

Institution: University College London
Unit of Assessment: 30 – History
Title of case study: Practising religious toleration
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Professor Benjamin Kaplan is a pioneer of what has been called ‘the new history of toleration’, which is of great significance to the public’s understanding of the possibilities for peaceful coexistence between people of different faiths in the post-9/11 world. More than any other work in this revisionist school of historical writing, Kaplan’s book <i>Divided by Faith</i> has been read and discussed by journalists, human rights organisations, churches and other non-academic audiences in North America, Britain and The Netherlands; it has also widely been used in university teaching. Kaplan’s research has thus profoundly influenced public discourse and academic education regarding the history and character of religious toleration.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Kaplan has been Professor of Dutch History at UCL since October 2001. His research on toleration, supported in 2001–2002 by the US National Endowment for the Humanities and in 2002–2003 by the American Council of Learned Societies, produced a string of publications between 2002 and 2009, including most importantly his 2007 book <i>Divided by Faith</i> [a]. This book was the first general history of religious toleration in early modern Europe published in English in four decades. So far it has had no successor. Covering the entire continent over three centuries, it treats toleration not in the conventional manner, as an abstract ideal enunciated by writers, but as a social practice enacted in local communities. Historical but politically engaged, it demonstrates the possibility of peaceful coexistence in societies that do not embrace western notions of human rights – societies where religion powerfully shapes the identities of individuals and communities. It shows that religious toleration can take a variety of forms that are qualitatively different from one another, many of them quite unlike the forms prevailing in western countries today. And it challenges the self-congratulatory narrative which people in western countries – scholars and the general public alike – commonly tell themselves about a gradual, evolutionary ‘rise of toleration’ taking place over centuries, uniquely in their lands.</p> <p>Other publications by Kaplan expound the same revisionist arguments in relation to specific subtopics, including relations between Protestants and Catholics [b], Christians and Muslims [c], and spouses of different faiths [d]; and spatial [e] and diplomatic [f] arrangements for worship by religious dissenters. These publications explore in depth some of the ways and places that a toleration functioned in early modern Europe that are most telling from a contemporary perspective: in states that maintained a single, official faith; in repressive capital cities such as Vienna and Lisbon; in the intimate setting of nuclear families; and between those religious groups who were most opposed to one another ideologically. They demonstrate the effective functioning of a pragmatic toleration in all these settings even before the modern concept of religious freedom was developed. They thus offer thought-provoking historical points of comparison to contemporary settings where the attainment of toleration seems most difficult.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>[a] <i>Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe</i>. Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, October, 2007. Awarded by the American Academy of Religion its 2008 Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion (Historical Studies category). Available on request.</p> <p>[b] <i>Catholic Communities in Protestant States: Britain and The Netherlands, 1580-1720</i>, co-edited with Robert Moore, Henk van Nierop, and Judith Pollmann. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009. Includes essay by Kaplan and Conclusion by Kaplan and Pollmann.</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

Submitted to REF 2014. Review e.g. <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=25270>

[c] *Muslims in the Dutch Golden Age: Representations and Realities of Religious Toleration*. Fourth Golden Age Lecture, May 2006. Amsterdam: Centre for the Study of the Golden Age, 2007.

Annual named public lecture delivered in Amsterdam, published as pamphlet. Available on request.

[d] “‘For They Will Turn Away Thy Sons’: The Practice and Perils of Mixed Marriage in the Dutch Golden Age’, in *Piety and Family in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honour of Steven Ozment*, ed. by Benjamin J. Kaplan and Marc R. Forster (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 115–33.

Reviews: *Renaissance Quarterly* 59/3 (2006), 927–929 (J. R. Watt); *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 75/4 (2006), 905–907 (A. Walsham); *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58/1 (2007), 138–140 (J. Goodale). Available on request.

[e] ‘Fictions of Privacy: House Chapels and the Spatial Accommodation of Religious Dissent in Early Modern Europe’, *American Historical Review* 107/4 (October 2002): 1031–64, with follow-up Communication: *AHR* 108/2 (April 2003): 645–6.

Peer-reviewed journal. DOI: [10.1086/532663](https://doi.org/10.1086/532663).

[f] ‘Diplomacy and Domestic Devotion: Embassy Chapels and the Toleration of Religious Dissent in Early Modern Europe’, *Journal of Early Modern History* 6/4 (2002): 341–61.

Peer-reviewed journal. DOI: [10.1163/157006502X00185](https://doi.org/10.1163/157006502X00185).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Kaplan’s book, *Divided by Faith*, has had a major impact on the vigorous and vital current debate in public discourse and in academic education about the possibilities for toleration in the contemporary world, including in highly religious societies across the globe. The book was not only widely read beyond academia but gave rise to extensive and lively debate in US, UK and Dutch media, and was adopted as a key text by two human rights organisations as well as on a range of undergraduate and postgraduate university courses in Britain and abroad. Kaplan further contributed to the development of public discourse on toleration by means of a TV appearance and a number of lectures to non-academic organisations.

The extensive *reach* of *Divided by Faith* is demonstrated first of all by sales figures. The book sold many more copies than academic books typically do: total sales until mid-2013 are just under 6,000 copies [1], and in the months following its publication, the book was for a time ranked #1 for sales on Amazon.com in the category of Western European History, while in the UK it was ranked #1 on Amazon.co.uk in the category of Religious Studies. These figures are in themselves proof of considerable extra-academic interest in the book and its themes. Still wider public awareness of Kaplan’s research findings was ensured by extensive media coverage, with a feature article in the *New York Times* (print circulation c. 780,000) by the paper’s religion correspondent, who wrote: ‘at this moment, there may be no more important story than the one Europeans and Americans proudly tell themselves about the rise of religious toleration. So please take note of Benjamin J. Kaplan’s argument that the story may be dangerously flawed’ [2]. *Divided by Faith* was also the subject of an extended discussion in American political periodical *The Nation* [3], the oldest continuously-published weekly magazine in the United States (print circulation c. 174,000), and of newspaper reviews that noted the book’s contemporary relevance – in the *Economist*, the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, the Dutch national daily *NRC Handelsblad* (which noted the book’s contribution to the contemporary ‘debate on integration’ in Dutch political circles), the *Church of England Newspaper*, and the ecumenical *Christian Century Magazine* [4]. A total of up to 1 million people were thus made aware of Kaplan’s research through print media. We may add the many users who continue to access on-line versions of several of the above publications, including the substantial articles [2] and [3], and the TV audience that saw Kaplan discuss his findings on religious toleration in an episode of the series *Christianity: A History*, broadcast in February 2009 on Channel 4 (UK) and subsequently viewed more than 46,000 times on YouTube [5]. A combined audience of c. 80 people benefited from Kaplan’s insights through smaller-scale but more intensive

Impact case study (REF3b)

public engagement activity: his lectures on toleration in public forums incl. the USC Shoah Foundation, Los Angeles; the Hampstead Museum, London; and Austin Friars, the Dutch Church in London.

The *significance* of the impact made by *Divided by Faith* was noted immediately by the first reviews of the book, but these appeared in the last few weeks of 2007 and will therefore not be cited as evidence of significant impact in the current assessment period. From early 2008 onwards, however, *Divided by Faith* fed directly into the debate sparked by proponents of ‘the new atheism’ when it was featured in a highly polemical article by Daniel Lazare in *The Nation*, which denied the possibility that people of genuine religious faith could be tolerant. Kaplan weighed in on the debate with a rebuttal of Lazare’s article that was published in a subsequent issue of the same periodical on a Letters page, which also included responses from other readers [2]. Similarly, a blog reviewing the book for the Dutch national newspaper *De Volkskrant* provoked 48 readers’ comments in the first day alone, most of the responses discussing contemporary relations between Christians and Muslims, in particular mixed marriages; the principle of freedom of speech; and the difference between freedom (*vrijheid*) and liberalism (*vrijzinnigheid*) [6]. Kaplan’s findings and arguments have become a regular point of reference in non-academic books that address contemporary problems of religious diversity, such as those by high-profile public intellectuals Ian Buruma and Richard Sennett [7], but also in specialised studies which apply Kaplan’s research in order to find practical solutions to problems such as the ecumenical use of multi-faith spaces [8]. At the other end of the spectrum, *Divided by Faith* is cited in the world’s most popular reference tool, in *Wikipedia* entries on Toleration, Religious Persecution, and Early Modern Europe.

Kaplan’s book has established itself as required reading in academic education at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in Britain and abroad, not only in humanities programmes but also in programmes of law (e.g. SUNY Buffalo Law School in 2011) and theology (e.g. Lancaster Seminary), which are more practice-orientated. Recently, it was the key text for a module on toleration in early modern Europe on a Political Science/Study of Religion advanced seminar course ‘Secularism and Religion’ (Spring term 2013) at the University of Toronto, as well as the main textbook for the second half of an introductory undergraduate history course ‘Early Modern Europe 1500-1789’ (Summer term 2013) at Simon Fraser University, Canada [9].

The ideas and evidence presented in *Divided by Faith* have been used by human rights organisations to enhance their own understanding of religious toleration and to formulate a discourse designed to combat intolerance. Kaplan has in person acted as consultant in these processes: in 2008 and again in 2010 the Executive Director of the international human rights organisation Humanity in Action (HIA) solicited his expert advice. The Director reports that Kaplan’s research ‘helped me to reconceptualize toleration – to understand it as a social practice rather than an abstract ideal, ... to see the wide variety of forms it could take ... [and to] identify the flashpoints for religious conflict ... currently operative in India, Indonesia, and other places around the globe’ [10]. Kaplan spoke about the practical lessons to be drawn from his research in November 2008 to a gathering of HIA’s UK fellows, and *Divided by Faith* was adopted by HIA in 2008 as required reading for its fellowship programmes – about 60 fellows subsequently read portions of the book [10]. The book is also cited on the website of Tolerance International UK, an NGO which ‘aims to promote community cohesion, tolerance and moderation between peoples’ [11].

In sum, the significance of the impact lies in the success of Kaplan’s research in making people aware of clear historical evidence that pragmatic religious toleration is entirely possible even in a world that seems doomed to be torn apart by violently opposed religious fundamentalists. The research has also demonstrated by historical examples that toleration can take forms other than the ones dominant in contemporary western countries. The obvious implications for current political debates on religion, atheism and multiculturalism were recognised by the nomination of *Divided by Faith* for the Louisville Grawemeyer Award (2008), established ‘to highlight ideas and works that “make the world a better place”’.

Impact case study (REF3b)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [1] Sales figures for *Divided by Faith* corroborated by statement from publisher and available on request.
- [2] Peter Steinfels, 'A Revisionist Historian Looks at Religious Toleration', *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/24/us/24beliefs.html>
- [3] Daniel Lazare, 'Good Faith'. *The Nation*, vol. 286, number 10, 17 March 2008, pp. 23-28 (<http://www.thenation.com/article/good-faith>), with follow-up exchange, vol. 286, number 14, 14 April 2008, p. 22.
- [4] Reviews: 'The discovery of tolerance', *The Economist*, 15 December 2007, p. 92 (<http://www.economist.com/node/10281443>); Diarmaid MacCulloch in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, December 14, 2007 (<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/310194.article>); Judith Pollmann in *NRC Handelsblad*, 11 January 2008 (<http://nrcboeken.vorige.nrc.nl/recensie/respecteer-de-vleugelmuts>); Timothy Renick in *The Christian Century Magazine*, 27 January 2009 (<http://www.christiancentury.org/reviews/2009-01/divided-faith-religious-conflict-and-practice-toleration-early-modern-europe>); *The Church of England Newspaper* 30 November 2007, p. 23.
- [5] *Christianity: A History – The Reformation* (Episode 5) – Pioneer Productions for Channel 4, broadcast 8 February 2009. Available on youtube.com at:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVz5RUFmCSM> (35,870 views);
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fd3tyCTXINQ> (10,146);
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glwMfPC_diM (108).
- [6] www.volkskrantblog.nl/bericht/178374; printout of blog and responses available on request.
- [7] Ian Buruma, *Taming the Gods: Religion and Democracy on Three Continents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 131; Richard Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 102. Available on request.
- [8] Chris Hewson and Ralf Brand, 'Multi-Faith Space: Towards a Practice-based Assessment', paper given at conference *The Struggle to Belong: Dealing with Diversity in 21st Century Urban Settings*, Amsterdam, July 2011. Published online at <http://www.rc21.org/conferences/amsterdam2011/edocs3/Session%2014/14-1-Hewson.pdf> , p. 7.
- [9] Lancaster Seminary (Spring 2013 course on the History of Christianity): http://www.lancasterseminary.edu/cms/lib07/PA11000568/Centricity/Domain/25/2013S_CH113_Thayer_SYL.pdf; Simon Fraser University (Summer 2013 course on Early Modern Europe): <http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/history/Course%20Outlines/2013/Summer2013/H223Klager.pdf>; University of Toronto (Spring 2013 course on Secularism and Religion): http://politics.utoronto.ca/uploads/syllabus/1213_jpr419h1s_l0101.pdf
- [10] Statement from the Executive Director, Humanity in Action, available on request.
- [11] Use by Tolerance International:
http://www.toleranceinternational.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=92