



**JOHN FELICE
ROME CENTER**

**THEO 279: Roman Catholicism
Rome Center • Fall 2026**

Tuesday section: 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Wednesday section: 2:30 p.m.–5:30 p.m.

Instructor: Dr. Rebecca Pawloski

Email: rpawloski@luc.edu

Office Hours: Before or after class onsite, by appointment at JFRC, or on Zoom.

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 historical 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, thematic, 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 Text / 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. Libreria Editrice Vaticana; United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, 2019.
- Louth, Andrew, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. 4th edition. Oxford University Press, 2022.
- *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. 2nd ed. 15 vols. Gale, 2003.

Texts for context

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



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Attendance Policy

In accordance with the Rome Center mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, and in compliance with full-time student visa status, all courses adhere to the following attendance policy.

Prompt attendance, preparation and active participation in course discussions are expected from every student and synonymous with academic success. Attendance is mandatory at every class meeting for each course. Lateness or leaving class early will impact the course grade at the professor's discretion. All absences, including medical absences, will be treated the same, unless they are documented long-term conditions or emergencies. Such situations will be evaluated case-by-case by the Academic Affairs office.

Once-a-week classes:

- After 1 absence, a 2% final grade reduction will be applied for each missed class.
- Missing 3 classes or more will result in an automatic failure (F).

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 Emergency, Illness, and Injury Absences" if unfortunate conditions legitimately cause your absences to exceed one lesson period.

Virtual Presence or Paper Participation for Emergency and Long-Term Condition 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 condition that prevents your attending class, you should contact your working group members as well as the instructor. The group may choose to 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, 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

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|-----------------------------------|-----|
| 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 (midterm assignment): 20%

- This assignment is due at the time of midterms.
- The essay uses the notes and bibliography system found in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.



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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 the week before the final exam.

Final Exam: 20%

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

N.B. In the case of an "Incomplete" the above percentages are suspended, and the grade will depend on the outcome of an oral exam on the material.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct are unacceptable at the Rome Center and will be dealt with in accordance with Loyola University Chicago's guidelines. Please familiarize yourself with Loyola's standards here: <https://catalog.luc.edu/academic-standards-regulations/undergraduate/>. You are responsible to comply with the LUC University Catalog.

Late or Missed Assignments & Exam Policy

Late or missed assignments will not be accepted for grading without the authorization of the instructor. As per the JFRC academic policies, students who miss any scheduled exam or quiz, including a final exam at the assigned hours will not be permitted to sit for a make-up examination without approval of the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. Permission is given rarely and only for grave reason; travel is not considered a grave reason. Make-up exams will only be given for documented absences.

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.



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Accessibility Accommodations

Students registered with the Student Accessibility Center (SAC) requiring academic accommodations should contact the Academic Affairs office at the John Felice Rome Center during the first week of classes.

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.

Comprehensive Policy and Procedures for Addressing Discrimination, Sexual Misconduct, Retaliation

The Rome Center follows Loyola's [Comprehensive Policy and Procedures for Addressing Discrimination, Sexual Misconduct, Retaliation](#) and will comply with those as indicated and instructed.

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.

Week 1: Introduction and Overview

Tuesday, September 1 • Wednesday, September 2

Location(s): Rome Center

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 (see underlined names). 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.

Week 2: The Zero Hour of the Church in Rome

Tuesday, September 8 • Wednesday, September 9

Location(s): Tiber Island, Santa 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.

Week 3: The Witness of a Fisherman

Tuesday, September 15 • Friday, September 18

Location(s): Domine Quo Vadis, catacombs



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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. 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.

Week 4: The Sword(s) of a Pharisee

Tuesday, September 22 • Wednesday, September 23

Location(s): San Paolo fuori le mura (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 Nicæan 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.

Week 5: The State Church of the Roman Empire: A Gift or Shift from the Way?

Tuesday, September 29 • Wednesday, September 30

Location(s): San Giovanni in Laterano (St. John Lateran), Sancta Sanctorum

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. Helena and her son Constantine usher in a new era of Christian practice. It is the dawning of the age of great synods and councils discussing Catholic belief, especially matters pertaining to **Christology and Trinitarian Theology**. The first council, that of Nicaea (325), gives some basic definitions. Yet, what is the difference between a council and synod? The Church of today is discussing just such a question...

Week 6: Christ from Mary: Feminine Foundations of the Church

Tuesday, October 6 • Wednesday, October 7

Location(s): Santa Maria Maggiore (St. Mary Major), Santa Prassede, Santa Pudenziana

Description: It wasn't long before the councils met on a feminine matter, the identity of Mary as Theotokos. The Council of Ephesus in 431 was held around the same time that St. Mary Major was (re)built following a miraculous apparition, in the midst of other titular churches dedicated to women. In this age, a transition from preparing for the immediate coming of Jesus to realizing there may be some delay, led to the celebration of other memorials in the Church. Feast days were celebrated, especially for those saints mentioned in the Roman Canon. **Mariology and Hagiography** developed in this period, and the process of becoming a saint still is connected to it today. It is an era in which Monica and her son Augustine and Jerome and his benefactress Paula spent time in Rome.

Week 7: Roman Monasticism

Tuesday, October 20 • Wednesday, October 21

Location(s): S. Gregorio al Celio, Ss. Giovanni e Paolo, S. Stefano Rotondo

Description: Around the year 500, Benedict came to Rome for studies and lived in Trastevere. As one of the great founders of organized celibate Catholic community, he heavily influenced Pope Gregory the Great in his governance of the clergy of Rome. Here we are in the presence of the oldest monastic foundations in the city. Religious life made keeping patterns of time and tradition ever more possible and safeguarded the practice of Catholic ritual, **Liturgy and Sacraments**, for the entire community. The monastic tradition remains alive in Rome today, and we will meet one of its heirs during our visit.



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Week 8: All Roads Lead to Rome: Pilgrimages and Crusades

Tuesday, October 27 • Wednesday, October 28

Location(s): Via Francigena

Description: From the beginning, Christianity was on the move and the roads of the Roman Empire were used to further the proclamation of the Gospel. Yet how did Rome become the ultimate pilgrimage destination? The answer is also related to the question of the crusades. This brings us to reflect on **Moral Theology** and questions of religious violence. Francis of Assisi gives a response to the crusades with consequences lasting until today. But would Francis have been able to go as far as he did without the backing of a powerful woman: “brother” Jacopa de’ Settesoli?

Week 9: The Leading Ladies of Medieval Rome

Tuesday, November 3 • Wednesday, November 4

Location(s): Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, Piazza Farnese (T), Basilica of S. Francesca Romana (W)

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 residents Catherine of Siena, Frances of Rome, and Bridget of Sweden exercised a prophetic power as women of contemplation in action. They show 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. Discussion of this period, the Avignon papacy, will also pick up one of the threads running through our course sessions—the relationship between Church and State.

Week 10: “Roman Catholics” – Pejorative or Prerogative?

Tuesday, November 10 • Wednesday, November 11

Location(s): Chiesa del Gesù, Rooms of St. Ignatius, Galleria Doria Pamphilj

Description: Up to this point in the course, we have not used the appellation “Roman Catholic” and in 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 biographies of Ignatius of Loyola and of one of his benefactresses (who was also a Jesuit for a short time!), Isabel Roser, will introduce us to the great concerns of the Church unfolding in the 16th century, concerns such as reform and mission. Of course, the discourse would not be complete without a discussion of imperialism and anti-clericalism. The story of the “Papessa” Olimpia Maidalchini Pamphilj and her brother-in-law, Pope Innocent X, 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.

Week 11: The Roman Question: What Is the State of the Apostolic Church?

Tuesday, November 17 • Wednesday, November 18

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. But 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 stories of founders such as Frances Xavier Cabrini and Giuseppina Vannini. Finally, we’ll look at Pius XII (12th), who has a wartime connection with this place. He came after the



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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.

Week 12: Rise of Roman Catholic Self-Awareness (and Other-Understanding)

Tuesday, November 24 • Wednesday, November 25

Location(s): San Pietro (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.

Week 13: The Roman Catholic Church Down the Road

Tuesday, December 1 • Wednesday, December 2

Location(s): Rome Center

Description: What is the Church of the Third Millennium? We could go to the parish church down the road and find out. The juridical parish of the Rome Center is Saint Fulgentius, and we will see if we have time for a visit. But most importantly, 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!

Week 14: Final Exam

Tuesday, December 8 • Wednesday, December 9

Location(s): Rome Center