Religious intolerance seems to be endemic in human societies. It takes different forms, ranging from subtle discrimination to mass violence. There are times when it is less intense than at others. As a social phenomenon, there seems little chance that it can ever be eliminated.

But historically, political and legal structures have been developed that have ensured a high degree of freedom for religious minorities. These structures have been built gradually and with great effort. They have very particular roots in early modern Europe (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries). In this course we will try to understand in historical perspective how this happened, as well as its impact on contemporary thinking.

To understand the extraordinary struggles of the early modern period, we’ll first have to understand the basic position and practices of the western Church toward heretics and non-believers as they were formulated in the first few centuries of the Common Era and as they were elaborated in the medieval period. We will then turn to the events and changed perspectives of the Reformation period. Finally, we will analyze the range of theoretical ideas about religious toleration proposed by European thinkers, and consider their practical implications. We’ll conclude with some reflections on the persistent problems that have arisen and still arise in the effort to achieve religious toleration, including recent issues particular to the multiculturalism experiment.

The course, then, has a three-part structure:

Part 1: A survey of the late antique and medieval European background;
Part 2: A look at how new conditions in the Reformation period encouraged the emergence of ideas of religious toleration;
Part 3: A study of a variety of theoretical positions – then and (briefly) now.

You will take an exam after the first two segments of the course (together, 50% of the grade), and a final exam (30%). In addition, you will write a 3-5 page exercise (10%), and attendance and participation will be evaluated (10%). Plus/minus grades will be assigned, as mandated by the new policy.

1. Jan. 14 – What do we mean by religious freedom – or do we know what we mean?
PART 1

   
   Sources: a) Augustine; b) The Nicene Creed.

   


   
   Paul’s Letter to the Romans
   
   Augustine’s interpretation of Psalm 59


5. Jan. 28 – The papacy, the state, and late medieval persecution.
   


7. Feb. 4 – EXAM

PART 2

8. Feb. 6 – Early modern skepticism about the knowability of truth.
   
   The “Story of the Three Rings” from the *Decameron: Decameron*, Day 1, Novel 3: online at 
   


Bagchi and Steinmetz, eds., *Reformation Theology*, 42-49.

10. Feb. 13 - The idea of multiple paths to religious truth. From the Catholic irenicism of Erasmus to the idea of natural religion.

Erasmus, from *The Complaint of Peace* (1521).


12. Feb. 20 – Print and censorship in the Reformation period.


Carlo Ginzburg, “The High and the Low: The Theme of Forbidden Knowledge in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, 60-76.


*The Travels of Fernando Mendes Pinto*, 87-89.


Menasheh ben Israel’s letter to Oliver Cromwell.


   **SPRING BREAK**

17. March 18 – The humanization of the Jews.


18. March 20 – REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

19. March 25 – EXAM

20. March 27 – FILM.

   **PART 3**

21. April 1 - Sebastian Castellio.

    Castellio, excerpts from Counsel to France in her distress (1562).

22. April 3– Michel de Montaigne.

    From Apology for Raymond Sebond (1580), tr. Ariew and Grene, passages on pp.127-8, 131-136, 139-141, 146-147, 152.

23. April 8 – Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert

    Synod on the Freedom of Conscience (1582), 151-162.

24. April 10 – Benedict Spinoza

    Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (1670), Chapter 20.

25. April 15 – John Locke

    From A Letter Concerning Toleration (1689).
26. April 17 – The Calas Affair

From Voltaire, “On Toleration in Connection with the Death of Jean Calas” (1763).

27. April 22 - The French Revolutionary Period and the Status of Jews

Excerpts from: Christian Wilhelm Dohm, “On the Civil Improvement of the Jews” (1781); the debate on the Status of the Jews in the French National Assembly; Napoleon and the Assembly of Notables.

28. April 24 – The American Experiment

Jefferson’s draft of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom

29. April 29 – Contemporary Issues and Discussion of Papers

“The War of the Headscarves,” The Economist 2/5/04:

http://www.economist.com/node/2404691?story_id=2404691

Supreme Court case Goldman v. Weinberger (1986): Religious headwear in the U.S. army – Can it be prohibited?


30. May 1 - REVIEW FOR FINAL EXAM