



JOHN FELICE ROME CENTER

Theo 279: Roman Catholicism Rome Center • Summer 2026

Tuesdays & 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.



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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. Three (3) absences will result in an automatic failure (F).

An absence excused by the administration or by a doctor's note allows students to mitigate its impact on their grade by completing a make-up assignment for the missed session.

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 course. 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).



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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](#). 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.

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.



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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.

[1] Introduction and Overview • Tuesday, May 19

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. 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 21

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**.

[3] The Witness of a Fisherman • Tuesday, May 26

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. Our discussion will also include two additional martyrs—the evangelist Mark and Cecilia, whose basilica we visited in the previous lesson. This will lead into a conversation on **Eschatology** and an acknowledgement of places where the Church still suffers persecution today. The lesson includes a tour of an ancient burial site, or catacombs, named for the martyr Callixtus.

[4] The Sword(s) of a Pharisee • Thursday, May 28

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.

[5] The State Church of the Roman Empire: A Gift or Shift from the Way? • Tuesday, June 2

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



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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 4

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

Description:

Our journey begins at Santa Sabina on the Aventine Hill, where we'll explore Pope Leo the Great's pivotal role in the 5th century. As the Western Roman Empire crumbled, Leo exemplified how church leadership filled the emerging power vacuum. The Aventine also serves as the global headquarters for the Benedictine Order, connecting us to our next figure.

Around the year 500, Benedict arrived in Rome for his education, initially residing in Trastevere before departing due to its notorious rowdiness (a reputation it maintains even today). Benedict would later establish one of the most influential frameworks for organized monastic communities in Catholic history.

This monastic tradition continues in Rome at its original site within the city walls—the Caelian Hill, where Gregory the Great first established it. The Caelian Hill also hosted Francis of Assisi during his crucial visit to Rome seeking papal approval for his new order, where he received assistance from John de Matha.

[7] From Medieval to Modern Rome: “Roman Catholics” – Pejorative or Prerogative? • Tuesday, June 9

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 appellation “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 11

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



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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. Jumping forward in time, we’ll look at Pius XII (12th), who has a wartime connection with this place, visiting 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 16

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 and movements, such as Dorothy Day’s Catholic Worker Movement, emerged in response to modern needs. At the same time, 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 18

Location(s): Rome Center

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!