



**UNIVERSITÉ  
DE GENÈVE**

INSTITUT D'HISTOIRE  
DE LA RÉFORMATION

## Institute of Reformation History



## SUMMER SCHOOL 2026

First week: From 1 to 5 June

**Thinking High and Low:  
Elites, Experts, and the Masses in the Early Reformation**

By Giovanni Gellera and Ueli Zahnd

University of Geneva

## Institute of Reformation History

22 Boulevard des Philosophes, CH-1211 Geneva 4

The Institute of Reformation History (*Institut d'histoire de la Réformation*, IHR) is an interdisciplinary research center of the University of Geneva, dedicated to the history of the reforms between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Research fields of its members range from intellectual history to cultural and political history, and to the history of women and gender.

In addition to its research library, the Institute houses the rare book and manuscript collection of the *Musée historique de la Réformation* (16,000 volumes in total) and is in close proximity to the University Library (over 1,5 million volumes of printed books and manuscripts) and the Geneva State Archives.

Located at *Uni Philosophes*, the Institute provides excellent conditions for research in the above-mentioned subjects. Since 1999 it has been running an annual summer school for graduate students (MA), PhD students or early postdocs, in the fields of History, Philosophy, Literature, History of Religions, and Theology.

# The IHR Summer Schools

The aim of the Summer schools at the IHR is to enable participants to deepen their knowledge in a particular historical field and to familiarize themselves with the treatment of sources. Special attention is paid to learning the methods used in the study of intellectual and cultural history.

The courses are given from Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm. Usually, the days are structured as follows:

- 9am to 11am: Lecture (introduction, problematization and contextualization of the topic of the day; case studies)
- 11am to 3pm: Study of sources (individual or in groups; a reader with the sources to study is sent to the participants a month before the summer school)
- 3pm to 5pm: Seminar (joint discussion of the sources studied before)

During a course, participants have direct contact with members of the teaching staff of the Institute and may ask to discuss their personal research with them. At the end of the Summer school, those who have been actively involved, especially in the afternoon seminars, will receive a certificate if they so wish. On request, and in agreement with their institution and depending on the work done, participants may obtain a certain number of ECTS credits (2 to 4).

# Summer School 2026

## **Thinking High and Low: Elites, Experts, and the Masses in the Early Reformation**

First Week: 1 – 5 June

Giovanni Gellera and Ueli Zahnd

Week 1 of the summer school 2026 is dedicated to the theme “Thinking High and Low”. It explores how authority, knowledge, and belief were negotiated across different social and intellectual spheres between the late Middle Ages and the early Reformation. The programme begins with late medieval systems of intellectual control and the challenges posed by the vernacular turn, examining the trajectories of figures from Jean Gerson (1363-1429) to John Mair (c.1467-1550) and exploring the ways in which scholastic culture articulated the normativity of belief. It then moves on to analyse the politics of language, including the interaction between humanist elites and scholastic experts (or “grammarians” and “barbarians” as they preferred to call each other), and considers the role of linguistic choices in shaping access to theological authority. Subsequent sessions investigate the emergence of the universal priesthood and its political ramifications, including the Peasants’ War (1524-1525) and Anabaptist movements (from 1525 onward), highlighting how doctrinal ideas circulated and morphed between learned and popular spheres. Further discussions focus on Bible translation and the rise of vernacular theology in the Reformed sphere, showing the extent to which linguistic mediation transformed both philosophical reflection and religious practice. Lastly, it examines how pedagogical and institutional developments—such as catechisms, new methods of instruction, and the foundation of Reformation universities—sought to stabilize and disseminate reformed belief while simultaneously reshaping the boundaries between learned and popular knowledge.

Throughout the programme, the summer school highlights the dynamic interplay between “high” and “low” forms of thinking and between elite norm-setting and the appropriation, adaptation or contestation of those norms in real-life situations and historical events. Particular attention is given to the role of conscience, the shifting grounds of authority, and the tension between prescriptive frameworks and everyday practice. By integrating inputs from theology, philosophy and history, along with intellectual, linguistic and social perspectives, the programme presents the transition from the late Middle Ages to the Reformation as a complex reordering of normative structures and cultural hierarchies. It invites the participants to reconsider the period through the lens of how ideas moved between, and were transformed across, different levels of thought, language and society.

# Program

***Monday 1 June: Introduction: Late Medieval Struggles with the Expansion of Knowledge, from Jean Gerson to John Mair***

- Afternoon seminar: study and discussion of selected texts, common activity

***Tuesday 2 June: Masters of Language: Humanist Elites and Scholastic Experts***

- Afternoon seminar: study and discussion of selected texts, common activity

***Wednesday 3 June: Theology Accessible to All? Universal Priesthood and the Anabaptist Challenge in the Early Reformation***

- Afternoon seminar: study and discussion of selected texts, common activity

***Thursday 4 June: Knowledge in Translation: Vernacular Bibles and Popularised Philosophy***

- Afternoon seminar: study and discussion of selected texts, common activity

***Friday 5 June: Authorizing the Masses: on Method, Catechisms and the Structuring of Curricula***

- Afternoon seminar: study and discussion of selected texts, common activity

# Linguistic requirements

The classes of the first week will be given in English. Candidates must have sufficient knowledge of English to be able to follow the course. However, they are allowed to express themselves in either English or French. Those who find it difficult to judge their level in these languages may contact a member of the teaching staff before registering. For the linguistic requirements of the second week, please refer to the other brochure.

## Application

The registration form must be completed [online](#) by **15 April**. Each candidate will have to indicate his/her wish to participate in the first, second, or both weeks of the summer school. A letter of motivation, a curriculum vitae, a brief presentation of the research carried out as part of the degree, doctoral thesis, or post-doctoral studies, as well as two signed letters of recommendation (PDF format) should be attached to the form. Applicants who have already completed an IHR summer school do not need the letters of recommendation but must produce updated versions of the other documents and also register via the online form.

Applications will be reviewed by the teaching staff; candidates will be notified of their decision within one week after the application deadline.

## Funding

Admission to the summer school takes the form of a residential scholarship, which covers the cost of half-board accommodation (breakfast and lunch). The Institute does not contribute to the participants' travel expenses.

As soon as they are notified of their acceptance, the selected candidates undertake to follow the complete course(s). Late withdrawals (less than one month before the start of the Summer school) or early departures will result in exclusion from the following summer schools organised by the Institute. For

organisational reasons, a cancellation fee may be charged in the event of late withdrawal without justification.

## Teaching Staff

Giovanni Gellera, studies in philosophy (Università Cattolica of Milan, BA and MA), PhD in history of philosophy (University of Glasgow). Assistant Professor at the *Institut d'histoire de la Réformation*. Areas of expertise: history of philosophy from the Middle Ages to the Early Modernity, with a focus on the traditions of Scottish philosophy, Reformed scholasticism, and Scotism. Areas of competence: the intellectual traditions of the Renaissance and the Reformation, history of philosophy during the Enlightenment.

Ueli Zahnd, studies in theology and philosophy (Bern and Paris), MAS in Reformed studies (Geneva), PhD degree in medieval philosophy (Freiburg im Breisgau). Full Professor at the *Institut d'histoire de la Réformation*. Areas of expertise: the intellectual history of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, their traditions of thought and the continuity between the late Middle Ages and the Reformation. Apart from the traditional methods of intellectual history, Ueli Zahnd explores the approaches of digital humanities.