Theo 281: Christianity Through Time  
John Felice Rome Center  
Fall 2023: Thursdays, 10.00 am – 12.30 pm  
Dr. Deborah F. Sawyer  
Email: dsawyer2@luc.edu  
Office Hours Thursdays: 2-3pm or by appointment

Course Description

Christianity has shaped our world more than any other religious or secular phenomenon. Today with approximately 2.6 billion adherents, it has the highest population of any world religion. To begin to understand the world we live in, we need to understand Christianity, its beliefs and practices, which have had, and continue to have, such a profound global impact.

During this semester you will be introduced to key factors and individuals that have shaped the religion we encounter today; and for your projects you will have the opportunity to research in depth a particular Roman location of your choice where Christianity has had a significant role to play. Planning and discussions of your projects will run throughout the semester.

In Part 1 we will be tracing the journey of a small Jewish sect that emerged in the first century, and how, with its founder executed and its first adherents persecuted, it became the dominant religion of the Roman Empire by the 4th century. We begin with the antecedents to Christian origins, studying the earliest evidence, and through work in class and your assignments, you’ll discover how the Christian faith was born and spread in the ancient world during these formative years.

In Part 2 we’ll study key moments and individuals from history that have impacted on the religion’s identity and practice. These include the internal challenges posed to the medieval church in Italy by S. Francis and S. Clare; the impact of Martin Luther’s ideas at the dawn of the modern era with the ensuing spread of the Protestant Reformation; and the subsequent Catholic Reformation, explored alongside the lives of S. Ignatius of Loyola and S. Teresa of Avila.

In Part 3 we cross over to the 20th and 21st centuries to examine Christianity in contemporary times with a particular focus on the Roman Catholic Church in its global contexts. We begin by assessing the impact of Vatican II on beliefs and practices since the 1960s. We continue with discussion of a variety of challenges facing believers and institutions today, including interfaith dialogue, gender and sexuality, and other social and political issues.

A central feature of this course is the project. Each of you, with advice and supervision, will select a Christian site in Rome, which could be a particular church, or Christian based institution, for example, a seminary, a social action center, a religious community, a school, a college or a hospital. You could
choose one of the Rome’s pilgrimage sites, or a pilgrimage with Rome as its final destination. You will research your chosen subject’s history, its faith foundation, and its activities up to the present day. Your project can include copies of archival material, photographs, interviews and other relevant illustrative material.

Towards the end of the semester we’ll bring together the project and classroom work. You will each present and discuss your research, identifying wider theological, historical and contemporary implications from your work, which we can integrate with the ideas we have been addressing during classes.

**Learning Outcomes**
Students who successfully complete this course will have the ability to:
- Identify and explain key aspects of the Christian religion from a theological, historical and global perspective
- Develop their research skills in constructing a detailed and well-informed project on the history, faith and practices of a particular Christian site in Rome
- Synthesize information from a variety of academic disciplines as it relates to the development of Christianity
- Research and evaluate secondary sources in relation to primary texts
- Develop and practice their technical and presentation skills

**Assessment Components**

**Midterm**
- 15% Midterm Assignment 1 Reading Responses
- 20% Midterm Assignment 2 Midterm paper

**Finals**
- 10% Finals Assignment 1 Annotated Project Plan
- 10% Finals Assignment 2 Reading Responses
- 35% Finals Assignment 3 Written Project Paper

10% Project Presentation and overall participation in the course

**Readings and Responses**
Each week you will be given questions based on the reading/s for that week - posted on SAKAI Resources. Your responses to these questions in groups, and in some instances for individual assessment, create your ‘reading log’ for this course. The aim is to ensure that you are building - and being tested on - your knowledge base in the subject.

**The Project**
Work on the projects begins in earnest after Fall Break. In the class workshops we discuss developing project plans and schedules for completion. The workshops and consultations aim to ensure projects are underway and progressing.
**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 standards here: [http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml). You are responsible to comply with the LUC Student Handbook.

**Late or Missed Assignments**
Late or missed assignments will not be accepted for grading except with authorization.

**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:
- For all classes meeting once a week, students cannot incur more than one unexcused absence. Unexcused absences beyond this will result in 1% lowering of the final course.
- The collective health of the JFRC is everyone’s responsibility, **DO NOT ATTEND CLASS IF YOU ARE ILL.**

**Accessibility Accommodations**
Students registered with the Student Accessibility Center requiring academic accommodations should contact the Office of the Dean at the John Felice Rome Center the first week of classes.

**Email Communication** I will do my best to reply to emails sent during business hours (Monday to Friday, 9.00 – 18.00). Emails sent after 18.00 will be considered received the next day. The best way to communicate is directly, during my office hour or by making an appointment.

**Computer, Phone & Internet Use in the Classroom** Use of phones is always prohibited. Please turn your phones off when in class. Use of laptop computers during class time is permitted only for note taking and group and workshop research activity.

**Course Schedule**
All required readings are posted on SAKAI. These may change during the course of the semester, sufficient notice will be given to allow for preparation.

**Week One 9/7**
Introduction to Theo 281
1. The course explained
2. Framing Christianity

**Week Two 9/14**
Cosmology, Creation and Anthropology

Reading 1: Text Genesis 1-3
Fewell, Danna Nolan and Gunn, David M. ‘Shifting the Blame’, Gender, Power and Promise: The Subject of the Bible’s First Story, pp.22-38.

**Week Three 9/21**
Judaism at the time of Jesus and Paul
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<tr>
<td>12/10</td>
<td>Midterm – completion and submission of Midterm Assignment 2 Project Workshop</td>
<td><strong>FALL BREAK</strong></td>
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<td>NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING</td>
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<td>30/11</td>
<td>Pilgrimage – Past and Present</td>
<td>Reading 11: ‘Introduction: Arriving at the End’, Frey, Nancy Louise. Pilgrim Stories : On and off the Road to Santiago, Journeys along an Ancient Way in Modern Spain</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Project Presentations</td>
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