THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION IN GERMANY

This course is intended to introduce upper-level undergraduates to historical knowledge about the Protestant Reformation and to test the assumptions underlying that knowledge. It will equip you with a solid grasp of the history and the current state of scholarly knowledge about the Reformation, an understanding of the main difficulties we face in studying the history of the Reformation, and the ability to formulate a well-informed research project of your own design. The method of the course consists of reading historical literature about the Reformation and reflecting on the issues raised by that reading. For reasons to be explained in class, you will not be required to read any primary sources.

The format of the course will be flexible. I will generally lead the class with a systematic commentary on the readings. I will often refer to specific pages, and I will read particularly important passages out loud. It will therefore be useful if you bring your own copy of the readings to class, so that you can read and mark the passages to which I refer yourself. If there is anything you do not understand, feel free to ask questions at any time.

I will presuppose that you have done the readings ahead of class. If you do not do the readings before class, you will be wasting your time. But doing the readings is merely the first step. Even if you read the assignments thoroughly, you will find yourself left with many unanswered questions. Indeed, the more thoroughly you do the readings, the more your questions will multiply. The point of this course is not to put an end to questions. It rather is to put you into a position to ask questions that are well informed, and to show you ways to go about answering them systematically.

So as to maintain a clear focus, the course is limited to the Reformation in Germany. So as to develop a broad perspective, we will pay much attention to classic writings about the Reformation by which current scholarship continues to be informed, often in ways that are not openly acknowledged and of which historians themselves are not always aware. The course emphasizes variety over depth, so as to expose you to as many different angles of perception as possible. You will be asked to read a great many articles, chapters, and selections from books. If the reading seems overwhelming to you, remember this: the purpose of this course is not for you to master every detail of the subject matter addressed by the readings, but to gain a grasp on the different kinds of approaches that have been taken to the Reformation by different historians over time.

The course is divided into three main parts. In part one, we will examine a few pieces that will give you a sense of the issues uppermost on the minds of Reformation historians about two generations ago and the way in which those issues were framed. In part two, we will turn to classical statements
about the Reformation and read them in chronological order in order to develop a sense both of what has changed and what has remained the same in the study of the Reformation since the origins of professional history in the nineteenth century (Hegel, Ranke, Marx, Engels, Weber, Troeltsch, and Febvre). In part three we will examine what some leading historians have written about the Reformation since the 1960s (Bernd Moeller, Heiko Oberman, Francis Oakley, Thomas Brady, Gerald Strauss, Bob Scribner, John Bossy, Wolfgang Reinhard, and others) in order to show how the agenda of Reformation historians has changed.

This course is not intended to give you a comprehensive overview of Reformation history as a whole. The readings are substantial, but they are focused on a few important historians and a few topics of particularly telling debate. There is a large range of issues that do not even appear on this syllabus. Some of the most obvious are the history of women and gender, the expansion of Europe, science, art, economic history, and military history. The reason for their omission is not that they do not matter for understanding the Reformation or that they have not received a lot of attention, but that no attempt at coverage could overcome the constraints imposed on us by a ten-week quarter. It is my hope that the topics and the historians I have chosen will make it easier for you to see the parallels to developments that have taken place in historical work by other historians on other subjects, should you ever decide to turn to such other historical work.

If you do not know the basic facts about the Reformation, I recommend that you read pp. 372-421 in William H. McNeill, History of Western Civilization: A Handbook, 6th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). This is a very brief and effective summary of conventional textbook knowledge. If you have enough time, I recommend highly that you read Euan Cameron, The European Reformation, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). This is probably the best general textbook about the Reformation that is currently available.

All of the required readings are on reserve in Regenstein Library. Most of them are available on electronic reserve. I have also asked the Seminary Co-op Bookstore to make the following books available for purchase:


One book that is central to this course is unfortunately out of print, namely Bernd Moeller, Imperial Cities and the Reformation, trans. H. C. Erik Midelfort and Mark U. Edwards, Jr. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972). Since we are going to read all of it, and copyright laws do not permit me to put entire books on electronic reserve, I cannot offer you more than the few copies that are on reserve in
Regenstein Library. Thankfully you can purchase copies for a very reasonable price from third-party sellers at Amazon or http://www.abebooks.com/.

If you have any trouble getting your hands on the readings, please let me know.

Requirements:

1. Reading the assigned readings in advance of class and attending class. I expect every student taking this course to attend every class and to be prepared to state their understanding of the readings in class (10% of the grade)

2. A paper of 5-10 pages (40% of the grade). Unless you make other arrangements with me, the paper must be focused on one or more of the books listed under the heading "Major Works of Scholarship" in the Guide to Further Reading that I have placed on Chalk. For details, see the separate handout on the paper assignment that I have placed on Chalk. Two hard copies of the paper are due in my office, Harper Memorial Library West Tower room 602 (or in my mail slot next to the entrance to the suite in which HMW 602 is located), no later than 12:00 noon on Tuesday, March 3. The grade for late papers will be lowered by steps. An A paper will get an A- if I receive it by noon on March 4. If I receive it by noon the following day, it will get a B+, and so on. Missed papers will be given zero points. I will consider requests for an extension until the end of class on Wednesday, February 25.

3. A take home final examination on a topic to be announced at the end of the course (40% of the grade). I will give you a choice of several questions about the material covered in this course and ask you to write a 5-page paper (double-spaced) answering one of those questions. Two hard copies of your final will be due in my office HMW 602 no later than 12:00 noon, Tuesday, March 17. Late papers will receive an automatic grade of F.

Study questions:

For each meeting of the class, I have given you a few study questions. These are intended to focus your attention on specific issues raised by the readings for that class while you are doing the readings. That will make it easier for you to prepare for class efficiently. The study questions are not intended to restrict you in any sort of way, nor should you feel compelled to come up with convincing answers. What matters is not that you find answers, but that you examine the readings for passages that may throw some light on the questions and ask yourself what light that is. That will help you to digest the readings and to develop the understanding of Reformation history with which this course is meant to equip you.

The study questions are specific to the readings for each class. There are also generic study questions that you should always keep in mind because they apply to all of the readings you do when you are doing history, namely:

1. Who is the author?
2. When and where did he or she live?
3. Why was s/he interested in the Reformation?
4. Was s/he a Protestant, a Catholic, a Jew, an atheist, an agnostic, or what?
5. With whom did s/he study?
6. What else is s/he known for?
7. What else did s/he write?
9. Who studied with him/her?

In order to answer these questions, you will normally have to go beyond the readings (in some cases, and for some of these questions, the readings themselves contain good clues). You are not required to do so, but you will discover that it is extremely useful if you do. For introductory purposes it is perfectly sufficient if you go to Google or Wikipedia to find out who Geoffrey Elton was, for example, and what he is known for. You can't trust Google or Wikipedia to give you reliable information, but they can help you to look more effectively for reliable information. If you want to go further, you will need to do research. For starters, search JSTOR for obituaries or historiographical reviews, and consult the guide to Basic Tools of Research that I have placed on Chalk.

Schedule of classes and readings:

A) INTRODUCTION

(1): Introduction to the course Jan. 5


**Study Questions:** Bainton and Moeller deal with the same basic questions, namely, what historians have so far learned about the Reformation, and what they still need to find out. How do their answers to those questions differ?


**Study questions:** Each of these three authors portrays the Reformation in slightly different ways. What are the differences between their portrayals, and what, if anything, do they agree on?

B) CLASSIC STATEMENTS

xi-xvi: "Charles Hegel's Preface" and "Contents"
341-6: "The German World – The Principle of Spiritual Freedom"
412-27: "The Reformation"
Study the table of contents and scan the rest of the volume if you can

Study questions: Broadly speaking, Hegel distinguishes between spirit and matter, and he believes that true liberty consists of uniting the two. How did the Reformation advance that goal in his account, and how did it differ from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution?

January 19, Martin Luther King Day – no class

(5): Ranke: Objectivity I (Politics, State, Individual, Action) Jan. 21
vii-xiv: "Author's Preface" and "Contents"
111-57: Book II, chapter I: "Origin of the Religious Opposition"
193-223: Book II, chapter III: "First Defection from the Papacy, 1519-1520"
Scan 223-45: Book II, chapter IV: "Diet of Worms, A.D. 1521"
Study the table of contents and scan the rest of the volume if you can

Study questions: Ranke claims to write the history of the Reformation, and not to be engaged in philosophy. Yet his work seems to echo the ideas of Hegel. How does it do so?

vii-xiv: Preface
1-11: Section I [Germany circa 1500]
12-28: Section II [Luther versus Muenzer]
79-83: Section VII [Effects and Nature of the Peasants' War]
Scan the rest of the volume, including the introduction
3-6: Karl Marx, "Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy"
53-65: Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction"
761-765: Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Joseph Bloch"

Study questions: Marx and Engels claimed to turn Hegel right side up. Engels' account of the Reformation is a good illustration of what that means. How does Engels turn Hegel "right side up," and how does his account of the Reformation differ from Ranke's?

(7): Weber: The Search for a New Synthesis I (Sociology) Jan. 28
"Author's Introduction"
"2: The Spirit of Capitalism"
"3: Luther's Conception of the Calling: Task of the Investigation"
"4: The Religious Foundations of Worldly Asceticism"—first and last pages
"5: Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism"

Scan the rest of the volume

If you are interested in an outstanding historical account of the relationship between religion and capitalism that is highly critical of Weber and offers a completely different perspective, read Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, "Religion, the Reformation and Social Change," in The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and Other Essays (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 1-45

Study questions: Weber may be described as a German idealist who took the Marxist challenge to idealism seriously—and in the process laid the foundations for an influential form of sociology. How did Weber try to meet that challenge? How does his account of the Reformation differ from the one given by Engels and Ranke?

(8): Troeltsch: The Search for a New Synthesis II (Theology)  Feb. 2

v-ix: "Preface"
1-8: "Introduction"
43-57: "The Meaning of 'Protestantism'"
57-88: "Protestantism and the Modern World: Points of Contrast"
171-207: "Protestantism and Modern Religious Feeling"

Study questions: Like Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch was convinced that it was impossible to understand the Reformation without studying society objectively. But his understanding of the Reformation was quite different from Max Weber's. How did it differ?

(9): Febvre: The Search for a New Synthesis III (History)  Feb. 4


vii-ix: "Contents"
1-8: "General Introduction"
335-53: "Religion's Domination of Life"
455-64: "Conclusion: A Century that Wanted to Believe"

Study questions: Lucien Febvre is known as one of the two founders (the other was Marc Bloch) of the Annales, a French historical journal after which the most influential school of historical thought in the twentieth century has been named. How does Febvre's account of the Reformation differ from the various approaches you have read so far? Is it idealist or materialist, or neither? What, if anything, is new about it?
C) THE FORMATION OF A NEW AGENDA

(10): The Reformation and the Cities  Feb. 9
Study questions: Bernd Moeller's essay on imperial cities is viewed as a revolutionary new departure in the study of the Reformation. This is because Moeller was the first to focus so explicitly on the role played by cities. But what exactly was new about the points that Moeller made? And how do his points relate to the issues we have discussed since the beginning of this course?

(11): Reformation Social History  Feb. 11
Robert W. Scribner, "Is There a Social History of the Reformation?" Social History 2 nr. 4 (1977): 483-505
E. William Monter, "Reformation History and Social History," Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte 72 (1981): 5-12
Thomas A. Brady, Jr., "Social History," in Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research, ed. Steven E. Ozment (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), 161-81
Study questions: What is the "social history" of the Reformation? How does it differ from other kinds of history? And what are the central problems that it faces?

(12): Religion and Popular Piety Before the Reformation  Feb. 16
1-7: "Introduction"
423-28: "Postscript: The Catholicity of Nominalism"
Francis Oakley, "Religious and Ecclesiastical Life on the Eve of the Reformation," in Reformation Europe, ed. S. Ozment (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), 5-32
Study questions: Historians continue to disagree about the question whether the Reformation was an unpredictable explosion that might never have happened if had not been for a certain unusual combination of circumstances, or an inevitable reaction to the corruption of the late medieval church. What light do these articles shed on the condition of the late medieval church and its supposed corruption?
(13): The Reformation and Humanism  
Feb. 18


**Study questions:** Historians have traditionally argued that the Reformation was sharply opposed to the Renaissance and in particular to Humanism. What exactly is Humanism (Kristeller gives an authoritative answer)? Why did historians use to oppose it to the Reformation? And why do they seem to have stopped doing so?

(14): Success and Failure  
Feb. 23


**Study questions:** Some historians believe that the Reformation failed. Gerald Strauss is one of them. What are his reasons for thinking so? Why does James Kittelson disagree with Gerald Strauss? And what does Geoffrey Parker add to the debate?

(15): Popular Religion  
Feb. 25


154-74: "The Legend of the Christian Middle Ages"

210-14: "A Revision of the Traditional Problematic"


**Study questions:** In the wake of the move towards the study of social history, historians have become very interested in understanding the religious beliefs of ordinary people. But they do not at all agree what those beliefs were. What does Jean Delumeau have to say about the religious beliefs of ordinary people? Does John Bossy agree with him? And if not, why not? And what does Robert Scribner add to the debate?
(16): **The Radical Reformation**

March 2

846-65: "The Radical Reformation: A New Perspective"

3-17: "Introduction: Interpretations, Problems, and New Perspectives"
187-93: "Conclusion: The Revolution of the Common Man"


**Study questions:** Why did George H. Williams write a book about the radical reformation, and what does he mean by that term? Why did Peter Blickle call his book *The Revolution of 1525* rather than a history of the peasants war or a history of the radical reformation? How does his account of the peasants war differ from that of Engels? What are the differences between terms like Anabaptism, radical reformation, popular reformation, and revolution?

**THE PAPER IS DUE IN HMW 602 NO LATER THAN 12:00 NOON TODAY**

March 3

(17): **Confessionalization**

March 4


1-9: "Introduction"
174-85: "Conclusion"


**Study questions:** What do Reinhard, Schilling, and Hsia mean by "confessionalization"? Why do they think it is a useful term? How does it change our understanding of the Reformation?

(18): **The State of the Art**

March 10


Study questions: These readings are authoritative in the sense that they are taken from writings of historians of the Reformation who have played a decisive role in shaping our understanding of the Reformation today. They are institutionalizing that understanding in handbooks and encyclopedias. Do they agree with one another? How does their understanding of the Reformation differ from that of Hegel, Ranke, and Engels? What have historians learned about the Reformation since the days of Roland Bainton? What have they not learned? What should they try to find out?

(19): Conclusion: Where are We Now?  
March 12


Study questions: What do you know now that you did not know before you took this course? What can you now do that you could not do before?