“When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.”

- Dom Helder Camara
Brazilian Archbishop

Religion has deeply influenced the course of Latin American society and culture. It has served not only as a source of individual identity, but as a basis for a collective one as well. This course will survey the development of religious thought and practice over five centuries of Latin American history. Lectures will examine the clash of diverse religious traditions beginning with the great “encounter” between Europeans, indigenous peoples, and Africans in the New World. An analysis will follow of the fundamental—and sometimes controversial—role of the Catholic Church in the region as well as non-Christian faiths. Themes will include indigenous religious practice, Christianization efforts, the role of religion in politics and revolution, liberation theology, Afro-Latin American faiths, Judaism, and the recent rise of Pentecostal denominations. Students are expected to attend lectures and complete all assigned readings. Videos and primary source materials will supplement the lectures.