

STANDARD SYLLABUS

**Roman Catholicism**  
**THEO 279**

Roman Catholicism has affected our world powerfully and pervasively and it continues to do so. Our lives are profoundly influenced by it, whether we are Catholic or not, and whether we like it or not! No one escapes its influence. At the same time, no one can avoid the questions and concerns that stand at the heart of the Church's very reason for existing: who are we? why are we here? what "happens" when we die?

For 2000 years, the Church has struggled to be the gathering of God's people that is faithful to Jesus Christ as God's "answer" to these issues and the embodiment of God's saving presence in the world. In this effort, it has often failed and fallen short, as even Pope John Paul II himself has stressed. Yet it has also offered strength to the weak, wisdom to the seeking, and hope to the oppressed and despairing.

By the end of this course, you should be familiar with the major facets of the complex reality that is the Roman Catholic Church and with the internal and external forces that are shaping its future.

**Knowledge Area(s) satisfied:** Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge  
**Skill(s) Developed:** Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions  
**Values Requirement(s) satisfied:** Understanding Spirituality or Faith in Action in the World

**Learning Objectives:**

**Knowledge Area (Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge):**

By taking this course, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge, with attention to historical development, of the central texts, beliefs, ethical understandings, and practices of Roman Catholicism. By way of example, students who take this course should be able to: (1) name and discuss some of the most important Roman Catholic beliefs; (2) Articulate the general outline of the historical evolution of Roman Catholicism and, in particular, the impact of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965); (3) Define and discuss key Roman Catholic concepts, terms, values, and religious practices; and (4) recount and analyze the main lines of current Roman Catholic debates about its identity in today's world.

The course also addresses other competencies as well. By taking this course, for example, students should be able to analyze and interpret Roman Catholic religious texts, beliefs, and practices using standard scholarly methods and tools (competency a). For example, students should be able to analyze and interpret some papal and conciliar statements and discuss the role of these texts in the lives of believing Roman Catholics. Students taking this course will also be able to demonstrate knowledge of the central ethical teachings and perspectives of Roman Catholicism (competency e), e.g., the role and meaning of "natural law." Finally, students taking this course will be able to evaluate the religious perspectives of Roman Catholics (competency d) in light of what they learn about the teachings and practices that are foundational to Roman Catholicism.

### **Skills (Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions):**

Students will:

1. "comprehend, paraphrase, summarize, and contextualize the meaning of varying forms of communication."

In class discussions, quizzes, and/or examinations, students will demonstrate the ability to comprehend, paraphrase, summarize, and/or contextualize a variety of religious texts, histories, and ideas, as well as scholarly arguments about those texts, histories and ideas.

2. develop "strategies for seeking and synthesizing information to support an argument, make a decision, or resolve a problem."

In class discussions, quizzes, and/or examinations, students will be encouraged to articulate reasoned arguments about materials studied in the course or to critique arguments to which they are exposed in the class.

3. monitor students' own "individual thinking or behavior" in relationship to Roman Catholicism "in order to question, confirm, validate, or correct" their presuppositions and prejudices.

Class discussions will require students to reflect on their own presuppositions and correct erroneous opinions by appealing to data and reasoned argumentation.

### **Values Area (Understanding Spirituality or Faith in Action in the World):**

1. Students who identify themselves as Roman Catholic or claim a Catholic heritage in some way will be enabled to "demonstrate knowledge of and . . . to articulate the foundations of one's own . . . beliefs or faith traditions." Similarly, non-Catholic students will be enabled to "demonstrate knowledge of and . . . to articulate the foundations of . . . others' beliefs or faith traditions" (competency a). Such competency will be promoted by the required reading, class discussions, student writing, and examinations.

2. In the Roman Catholic ethos, belief and worship are gradually but surely to shape one's way of life. Thus, a study of Roman Catholicism will enable students to "demonstrate how faith traditions or belief systems have been or can be related to intellectual and cultural life" (competency b). Such competency will be promoted mainly by class discussions and student writing.

3. Since Roman Catholicism focuses upon fundamental issues of personal identity and meaning, the study of Roman Catholicism in this course will "develop an ability to reflect upon the applications of one's beliefs or faith traditions to decisions in one's personal, professional, and civic life" (competency c). Such competency will be promoted mainly by class discussions and student writing.

## **Learning Activities:**

### **Possible array of texts:**

- Joseph F. Eagan, Restoration and Renewal. The Church in the Third Millennium. Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995.

Note: (Instructors may vary the textbooks.)

### **Possible evaluation methods:**

- Lecture
- Discussion
- Papers
- Examinations
- Presentations
- Fieldtrips

Note: (Instructors may vary the evaluation categories.)

### **Sample Semester Schedule:**

- Week 1: Introduction to course  
Vatican II: what it was and what it meant
- Week 2: Why does the Church exist, anyway?  
The Meaning and Role of Morality
- Week 3: Who calls the shots in the Church - and why?  
What about the rest of us?
- Week 4: The heart of the matter
- Week 5: Marriage and reconciliation  
The Church confronts the world
- Week 6: The RCC and other Christian churches

Note: (Instructors may vary the presentation of topics to some degree, but the material covered will remain the same: This is a summer Schedule.)