

The Wars of Religion



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Note: This article was released prior to the 2015-2016 revision to the AP European History exam. In order to see what is still in the Course and Exam Description, explore the course framework [here](#).

The 89 years between the commencement of the Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis in 1559 and the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648 were marred by true holy wars. The last truly dynastic war of the 1500s, the Hapsburg-Valois Wars, ended in 1559 and made way for a series of conflicts fought in a large part over religion.

This AP European History crash course for the Wars of Religion will explore those 89 years pretty thoroughly. However, with the redesign of the AP European History exam that will begin in the 2015-2016 school year, you can concentrate less on learning a breadth of knowledge on the Wars of Religion in a superficial manner. Now, you can succeed by studying certain pertinent aspects of this concept in European History.

The Wars of Religion Cont.

The Wars of Religion

From 1560 through 1648, a multitude of European powers initiated wars on purely religious bases. The qualifier “purely religious bases” is necessary here because subsequent wars would also be considered religious conflicts, though they are not considered directly related to the Wars of Religion. However, many of these subsequent wars were religious, as well as apparently political.

Several separate conflicts took place throughout this time period. Spain attempted to combat Protestantism in Europe and Islam in the Mediterranean. French Catholics began something of a civil war against the French Calvinists, the Huguenots. The Holy Roman Empire wanted to re-impose Catholicism in Germany. The Calvinist Netherlands wanted out from under Spanish rule. The English Puritans and Anglicans fought a civil war.

In the next section, we’ll explore these religious wars and give you some key points throughout the Wars of Religion to guide your preparation for the AP European History exam. We find it very useful to separate these conflicts by the countries involved.

The Spanish Crusades

Spain’s Philip II made central to his reign for the re-imposition of Catholicism in Western Europe. Under Philip, Spain dominated Europe; Spain entered its Golden Age.

Spain was involved in a few international conflicts.

First, Spain fought the Turks in the Mediterranean. The Ottoman-Venetian Wars were fought specifically to provide security for Christians in the region. In essence, this conflict ceased in 1571 at the Battle of Lepanto. The Turks suffered massive losses. Spain stopped the spread of Islam in the Mediterranean.

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Next, William I, known as William of Orange, fought against the Spanish Inquisition and for tolerance of the Calvinists. In 1581, the Dutch Republic was formed from the 17 northern provinces of Netherlands, while the 10 southern provinces remained Spanish and became modern-day Belgium. Spain and Philip failed to maintain Catholicism throughout the empire.

England's Queen Elizabeth, after the death of Queen Mary Tudor, who was Philip's wife, had provided aid to the Protestant Netherlands in their successful bid for independence from Spain. Philip not only wished to bring Catholicism back to England, he wanted revenge for English support of the Dutch. In 1588, the Spanish Armada failed in its mission to invade due to weather and was decisively bested by the British Navy.

The French Civil Wars

Between 1562 and 1598, there were at least nine wars that can be considered part of the French Civil Wars.

The conflict between Catholics and Calvinists began in 1562, after the death of Henry II in 1559. Three families vied for the throne. From 1559 to 1589, Catholics remained in control in France. However, roughly half of all nobles in France became Calvinists (Huguenots), many of whom were of Bourbon decent.

On August 24, 1572, Margaret of the Valois family (Moderate Catholics) was to be wed to Henry of Navarre, a Huguenot. The Guise family (Extreme Catholics) ordered the murder of a Huguenot leader the night before the ceremony, causing riots and the subsequent order by the ruling Valois family to massacre 20,000 Huguenots by October of that year. This massacre started the War of the Three Henrys: Valois, Guise, and Bourbons.

When Henry IV (Navarre; Bourbon) rose to power in France, and ended the civil wars. He devised a solution to the religion problem in France: he converted to Catholicism and granted religious toleration to the Huguenots in the 1598 Edict of Nantes.

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The Thirty Years' War

The Thirty Years' War is considered the most important war of the 17th century. In 1618, the Peace of Augsburg failed and the Holy Roman Empire began a massive conflict.

The Thirty Years' War began with the elimination of Protestantism in Bohemia. The Danish phase of the conflict is earmarked by the 1629 Edict of Restitution, whereby the Catholic Church reclaimed all secularized territory lost since 1552. In the Swedish phase, Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, pushed the Catholics back to Germany, effectively negating the gains from its Danish phase. However, in 1634, the Holy Roman Empire defeated the Swedish.

The commencement of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 marks the end of the Thirty Years' War. This treaty ended the Catholic activity in Germany, kept Germany divided, and renewed the Peace of Augsburg. Most importantly, the Treaty of Westphalia provided toleration of Calvinism.

The English Civil War

In 1642, civil war broke out in England between the Calvinists and Anglicans. Oliver Cromwell, a Puritan military leader, led his New Model Army to victory in 1649, after a rift between the Puritans and Anglicans, when Charles I was beheaded. Cromwell denied toleration to Anglicans and Catholics, yet allowed Jews back into the country for the first time since 1290. He subdued the Irish and conquered the Scottish during his reign until 1658 when he died and he was succeeded by his son, Richard, who failed to maintain power.

Charles II regained the throne in 1660.

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The Bottom Line—The Wars of Religion

The bottom line on the Wars of Religion is that this period of 89 years was decisive in the development of modern European powers. During your AP European History review, study the key points laid out in this crash course on the Wars of Religion. Remember that the AP European History exam is undergoing a redesign for the upcoming test year. Knowing these four categories of conflicts within the Wars of Religion can serve you better than studying the entire breadth of information out there for this time period.

Reviewing this AP European History crash course on the Wars of Religion is a great way to get started studying this decisive time period for Europe.