

Title

Things Not Seen: Faith and Reason in Christian History

Description

Modern thought often contrasts reason and faith, knowledge and belief, science and religion, but people in the ancient and medieval west had no problem integrating their rational, practical, and spiritual lives. This series will explore the relationship between faith, doubt, and rational inquiry in the Christian west. Participants will examine how pre-modern people reconciled reason and faith, learn how and why modern thinkers ultimately separated them, and discuss the changing relationship between reason and faith in the 21st century.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the series, participants should be able to:

- 1) identify the ancient traditions that influenced Christianity's formation
- 2) understand the historical context of early Christianity and its later development
- 3) compare and contrast modern and pre-modern ideas about faith and its purpose
- 4) discuss the integration of the spiritual with the rational and practical aspects of life

April 7 In the Beginning: What are the roots of Christianity?

This session will introduce the series and explore the ancient philosophical and religious traditions outside of Judaism that influenced early Christian doctrine and practice, including the Roman mysteries, Persian Zoroastrianism, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Participants will be asked to discuss the degree to which these other influences may have helped shape Christian ideas about reason and faith.

April 14 Begotten, Not Made: How did Christianity develop?

This session will explore the Jesus movement and the growth of the early church, including the Great Persecution, Constantine's conversion, the first heresies, and the importance of the Nicene Creed. Participants will be asked to discuss if they think the church's becoming a powerful, multinational institution ultimately helped or hurt Christian ideals, especially the emphasis on faith and belief.

April 28 The New Life: Can there be rational thought in an age of faith?

This session will discuss medieval Christianity, the scholastic movement, and medieval scholars' attempts to reconcile the Classical past with the Christian present, including Peter Abelard's assertion that "by doubting we come to investigate, and by investigating we recognize the truth." Participants will be asked to discuss how doubt and rational inquiry relate to faith and belief.

May 5 Schism & Skepticism: Who separated reason from faith?

This session will discuss the Protestant Reformation, the Wars of Religion, and the Enlightenment, including skepticism, relativism, and the push to separate church and state. Starting with Martin Luther's assertion that "faith must trample underfoot all reason, sense, and understanding," participants will be asked to discuss modern ideas about the relationship between faith and reason and the pros and cons of skepticism and relativism in the modern world.

May 12 Devotion & Desire: Why has the search for happiness failed?

[Corinne away at a conference; Rev. Abshire to present(?)]

This session will discuss the changing relationship between reason and faith from the Enlightenment through the twentieth century, including existentialism, nihilism and postmodernism. Participants will be asked to discuss the reasons why we tend to focus on happiness instead of fulfillment and whether or not this is the result of having reason without faith.

May 19 Illumined by Its Light: Can we reconcile reason and religion?

The conclusion to this series will consist of a full-length discussion of the relationship between reason and faith today, whether it is possible to reconcile the biggest rifts (church and state, science and religion) in a positive way, and how participants can integrate reason and faith in their own lives.