Panel: “Heresy, Inquisition, and the State”

Jessie Cortesi

Title: Authority and Orthodoxy: The Establishment of Catholic Temporal Power
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Suzanne LaVere
Paper written for: History J495: Senior Seminar “Medieval Heresy” (Fall 2013)

Jessie Cortesi is a senior at IPFW. She is a History major and a Medieval Studies minor. She is currently working as the Assistant Book Review Editor for the journal of the Business History Conference, Enterprise and Society, an Oxford University Press quarterly. Together with Dr. Richard Weiner she is co-authoring an article on Andre Gunder Frank for publication in OUP’s forthcoming Encyclopedia of World Poverty. In addition, she was selected as one of this year’s Outstanding History Seniors.

Abstract

Religious persecution of “heretics” by the Catholic Church that characterizes the middle ages had its roots in power struggles centuries prior. In the first centuries of Christianity, Christians fought amongst themselves for interpretive and doctrinal authority. Heterodoxy didn’t stand a chance in the Middle Ages; in Late Antiquity nothing was certain. Everything changed when, in 380, Emperor Theodosius legally adopted Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. A minority group that had once only held sway among its own, Christians were now in a position to influence the most powerful man and government in the world. Before long, bishops would rise to a higher station than the emperor himself. Previously, Christian officials wielded only religious authority, but after Theodosius’ Edict they would command temporal authority as well. It was not long before Theodosius’ commitment to rooting out wrong belief was put to the test; only five years later in 385 the first execution for heresy took place.

As Roman imperial rule waned in the west, the Catholic sphere of influence grew. In 410, with the imperial government safely retreated from the city, the Bishop of Rome was left to negotiate with invaders. Increasingly, the emperor in the west had little real power; the official seat of the Empire was in Constantinople. As Goths settled in Gaul and threatened Roman borders, Christian officials campaigned to bring these groups into the Catholic Church. The focus was different in the east where a powerful emperor still held sway. There, Christian leaders and their doctrinal interpretations remained inextricably tied to currents of politics and the will of the emperor. Gradually and over the course of many disputes, the eastern and western Christians drifted farther and farther apart in doctrine. In the west, the Bishop of Rome became inarguably more powerful than and more influential over the rulers of the kingdoms that arose after the fall of the empire. The changing role of bishops, the reservation of harshest punishments for those who relapsed from Catholicism, and the successful formation of a myth of unity despite the reality of faction are the critical factors from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages visible in shaping the development of widespread heretical persecution later in the medieval period.

Bibliographical Note
In the course of my research, the Fordham University website’s Internet History Sourcebooks (Ancient and Medieval), proved to be a valuable resource of primary sources. *Gelasius I on Spiritual and Temporal Power, 494* is quoted from the Fordham Medieval Sourcebook. The Oxford University Press collection *Documents of the Early Church* (Oxford, 1999) was a fruitful resource for Church documents. I referenced a wide variety of works among secondary sources; a few of the most frequently cited were David Foster’s *Early Christian Thinkers* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2010), Peter Iver Kaufman’s *Church, Book, and Bishop: Conflict and Authority in Early Latin Christianity* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996), and Raymond Van Dam’s *The Roman Revolution of Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). R.A. Markus is quoted on Donatism from his *Christianity in the Roman World* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1974).
Joshua Fisher

Title: John Wyclif: Papal Reformer
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Suzanne LaVere
Paper written for: History J495: Senior Seminar “Medieval Heresy” (Fall 2013)

Joshua Fisher is a senior and will be graduating in May with distinction with a B.A. in History. He is especially interested in the periods of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, specifically the development of religion and the resulting debates, and how these phenomena impacted both the secular and spiritual realms. He has been accepted for graduate study at Western Michigan University and the University of Tennessee, although he has yet to make a final decision on his immediate future. His career goal is to become an educator and researcher at the collegiate level. Joshua is a member of The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi and is a founding member of IPFW’s Latin Club. He would like to thank those within the IPFW faculty who have helped his development, and his friends and family for their support throughout his collegiate career.

Abstract

John Wyclif has been an enigmatic figure since his death in 1384, and many of his notions are still being examined and debated today. One such example is his opinion on the papacy and, more specifically, the question of if Wyclif supported the abolition of the office. Many contemporaries, 16th century Anglicans who championed Wyclif as the so-called ‘Morningstar of the Reformation,’ and even some modern historians have argued that Wyclif was, in his true belief, antipapal and that evidence of this is found in Wyclif’s own words. This paper details the evolution of Wyclif’s career as a thinker, not just in an ecclesiastical capacity, but in a philosophical one as well, in an attempt to demonstrate that any antipapal polemics which can be attributed to Wyclif were the result of outside influences and anger over certain circumstances. I argue that while there are a few polemics (all of which came at the very end of Wyclif’s life) that can be construed as antipapal, the overwhelming majority of Wyclif’s writing on the papacy supports the notion that he was a reformer and not an abolitionist. This paper looks at specific examples from Wyclif’s contemporaries, later Wycliffites who either misunderstood or exaggerated Wyclif’s position when facing heresy accusations, and modern historians, all of whom have focused on a very small portion of Wyclif’s work. This paper makes an attempt to either discredit the sources for these claims or to demonstrate how the evidence has been misinterpreted. I have examined several of Wyclif’s own tracts which relate to the papacy, and I have made an attempt to use Wyclif’s own words to establish that he was not antipapal at his core. My argument, rather, is that those who have portrayed Wyclif as antipapal (such as William Courtenay, Archbishop of Canterbury during the life of Wyclif and Dominican inquisitors charged with questioning perceived heretics) have done so to promote their own arguments. This paper details how the historiography on the subject has evolved over time and also explains what more recent historians are saying on the subject. Ultimately, the aim of this paper is to show that Wyclif was not the true ‘Morningstar of the Reformation,’ but rather was a papal reformer whose arguments have been used for various ends depending on time and place.

Bibliographical Note
As this research attempts to define the true opinion of John Wyclif concerning the papacy, many of the sources used in research are the writings of Wyclif himself. Some of these sources were found in translation, and some had to be translated into Modern English. Latin and Old English courses offered at IPFW proved invaluable in this research. Beyond Wyclif’s writings, the bulk of the research focused on the words of those who have attempted to portray Wyclif as an antipapist, or as he is commonly known “The Morning Star of the Reformation.” These sources included those written by contemporaries of Wyclif, heresy trial transcripts from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the words of Anglicans writing during the English Reformation, and modern scholars who have either misinterpreted Wyclif’s writings or simply used old sources in their work. Fiona Somerset and J. Patrick Hornbeck II are examples of modern scholars whose conclusions on Wyclif are similar to those of Joshua.
Rebecca Jacobs

Title: Spain’s Complex Image: The Connections Between the Black Legend and the Spanish Inquisition
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Suzanne LaVere
Paper written for: History J495: Senior Seminar “Medieval Heresy” (Fall 2013)

Rebecca Jacobs is a senior at IPFW. She is a History and Anthropology major with certificates in International Studies and Native American studies. She is a recipient of the Chancellor’s and Withers scholarships. She ran for IPFW women’s cross-country and track and field teams for three years. She is the president of IPFW’s Anthropology honors society, Lambda Alpha Theta. Rebecca’s special academic interests include ethnohistory and the study of indigenous cultures, particularly those in South America.

Abstract

The Spanish Inquisition: an evil, dominating institution imposed upon the people of Spain, used to persecute, torture, and kill Protestants that is just one illustration of the barbarous, greedy, and backwards Spanish character. This popular image or any variation of this image was an untrue and exaggerated image that often characterized the Spanish Inquisition and the nation of Spain until the twentieth century. The goal of this paper was to trace the origins of the Black Legend (the traditional literature that criticized the people, history, and national character of Spain due to cruel treatment of Native Americans in the country’s conquests, and for participation in heinous acts that demonstrated negative aspects of Spanish character, such as the Spanish Inquisition) through the Spanish Inquisition to illustrate how the Black Legend was created and how this ideology warped public perception of the image of Spain and the Spanish Inquisition. This paper concludes that the negative image that Spain acquired, which arose from the Black Legend, was a result of the subjective writings of English Protestants angered by religious differences, Dutch Protestants in conflict with Spain over the Revolts of the Netherlands, Spanish missionaries, like Bartolome Las Casas, who were disheartened by the treatment of indigenous people during Spanish conquest, and criticisms from French Enlightenment thinkers, such as Montesquieu, who used examples of Spanish fanaticism and barbarianism to account for Spain’s lack of progress during this time. As a result of the works from these sources, the Black Legend has created a bias that has affected how the popular audience, as well as how historians have viewed the Spanish Inquisition. As more and more has been discovered about the Black Legend and its relationship to Spain, the historiography of Spain and the Spanish Inquisition has rapidly evolved to illustrate a less biased, more comprehensive picture of Spain from the late fifteenth to early nineteenth centuries. Using primary and secondary sources from the time period, as well as secondary sources on the Spanish Inquisition and Black Legend from more recent scholars, this paper traces how opinions have changed about both the Black Legend and the Spanish Inquisition through academia and public opinion and also examines the complex relationship between the Black Legend and the Spanish Inquisition.

Bibliographical Note
Rebecca made extensive use of secondary sources from the time period to trace the relationship of the Black Legend and the image of Spain, as well as supplemented these with primary sources from the time period, such as the writings of Bartolome de Las Casas. She also used contemporary secondary sources from scholars like Henry Kamen and B. Netanyahu to examine the Spanish Inquisition, as well as used anthologies that helped trace the effects of the Black Legend through each region and time period discussed in the paper.