This course deals with the long and difficult process by which a principle of freedom of conscience emerged in early modern Europe – a principle that is still contested in many parts of the world. In late medieval Europe, such an idea was unimaginable. Over many centuries the Church had exercised authority in matters of belief, and the Church’s power was embedded in the social fabric in myriad ways. The Reformation of the sixteenth century shattered not only the unity of the Church, but perceptions of its authority and of the bonds of community. Yet it was by no means obvious to anyone that a person should be free to believe what seemed true to him or her.

In this course we will travel back in time to Reformation Europe during the bitter religious wars between Catholic and Protestant powers. In the wake of these wars (and other episodes of religious violence), pragmatic ideas about how to keep civil peace emerged. So did new ideas about freedom of individual conscience. Why were such ideas so threatening? Why did they seem to so many people downright immoral? How did a psychological and intellectual shift take place that allowed ordinary people (as well as brilliant thinkers) to change their minds and come to support freedom of conscience? To answer these questions we will examine important episodes like the Dutch Revolt against Spain, the Inquisition trial of Galileo, and the English Civil War; we will read from works by authors who struggled to envision a society without religious controls; and we will examine the underground world of “forbidden best-sellers” and popular ideas about freedom of religion.

Each of you will choose a historical figure from a list provided by me. (You may also choose a figure not on the list, in consultation with me.) You will read more deeply about this person and represent his or her opinions in mock debates we will stage in class. Your grade will be based on the following: 10% attendance and participation, 20% a review of a book on your “person,” 20% blog participation, 30% a paper on a topic related to your “person,” 20% final exam.

Suggested to buy (they can all be obtained cheaply online as used books):

Joseph Perez, *The Spanish Inquisition*

Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*

Readings marked with a * will be done by only one or two of you; you will discuss the reading in class.
CLASS MEETINGS

1. – Introduction: Power and belief.

PERSECUTION AND CONFLICT

2. – Heresy in Early and Medieval Christianity


   Augustine’s letter on the Donatists.

3. – Jewish “Perfidy” in Christian Europe


   *Chaucer, “The Prioress’s Tale,” from Canterbury Tales

4. – The Protestant Upheaval and Protestant Intolerance: Calvin has a heretic burnt at the stake

   Goldstone, Out of the Flames, 7-99.

   Benjamin Kaplan, Divided by Faith, 15-47.

   *Goldstone, Out of the Flames, 65-75, 176-197.

5/6 – The Spanish Inquisition and the “Black Legend”

   Joseph Perez, The Spanish Inquisition.

   Van Deursen, Plain Lives in a Golden Age, 200-229.

   *Sara Nalle, Mad for God, Ch. 1.

   *Stuart Schwartz, All Can be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World,

7. – Religious War in France


   *Sebastian Castellio, excerpts from Counsel to France in her distress (1562).
8. – Religious War in the Netherlands

Geoffrey Parker, “The Origins of the Dutch Revolt” in *History Today* 34: 7 (online), July 1, 1984. (enter through library portal)

Geert Mak, *Amsterdam: A Brief History*, 53-96.

9/10 – Changing perceptions

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.


**EMERGING MULTIRELIGIOUS SOCIETIES IN POST-REFORMATION EUROPE**

11. – Containing conflict in post-Reformation Europe

Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 48-197.


12/13 – Jews: A Special Case?


Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 100-154. (his excommunication)

14. – Confusions, Conversions, Re-conversions


* Uriel da Costa’s “Autobiography.”

Moshe Sluhovsky, “Recidivist Converts in Early Modern Europe,” in Eliav-Feldon and Herzig, eds., *Dissimulation and Deceit*. 
MAKING THE CASE FOR TOLERATION

15/16. Early Voices in Context
   Michel de Montaigne, *Apology for Raymond Sebold*.

17/18. Spinoza in Context
   Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, Ch. 6
   Benedict Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, Ch. 20

19/20. Locke in Context
   Locke, *A Letter on Toleration*.

21/22. The Last Frontier? The Argument for Intellectual Freedom
   Excerpts from John Milton, *Areopagitica* (1644)

23. Printing and Freedom
   Robert Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*.

24. Wrap-Up