New Directions in the History of Early Modern Religious Violence
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- Violence is not simply a means to an ends it is transcendent. There is a mythic quality of redemption through violence - the ultimate expression of faith for fundamentalists for example.
- Shock and Awe - pamphlet published in 1996 (used in 2003 by Blair and Bush) - overwhelming enemy by the brilliance of the show - borrows from religious language - fear and trembling at the sight of God. Language of religion has returned to modern violence.
- Europe has a long history of religious violence which continues today.
- Modernity and secularism have often been seen as intertwined however we seem to be living in a new age of faith - especially beyond Europe. A parallel can be seen in historical France.
- Why did France not become Protestant? Answer can be found largely in violence. Massacre as a word was invented in C16th - literally to butcher. Looking at how violence has been viewed and expressed in the past is key.
- Violence has not been a theme for critical analysis until very recently. Violence and military history are considered separate. The history of the reformation for example has been told as a history of enlightenment rather than one of violence. Better for example to focus on the Renaissance than the dark period of French history in the C16th.
- Other approaches have focused on the violence of class struggle rather than violence itself.
- The history of Ireland has also seen violence expunged from the record. By 1690 Protestants owned 80% of land in Ireland. The history of Ireland has ignored this violence and have focused instead on heroes and martyrs. A sectarian history and justification. The massacre of 1641 has become central to the creation of a black legend of Irish history.
- Irish history of the 1970s has avoided themes of violence for obvious reasons. The study of religious violence was not really looked at until the 1990s
- "On the Origin of Monks" (1545) image source and text shows the devil literally shitting monks - gives an insight into the popular view of the monks during the reformation period.
- Natalie Zemon Davis "The Rights of Violence" (1973) argues that the Protestants made war on the images and altars whereas the Catholics made war on people. Catholic belief was that heretics polluted the Christian body. The Catholics desecrated the corpses of the heretics eg. Massacre of Tours 1562 people being drowned - cleansed by holy water - or burned - cleansing by fire. Religious violence was a culture clash between two opposing views of religion.
- These ideas can be seen in Ireland. Depositions project (1641 uprising) catalogue s what happened to the Protestants in the country. The English fought with very different tactics
in Ireland - killing of civilians, scorched earth, martial law etc. Was this a policy of racial discrimination?
* A pewterer’s drawing of a man being ducked in 1604 suggests that violence was fairly common and every day but these acts did not always lead to mass violence, pogroms etc.
* People have very complex relationships in this period. They did not just belong to their religious group. Lots of the religious language of the ordinary people is about cooperation and tolerance. This challenges Davis’ view. Peace and harmony do not really leave historical records which makes this hard to find.
* Civil War privatises violence - it allows people to gain from the violence that is happening. The CIA are looking into these issues in Afghanistan. The most dangerous situation is Syria is caused by those people who benefit from the state of war. Historically, French communities in C16th were not continually divided by religious differences. Civil War allowed elites to capitalise on popular violence, benefit and perpetuate war. Religious division is as much a consequence as a cause of violence.
* French Protestants like to portray themselves as victims of violence. Calvinism saw itself as a rational attack on images. Calvin modified the word society to by a noun - previously society was a set of relationships. A godly reformation to create a new society became a justification for the violence of the religious wars - targeting of kings and images of kings as an abomination to god's law. Protestants called for a new type of equality - kings now become a target for assassination.
* French wars of religion not just a clash of 2 cultures but of 2 views of society. Many commentators opposed tolerance on the grounds that it would divide the nation. A focus on the state.