 1209.

## Selected Bibliography

The following books provide starting points for the topics covered in Weeks 2 to 4.

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