Are religion and science fundamentally incompatible worldviews? Judging by today's headlines, it often seems so. On the one side is religion, whose truths are based on revelation and faith; on the other is science, founded on experience and reason. Inevitably, it seems, the two irreconcilable views collide, as they do today in debates over evolution and the age of the universe.

A broader historical view, however, reveals a far richer and more interesting story. Some of the greatest scientists, we find, were profoundly devout individuals whose religious beliefs served as an inspiration and guide to their work. Others were indeed agnostics and atheists who resented the presumptions of religion to weigh in on scientific matters. Some religious movements actively promoted scientific innovation, whereas others viewed science with suspicion, as a threat to their authority and accepted dogmas.

The course will trace the relationship of religion and science in the West by focusing on the cases of leading scientists such as Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, and Darwin. Each dealt with the competing demands of science and religion and in each case the interaction was different -- sometimes positive, at times negative. But through it all religion and science maintained a constant dialogue -- reflecting on each other's positions and responding to each others' challenges.