

## **RELS 380: Contemporary Catholic Thought**

Fall 2006, Mondays 7-9:40 p.m.

**Instructor:** Prof. Peter McCourt, M.T.S.  
[pmccourt@vcu.edu](mailto:pmccourt@vcu.edu),

**Office location:** 210 Lafayette Hall (only there for scheduled appointments)

**Faculty mailbox:** Lafayette Hall – School of World Studies, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor

**Office Hours:** by appointment, arranged via e-mail of after class.

### **TEXTS**

- *Vatican II in Plain English: The Constitutions*; B. Huesbch; or full text available on-line at the Vatican Archives, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)
- *Catholicism in the Third Millennium*, T. Rausch, SJ
- *The College Student's Introduction to Theology*, ed. T. Rausch, SJ
- Other Readings, available in-class only

N.B. This is a reading-intensive course. We will be having a discussion in each class period on the readings. You need to obtain the books/other readings. The Writing Portfolio essays are based on these materials.

### **Reference Materials**

A Theology of Liberation, G. Gutierrez.

Catholicism, New edition, R. McBrien.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, HH Pope John Paul II.

Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret, 4th ed., E. DeBerri, et al.

Creation Spirituality: Liberating Gifts for the Peoples of the Earth, M. Fox.

Introducing Liberation Theology, L. Boff and C. Boff.

She Who Is, E. Johnson.

The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview, G. Baum, ed.

What Makes Us Catholic, T. Groome.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

“Semester course; 3 lecture hours. 3 credits.

A study of the contemporary Catholic Christian response to the questions of God and the experience of the sacred in life. Methods of Catholic theology will be explicated and an exploration of the contemporary theology and thought of the Catholic Church in the modern/post-modern era. Topics will include: the Second Vatican Council and its reforms,

theologies of liberation, feminist theology, Catholic Social Teaching, biomedical ethics/issues, eco/creation theology.”

**EVALUATION** (there are 4 components)

**1. Reading/Attendance/Participation**

10%

Basic requirement of this course. You must be present at each session, for the full session, so that we can gain from your insights and experience and you can benefit from ours and the class as a whole.

In order to make our time together as productive and engaging as possible, every student must: 1) attend all classes, being present in body, mind, and spirit; 2) take notes on the lectures, handouts, videos, and on the reading assignments so that you can pose questions and make comments about these materials in class and in your writing assignments; 3) complete reading and writing assignments prior to the start of the class in which they are due; 4) participate in class discussions, exercises, and presentations with good cheer! **THERE WILL BE POP QUIZZES ON THE READINGS EACH WEEK.**

**Writing Portfolio**

20%

A series of 1-3 page **Reflection/Response Essays** to SPECIFIC topics are required throughout the semester; topics are assigned in class. All papers should be typed using standard 1” margins; double-spaced; references can be parenthetically (i.e. noted within the body of the paper). If you use material other than our reading material, you need to include a “Works Cited” list. Papers are due at the beginning of class on the assigned day. Late papers are not normally accepted. If unavoidable circumstances arise, the student may REQUEST consideration for submitting late papers. The instructor reserves the right of decision.

**2. Mid-term Exam**

20%

Book Review: At least one-half to two-thirds of the book review should be dedicated to reporting on the book’s contents. A minimum of two pages must be an interaction and/or critique of the book. An exceptional paper will also reference the readings of the course. The length of the review paper should be from 5-7 pages. Typed, double-spaced, 1” margins. Use parenthetical references and then follow MLA style manual ([www.mla.org/publications/style](http://www.mla.org/publications/style)) for a “Works Cited” list. (Footnotes or endnotes are not needed)

OR

Exam (either written or oral: chosen by consensus of class)

The midterm is due at the start of class on **October 23.**

**3. Topic Project**

25%

Students select a topic in contemporary theology, with the instructor, to do focused research and writing on. (List provided by Instructor) These projects will be presented during a regular class session. Visuals (‘power-point’, videos, posters, pictures, maps, etc.) greatly enhance your presentation. Each person will have 30 minutes for his or her presentation. These presentations are considered exam material. A complete discussion of projects will occur on the day of selection. Presentations are scheduled for **November 20-December 4.**

**4. FINAL EXAM**

25%

Each student is also required to submit a **Bibliographic Research Project** of her/his research on the Topic Project. Instructor will give directions. These projects will be discussed individually during the final exam session on **December 11.**

## **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION**

This class is a cooperative effort based upon interaction in the classroom. Attendance is taken each class session. It is the student's responsibility to make sure her/his attendance is noted each session. Students are expected to be in class, on time, and remain in class until the session is concluded, unless arrangements are made with the Instructor.

### **Religious Studies Department Guidelines on Attendance:**

**If a student misses three weeks of class (after the add-drop week), the student's grade will be dropped one letter. If a student misses four weeks of class (after the add-drop week), the student cannot receive credit for the course.**

Your participation in this course is vital to its success. Your completion of assigned readings and your diligence in "keeping up" with the work will be evident to the Instructor in your assignments and questions/discussion. This will be the "swing vote" in determining final.

SO, COME, PREPARED, EACH WEEK, and TURN ASSIGNMENTS IN ON-TIME or even early!

## **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

(Tentative means that I can make changes and so you need to be in class in case that happens)

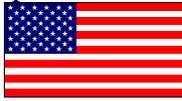
### SECTION 1: INTRODUCTIONS

**Week 1: 8/28** Introductions: me, you, the syllabus; the subject

READ (for next class): Ch. 1, *Catholicism in the Third Millennium* (Rausch); and Ch. 1, *Introduction to Theology* (Rausch, ed.)

WRITE: first paper: 2 full pages on "My Perceptions of Religion, Catholicism, and the key contemporary religious issue in the Catholic Church"; due next class.

**8/30** Last day to Drop/Add



**9/4** NO CLASS

**9/8** Deadline for students to provide advance written notification to instructors of intent to observe religious holidays

**Week 2: 9/11** Introductions, continued

#### *THE CHURCH IN HISTORY*

READ (for next class): Ch. 4 and 10, pp. 175-179, *Intro. to Theology* AND *Lumen gentium* (Vatican II)

WRITE: Reading/reflection essay (2 pages)

**Week 3: 9/18** *The Church in the Modern World*

READ (for next class): *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* (<http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/bishopStatement.html>), *Catholics in Political Life* (<http://www.usccb.org/bishops/catholicsinpoliticallife.htm>), and *DOCTRINAL NOTE on some questions regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* ([http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20021124\\_politica\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20021124_politica_en.html))



**Week 4: 9/25** *The Church in the Political Realm*

READ (for next class): Ch. 2 and 3, *Intro to Theology* AND Ch. 3 and 4, *Catholicism in the Third Millennium* AND *Dei Verbum (Vatican II)*

WRITE: Reading/reflection essay (2 pages).

**Week 5: 10/2** SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

READ (for next class): Ch. 5 and 6, *Intro to Theology* AND Ch. 2 and 10, *Catholicism...*

WRITE: Reading/reflection essay (2 pages).

**Week 6: 10/09** CHRISTIAN FAITH AND THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

READ (for next class): Ch. 8, *Intro to Theology* AND *Sacrosanctum concilium (Vatican II)* AND Ch. 5, *Catholicism ...*

WRITE: Reading/reflection essay (2 pages).

**Week 7: 10/16** SACRAMENTS AND THE LITURGY

READ (for next class): *Presbyterorum ordinis (Vatican II)*

10/19-22: VCU Reading Days



**Week 8: 10/23** **MIDTERM DUE** at the start of class. Group discussion on midterms and *Presbyterorum ordinis*.

READ (for next class on 3/22): Ch. 7 and 8, *Catholicism ...* AND Ch. 7, *Intro to Theology* AND *Gaudium et spes (Vatican II)*

**Week 9: 10/30** MORAL THEOLOGY

READ (for next class): pp. 170-174; 182-188, *Intro to Theology* AND pp. 155-165; 220-227, *Catholicism...* AND Reading handout AND *Dignitatis humanae (Vatican II)*

WRITE: Reading/Response essay (2 pages).

**Week 10: 11/6** SOCIAL ETHICS: Liberation, Feminist, Catholic Social Teaching

READ (for next class): Ch. 10, pp. 179-182 and 11, *Intro to Theology* AND *Unitatis redintegratio* and *Nostra Aetate (Vatican II)*

WRITE: Reading/Response essay (2 pages).

**Week 11: 11/13** ECUMENISM AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

READ (for next class on 4/19): Ch 10, *Intro to Theology* AND Ch. 11, *Catholicism...*

WRITE: Reading/Response essay (2 pages).

NEXT CLASS: TOPIC PROJECTS BEGIN

**Week 12-14:** TOPIC PROJECTS

11/20, 11/27 INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATIONS

READ (for each class): TBA

12/4: INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATIONS, Prepare for final exam, evaluations, wrap-up

12/11: FINAL EXAM, 7-10 p.m.

### **Plagiarism, Cheating, and the Honor System at VCU**

“If an instructor believes that a student has cheated, then the instructor must report the incident to an honor system administrator... According to the honor system manual, a professor can't offer the student optional penalties. One reason might be the concern that a student would get less punishment than she (/he) deserves.”

“If an instructor has strong evidence that a student has cheated, the instructor must still present the evidence to the administrator in order for him to gather all relevant evidence, speak to all parties involved, confront the student with the accusation, etc. In short, the administrator needs to investigate and get all the data to prove that the student is guilty. I suppose it's something like getting a second opinion in medicine, except that the administrator spends much more time in trying to determine if the student is guilty. The student is innocent until proved guilty and it takes time and a certain process to establish guilt or innocence. So the instructor who thinks the student plagiarized should not record an F for the student, but whatever grade the paper would get were it not plagiarized. Then it's my job and the instructor's to go through the process of determining guilt or innocence.”

-E. Coleman, University Honor System Administrator, Fall 2003

N. B.: Under no circumstances will plagiarism or cheating of ANY kind be tolerated in this course!

Please consult the VCU Resource Guide (student handbook) for further information.

<http://www.students.vcu.edu/rg/>

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## **VCU CREED**

### *Philosophy for an Academic Community*

Academic institutions exist, among other reasons, to discover, advance and transmit knowledge and to develop in their students, faculty and staff the capacity for creative and critical thought.

At Virginia Commonwealth University, members of the academic community should strive to exemplify

the following specific ideals in addition to other worthy ideals:

#### **TO DEMONSTRATE ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL INTEGRITY.**

One who is committed to this ideal respects and observes the VCU Honor System and practices honesty, loyalty and faithfulness in personal relationships.

#### **TO RESPECT THE RIGHTS AND PROPERTY OF OTHERS**

A commitment to this ideal respects all aspects of the personal rights of others and refrains from all forms of theft, vandalism and destruction of the property of another.

#### **TO BE OPEN TO OTHERS' OPINIONS.**

This ideal requires one to listen to the opinions of others and respect the right of all persons to a free and open exchange of ideas and opinions.

#### **TO UPHOLD ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND FREEDOM OF INTELLECTUAL INQUIRY.**

The University is committed to educating its students in an atmosphere of freedom of expression, critical thinking, intellectual curiosity and scholarship to permit students to realize their full potential as informed, productive citizens with a lifelong commitment to learning and service.

**TO APPRECIATE DIVERSITY AND TO VALUE AND LEARN FROM THE UNIQUENESS OF EACH PERSON.**

The University values racial and cultural diversity in its community to enhance and enrich a stimulating environment for teaching, learning, research and creative expression.

**TO UPHOLD THE RIGHT OF ALL PERSONS TO BE TREATED WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT AND TO REFRAIN FROM ALL FORMS OF INIMIDATION, HARASSMENT AND ILLEGAL DISCRIMINATION.**

One who is committed to this ideal practices courtesy and consideration toward others and refrains from any action that denigrates another person.

**TO DEMONSTRATE AND RESPECT INTELLECTUAL COURAGE IN SITUATIONS THAT DEMAND IT.**

Commitment to this ideal requires one to uphold the highest standards and ideals of teaching scholarship, research and intellectual integrity.

Approvals:

Academic Campus Student Government Association: December 6, 1993; March 4, 1996; September 14, 1998; February 22, 1999.

VCU Medical Campus Student Government Association: Fall 1998, February 1999.

University Council Committee on Student Affairs: March 23, 1999

Faculty Senate: June 4, 1996; February 2, 1999

University Council: May 11, 1999

Board of Visitors: May 14, 1999