

Theo 279: Roman Catholicism

John Felice Rome Center

Summer 2025

Tuesdays and Thursdays | 9:00 a.m.–12:20 p.m.

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Office Hours: By appointment at JFRC, on Zoom, or onsite

Course Description

This onsite core course provides an introduction to Roman Catholicism. Lessons will be held at key locations in Rome, each chosen for its historical importance for understanding the evolution of Roman Catholic practice and belief. Each lesson will have different components: A chronological approach will present the major developments within Roman Catholicism in a particular era—from the “Zero Hour of the Church in Rome” to the “Roman Catholic Church Down the Road.” A systematic component will look at the progression of ideas connected with each era, resulting in a brief introduction to the different theological fields of study within Roman Catholicism, fields such as Biblical Studies, Eschatology, and Ecclesiology. Students will hear colorful stories of Catholic influencers who lived in or passed through Rome and whose biographies illustrate key historical and theological ideas of each period. History, theology, and biography will be brought into dialog with Roman Catholic identity in today’s world through the use of anecdotes. Each onsite visit will conclude with a time for location exploration and creatively committing the material to memory together with members of a small group.

Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to demonstrate understanding of the most important Roman Catholic beliefs, the historical evolution of Roman Catholicism, the key Roman Catholic concepts, terms, values, and religious practices, and the main lines of current Roman Catholic identity in today’s world.

Required Texts / Materials

- Bible (Recommended translation: New American Bible Revised Edition [NABRE], available online through LUC Libraries)
- Assigned readings for each lesson are posted on Sakai.

Reference Materials (Not Required)

Reference works

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 2nd edition. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, 2019.
- Louth, Andrew, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. 4th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.
- *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. 2nd ed. 15 vols. Detroit, MI: Gale, 2003.

Texts for context

- Hibbert, Christopher. *Rome: The Biography of a City*. London; New York: Penguin UK, 1987.
- Majanlahti, Anthony. *The Families Who Made Rome: A History and a Guide*. London: Pimlico, 2006.
- Mason, Georgina. *The Companion Guide to Rome*. Exeter: Short Run Press, 2009.
- O’Collins, Gerald. *Catholicism: A Very Short Introduction*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Attendance Policy

In accordance with the JFRC mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, all courses adhere to the following absence policy. Prompt attendance, preparation, and active participation in course discussions are expected from every student. Any lateness or leaving class early will impact the final course grade. Attendance is mandatory at every class meeting for each course. Absence due to sickness or injury needs to be corroborated by a doctor's note. Students late to class twice will be credited with one absence in accordance with the JFRC's Attendance policy. Three (3) absences will result in an automatic failure (F). Travel does not constitute reason to miss class.

In the case of absences excused by administration or by a doctor's note, additional work must be completed for each missed lesson in order for an absence not to impact the grade. Please bear in mind, however, that the collective health of the JFRC is everyone's responsibility and refer to the policy "Virtual Presence or Paper Participation for Excused Emergency, Illness, and Injury Absences" if unfortunate conditions legitimately excuse your absence.

Virtual Presence or Paper Participation for Excused Emergency, Illness, and Injury Absences

In order to ensure the fullest possibility for participation, we will use a working group system. Each member of the class will be in a working group of three to six students. In the event of a professionally verified condition that prevents your attending class, you should contact your working group members as well as the instructor. The group ideally will support the virtual presence and participation of their absent member at the onsite lesson using a video conferencing app, such as Telegram, Signal, WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom or Facetime. If a student is not able to participate virtually in this way and has been excused by administration or by a doctor's note, an assignment such as a 1,000-word reflection paper considering the Sakai readings and the video footage of the lesson will be assigned in lieu of onsite participation in order for the absence not to impact the grade.

Assessment Components

Individual Research Presentation	20%
Individual Research Paper	20%
Participation in Group and Online	20%
Group Project	20%
Final Exam	20%

Grading

94–100: A
90–93: A-
87–89: B+
84–86: B
80–83: B-
77–79: C+
74–76: C
70–73: C-
67–69: D+
60–66: D
59 or lower: F

The grading rubrics for the Individual Research Presentation, the Individual Research Paper, and the Group Project are posted in the Assignments tool on Sakai.

Individual Research Presentation: 20%

- Students select a historical figure and a presentation date from a list of choices.

Individual Research Paper: 20%

- The essay uses the Chicago Manual of Style's notes and bibliography system.

Participation in Group and Online: 20%

- This evaluation is ongoing throughout the semester. Assessment criteria are available on Sakai.
- Instructor assessment considers student engagement with materials on Sakai and in-class participation.
- Peer assessment offers feedback on student participation in working groups, aiding the instructor's assessment.

Group Project: 20%

- A description of the group project will be given on the first day of the course and is available on Sakai.
- The assessment of the project product is made before the final exam.

Final Exam: 20%

- The exam consists of 20 fixed-response questions (and one written response for extra credit).

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are unacceptable at the JFRC and will be dealt with in accordance with Loyola University Chicago's guidelines. Please familiarize yourself with [Loyola's academic standards](#). You are responsible to comply with the LUC Student Handbook.

Late or Missed Assignments

Late or missed assignments will not be accepted for grading without the authorization of the instructor.

Position on the Use of Assistive Technologies in Scholarly Production in This Course

Distinguishing between critical and non-critical sources is an important component of academic writing and scholarly production. The student is responsible for ascertaining, with the use of critical resources, any use they may make of non-critical materials in their academic work. Noncritical documentation, such as Wikipedia, and noncritical technology, such as Google Translator or large language model text generators (AI), may in certain instances help student understanding by offering an immediate and accessible explanation. However, these resources also risk undermining the educational process if they supplant critical engagement with primary sources and complex ideas and bypass the work of questioning inherent biases. Thus, within this course, helpful uses of assistive educational technologies are approved and uses harmful to the learning process are prohibited. To determine a tool's appropriateness, open and ongoing dialogue between the instructor and the student is essential.

AI Policy

Following the policies of the [Committee on Publication Ethics \(COPE\)](#) students need to be transparent about disclosing all sources for their research, including AI. Therefore, in evaluating coursework, any text or product which raises questions regarding its origin will result in a conversation with the student(s) before an evaluation of the assignment may take place. The AI Policy for this course will always defer to LUC's general policy.

SAC-Authorized and Exceptional Needs Accommodations

Students with accommodations authorized by the Student Accessibility Center bear the responsibility of initiating communication with the course instructor to address their specific needs. During the first lesson, each student will receive a questionnaire designed to facilitate the creation of small groups. Included in this questionnaire is a section titled, "Anything you'd like to let me know so that you are welcomed, accommodated, safe, and free in this course." This provides an opportune moment for indicating the necessity of a conversation about accommodations from the Student Accessibility Center. Additionally, the question serves as a platform for disclosing other personal circumstances that may warrant consideration, such as food allergies, limitations of sight, hearing, mobility, preferred names or pronouns, or personal challenges (such as being in a state of bereavement). Upon reviewing the completed questionnaires, the instructor will initiate contact with any students whose disclosed circumstances necessitate modifications to what would be a conventional course participation.

Course Schedule

Please note that this schedule is tentative. A detailed and updated overview will be provided on Sakai and on the first day of class.

[1] Introduction and Overview • Tuesday, May 20

Location(s): JFRC

Description: This introduction and overview class is important. It will include an orientation to the materials on Sakai, an explanation of the biographical presentation and essay assignment with instructions on the candidates for choice. There will be an opportunity to fill out a simple questionnaire asking which type of group you prefer (video, photo, poetry, epistolary, musical, artistic or narrative writing, or other), and while you test

your knowledge using the glossary of Catholic concepts and terms with a partner, I will create the working groups. We will take a brief look at the places we will visit and finalize any decisions that may still be needed.

[2] The Zero Hour of the Church in Rome • Thursday, May 22

Location(s): Tiber Island, St. Cecilia

Description: This lesson takes us to Trastevere to visit the excavations of a first-century Roman house. We'll meet a power couple of the Roman Church, Priscilla and Aquila, and talk about a central question surrounding the arrival of Christianity in the city. A reading of Romans Chapter 16, a text from Irenaeus, and a study of the composition of first-century Rome will help us discuss possible solutions to an open theological question. We'll talk about how theological studies are organized and the various topics of Dogmatic or **Systematic Theology**. A close reading of Romans Chapter 16 will yield a word giving rise to much theological debate today.

[3] The Witness of a Fisherman • Tuesday, May 27

Location(s): Domine Quo Vadis, Catacombs of Callixtus

Description: We look again at the origins of the Church in Rome. We'll meet the martyr Peter and examine the choices which brought him to Rome. Two additional martyrs, the evangelist Mark and Ignatius of Antioch, will figure into our conversation. It will lead to a discussion of **Eschatology** and an acknowledgement of places where the Church still suffers persecution today. This lesson will include a tour of an ancient burial site, or catacombs, named for the martyr Callixtus.

[4] The Sword(s) of a Pharisee • Thursday, May 29

Location(s): St. Paul Outside the Walls

Description: It is not possible to talk about the origins of Catholicism without speaking of Paul. Why is he holding a sword? After his martyrdom at Tre Fontane (*come vuole la tradizione*), he was buried in the place where we find the Basilica of St. Paul. We are still in the Ante Nicene Period, and the Pauline corpus of New Testament writings sets the stage to talk about **Biblical Studies**, which gives us an opportunity to discuss the place of the Bible in Catholic practice today. Additionally, we'll meet two people connected with Paul's ministry: Luke, who chronicled the apostle's journeys, and Phoebe, who may have delivered his letter to the Romans. We'll also encounter Mary Magdalene, sometimes called the "apostle to the apostles."

[5] The State Church of the Roman Empire: A Gift or Shift from the Way? • Tuesday, June 3

Location(s): St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major

Description: Here we will not be far from the Roman forum, but the power has shifted from the buildings along the ancient via Sacra to a new Basilica, which we will visit. It is the dawning of the age of great synods and councils discussing Catholic belief, especially matters pertaining to **Christology**. The first council, that of Nicaea (325), called by the emperor Constantine, gives some basic definitions. Yet, what is the difference between a council and synod? The Church of today is discussing just such a question...

We will also visit the church of Saint Mary Major and discuss the presence of women in the early Church. The person of Mary, the Mother of Jesus remains a theological focus of the 5th century and women such as Monica and Paola of Rome determine the course of theology in a surprising way. We will also visit the church of Saint Mary Major and discuss the presence of women in the early Church.

[6] Roman Monasticism and Scholasticism • Thursday, June 5

Location(s): San Gregorio al Celio, Santa Sabina

Description: Around the year 500, Benedict came to Rome for studies and lived in Trastevere but left that area of the city because it was too rowdy (even then). He became one of the great founders of organized celibate Catholic community. The monastic tradition remains alive in Rome today in the place where it was first introduced within the city walls by Gregory the Great.

On our way to the Aventine, we will see a tower in Circo Massimo that used to be owned by the Frangipane family. Lady Jacopa de' Settesoli is an important member of this family. Without her, would we even know the name Francis of Assisi?

On the Aventine, the Dominicans claim to have the oldest pontifical university in Rome, explaining that the 1222 establishment of the studium conventuale at Santa Sabina is the predecessor to today's Angelicum. While the veracity of the claim depends on one's definition of "university," what's certain is that Rome arrives late to the scholastic scene. However, no less than the great founder of the Order of Preachers himself resided for a time on the Aventine Hill. Organization of information is a passion of this period, and we will see how scholastics like the theologian Thomas Aquinas compiled time-honored manuals.

[7] From Medieval to Modern Rome: "Roman Catholics" – Pejorative or Prerogative? • Tuesday, June 10

Location(s): Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, Chiesa del Gesù, Galleria Doria Pamphilj

Description: When the papal court took leave of Rome for Avignon in 1309, some of the Roman infrastructure fell apart. However, it was just the time in which several women exercised prophetic power and became religious points of reference for the city. Roman resident Catherine of Siena exercised a prophetic power as a woman of contemplation in action. She shows that **Spirituality** is not only business of the mind but also a passion of the heart. We will discuss the art and science of prayer at the core of the practice of Catholicism even today.

Up to this point in the course, we have not used the appellative "Roman Catholic" and in the second part of this lesson we will find out why. Similarly, we will look at the term "Jesuit." We will examine the Roman Catholic Church on the rise through the Renaissance and the subsequent Baroque which remains the façade of the city center today. The biography of Ignatius of Loyola will introduce us to the great concerns of the Church unfolding in the 16th century, concerns such as reform and mission. The story of the "*Papessa*" Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphilj will help us with the discussion on power and reform. We will look at the tensions building between faith and science and how the field of **Fundamental Theology** provides grounding for a dialog between them.

[8] Three Pius Popes and Three Secular Sovereigns • Thursday, June 12

Location(s): San Lorenzo fuori le mura, Campo Verano

Description: Campo Verano is a fitting backdrop to speak about three different popes named Pius, all of whom have a connection with the place. We'll start with Pius VII (7th) and his struggle with Napoleon. Then we will hear about Pius IX (9th), who led the First Vatican Council, which defined papal infallibility. Yet he was faced with a historical problem which is now called "*la Questione romana*" in Italian textbooks. As we visit his tomb we will discuss the dilemma of the "Apostolic See" of Rome and the struggle with Garibaldi. We will also discuss the meaning of the word "apostle" as it relates to the explosion of missionary communities in this same period. We will have a glimpse of this pattern in the story of foundress Frances Xavier Cabrini, patroness of immigrants, whose path briefly took her to Rome and then around the world. The story of don Giovanni Bosco, founder of the Salesians, will further aid our discussion. Jumping forward in time, we'll look at Pius XII (12th), who has a wartime connection with this place. He came after the bombardment of San Lorenzo during WWII. We will see how questions of the exercise of the papacy and the organization of the missional church remain at the heart of the study of **Ecclesiology** today.

[9] Rise of Roman Catholic Self-Awareness (and Other-Understanding) • Tuesday, June 17

Location(s): Basilica of St. Peter, Centro San Lorenzo

Description: How does one describe the Roman Catholic Church of the 20th century in a nutshell? Many new communities such as Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity and new movements like Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker Movement responded to modern needs. However, we must mention the sad divisions of World War I, the political dance of World War II, the whirl of changes which came with the Second Vatican Council, and the mediatic pontificate of Pope John Paul II. We will also discuss how topics of **Theological Anthropology**, such as human sexuality, dominate the discussions of this period.

[10] The Roman Catholic Church Down the Road • Thursday, June 19

Location(s): JFRC

Description: Group Project Presentations and Final Exam

What is the Church of the Third Millennium? This is the day in which the small groups present their projects. The projects include an invitation to reflect on Pope Francis's encyclicals *Laudato Si* and *Fratelli Tutti* and the current topics of ecology, ecumenism, dignity of human life, systems of solidarity, safeguarding the vulnerable, and economic responsibility. Here we will see what you have to say!