

## **AMERICAN CATHOLIC HISTORY**

an upper-level undergraduate course  
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies  
Louisiana State University

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### **INSTITUTIONAL SETTING**

Louisiana State University is the flagship public university in the capitol city of Baton Rouge. The combined undergraduate and graduate enrollment is approximately 30,000 students. Most students are Louisiana natives from one of six urban areas in the state, though there are many from more rural communities. The social and economic backgrounds of students run the gamut of extreme poverty to extreme privilege. Because of the state's relatively poor public school system and high church attendance (7 in 10 residents say religion is very important in their lives, the 4th highest count in the U.S., according to a Pew study), about 1/6 of Louisiana's students graduate from parochial high schools before entering college. LSU does not boast a very diverse student body: over 75% of students are white, 10% are black, 3% are Hispanic, and 3% are Asian; gender is almost 50/50. Most LSU students self-identify as Christian, usually falling into the categories of Roman Catholicism (Louisiana has a disproportionately large Catholic population for a southern state) or Evangelical Protestantism. The perspectives of LSU students on religion, like most universities, range from genuine inquisitiveness to overt hostility and from bored apathy to devout piety.

### **CURRICULAR CONTEXT**

The LSU Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies is the smallest academic unit in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. However, the Department teaches more general education courses than any other unit in the College. Currently, there are approximately 40 students majoring in philosophy with a "concentration" in religious studies. There is not a graduate program in religious studies. With so few majors and so many non-majors taking religion classes, it is common for students with no training in religious studies to take upper-level courses. "American Catholic Experience" is an upper-level course with an enrollment cap of 30 students, though usually fewer than 20 students register for the course. The course serves as a compliment to several other specialized courses in American religious history and a general education survey of American religions.

### **TEACHING METHODOLOGY**

In the classroom, I consider it my responsibility to conduct myself as both a teacher *and* a student of religion. I value the messiness of making sense of religion and encourage my students to join me in the business of interpreting the worlds of others by using historical and ethnographic methods. It is also my responsibility to create an environment of learning that balances the amount of information covered in lectures and reading assignments with critical

reflections and group discussions about topics related to Catholic experiences in America. Consequently, students are evaluated on their performance in three types of assignments: written essays, classroom discussions, and primary source research. Specifically, students are required to write 2 book reviews and 2 take-home essays (midterm and final exams), come to class prepared to discuss pre-assigned questions about reading assignments, and conduct an oral history of a Catholic resident of Louisiana in coordination with LSU's T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History (<http://www.lib.lsu.edu/special/williams/>).

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course provides an introduction to the historical experiences of Catholics in North America from the colonial period to the present. This course is not only an institutional history of the American Catholic Church, but also a study of popular manifestations of Catholicism which tries to uncover the diverse experiences of American Catholics in different places and times throughout the history of the United States. We will use a variety of primary and secondary sources to achieve these goals, including traditional monographs, novels, memoirs, films, papal documents, correspondences, essays, speeches, poetry, political writings, sermons, advertisements, liturgies, and works of art. Over the course of the semester we will learn about the major developments, persons, institutions, and ideas that shaped the experiences of Catholics at different moments in American history. We will also learn how to listen to and understand the voices of people from the past and the present, perspectives that are embedded in historical artifacts and available to us in the person of Catholic adherents today.

## **PREREQUISITES**

This course assumes no prior knowledge of Catholicism and, indeed, no prior knowledge of any religion. It is, however, primarily designated for upper-level Religious Studies majors who are familiar and comfortable with the field's critical-historical approach to the study of religion. Accordingly, students should understand that this is not a course on Catholic theology or orthodoxy, but rather an exploration of the diverse historical experiences of Catholics in the United States. Non-Religious Studies majors are welcomed in this class but are expected to work hard in the early weeks of the course to become familiar with the perspectives and methodologies of Religious Studies. In addition, there is substantial reading for this course. Students who enroll in the class must be prepared to read approximately 100-150 pages per week, depending on the difficulty of the assigned reading. To do well in this course, students must complete the assigned readings.

## **CLASS PROTOCOL**

**Consideration and Respectfulness:** The study of religion in America often leads to the discovery of religious traditions and practices that differ significantly from what is familiar to students. It is essential that students approach the rich history of religion in America with a perspective that will allow them to understand those differences. Accordingly, all discussion in this course must be carried on with respect for the views of those with whom one might differ. There will be no proselytizing in class.

## REQUIRED BOOKS

Jay Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension*  
Brian Moore, *Black Robe*  
Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem*  
James Fisher, *On the Irish Waterfront: The Crusader, the Movie, and the Soul of the Port of New York*  
Kristy Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio: Marian Apparitions, Catholic Evangelizing, and Mexican American Activism*  
Peter Manseau, *Vows: The Story of a Priest, a Nun, and Their Son*  
Elia Kazan, *On the Waterfront* (film)

In addition, most weeks there will be primary documents that are **required reading**. You will find these documents on the Internet. The websites are provided in this syllabus. With the exception of *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* and the *Jesuit Relations*, you should print each week's primary document and bring it with you to class for discussion.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Participation (100 pts.)

Students will be expected to attend all classes and participate in all classroom activities. Discussion questions will be provided for each reading assignment, and students will be assigned discussion questions for which they are responsible for facilitating conversation in class.

### Book Review (200 pts., 50 pts. each)

Students will be required to answer questions related to four (4) of the five (5) books assigned for this class. Students will not answer questions related to Jay Dolan's *In Search of an American Catholicism*, as it will function as a general survey of the course material. Answers will be assessed for their intelligence, insightfulness, and form. Writing guidelines will be provided.

### Midterm Examination (100 pts.)

Students will be tested on their ability to apply analytical theories and methods to the study of religion. Students will be allowed to choose one among several take-home essay questions approximately five pages in length. Essays will be assessed for their clarity of thesis, effectiveness of argument, employment of reading assignments, and grammatical discipline.

### Oral History Project (100 pts.)

Students will conduct an oral history of a Catholic practitioner in Louisiana. Students will be graded on their ability to produce a questionnaire, conduct an interview, digitally record and edit the interview, and comment on how the interviewee's perspective contributes to our understanding of Catholicism in Louisiana.

### Final Examination (100 pts.)

Students will be tested on their ability to apply analytical theories and methods to the study of religion. Students will be allowed to choose one among several take-home essay questions

approximately five pages in length. Essays will be assessed for their clarity of thesis, effectiveness of argument, employment of reading assignments, and grammatical discipline.

A=540-600

B=480-539

C=420-479

D=360-419

F=<360

## **CLASS SCHEDULE**

### **Week One: Introduction to Roman Catholicism in the United States**

What do you want to get out of this class? What types of approaches are we going to take when we try to understand the history of Roman Catholicism in the United States? What do we mean when we say “American Catholicism”?

### **Week Two: Oral History Workshop**

What is history? How can you think and perform as an historian in this class? What is an “oral history” and how does one conduct an oral history?

- Discussion of Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, Intro

### **Week Three: Spanish and French Colonialism in the Americas**

What impact did Spanish and French Catholics have on the lives of Native Americans and future European colonists to the “New World”? How did Catholicism change in the face of a diversity of colonial experiences? What is the legacy of these early Catholic settlements in what would become Canada, Mexico, and parts of the United States? Do the Jesuit Relations help us better understand Catholic colonialism? What about Moore’s Black Robe?

- Discussion of Moore, Black Robe
- Discussion of the Jesuit Relations,  
[http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/relations/relations\\_31.html](http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/relations/relations_31.html)

### **Week Four: English Colonialism and Frontier Catholicism in the Early American Republic**

How were the experiences of English Catholics in Maryland and other American colonies different from the experiences of French and Spanish Catholics of the same period? What was life like for Catholics of many ethnic and national backgrounds on the American frontier? Should we consider the English Catholic settlement of Maryland to be the starting point for a history of Catholic experiences in the United States?

- Discussion of Dolan, *In Search of American Catholicism*, Ch. 1

### **Week Five: Immigration and Anti-Catholicism in the 19th Century**

How did European Catholic immigrants change the religious landscape of the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Did immigrant groups assimilate or resist American culture? How did Protestant Americans respond to the immigration of Catholics to the United States? How did these and other issues change the ways in which Catholics believed and practiced their understanding of Catholicism?

- Discussion of Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, Ch. 2

- Discussion of *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*,  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext05/8adis10.txt>

### **Week Six: Catholic Culture of Devotion**

After reading Orsi's book, how do you understand Catholic devotional culture? What do you know about "lived religion" and how does this affect the way you think about Catholic experiences in the United States? How does Orsi's approach complement or detract from other approaches to the study of Catholicism in the United States?

- Discussion of Orsi, *Madonna of 115th Street*
- **Book Review #1 Due:** Orsi, *Madonna of 115th Street*

### **Week Seven: Catholic Labor Tradition and the Americanist Crisis**

The latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw many Catholics engaging in American culture, as seen most evidently in the Catholic composition of the American workforce and Catholic higher education. How did the American experience put stress on the relationship between Catholics in the United States and Europe? How did some popes respond to the changes that were taking place in the American Catholic church? Where do these papal encyclicals fit into our larger discussion of American Catholic history?

- Discussion of Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, Ch. 3
- Discussion of *Rerum Novarum*,  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html) and *Testem Benevolentiae*,  
<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/l13teste.htm>

### **Week Eight: World Wars and Public Catholicism in the 20th Century**

At what point do we see Catholics entering into "mainstream" American society? Is the term "mainstream" useful or confusing? What do we mean by "public Catholicism"? What is the relationship between war and religion, and, particularly, how and why do American Catholics engage in the world wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? How does their service in the war efforts change their status in American society? Do you think Father Coughlin is a good representative of what it means to be an American Catholic at mid-century?

- Discussion of Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, Ch. 4
- Discussion of "The Bishop's Program of Social Reconstruction" (1919),  
<http://www.osjspm.org/cst/bish1919program.htm>
- Discussion of Charles Coughlin, "Somebody Must Be Blamed,"  
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5111/>
- **Midterm Due**

### **Week Nine: The Catholic Imagination and Catholic Film in the 20th Century**

What is the "Catholic imagination"? How has Catholicism influenced American art? What makes a writer a Catholic writer? Artist? Filmmaker? Is *On the Waterfront* a Catholic film? Why or why not?

- Discussion of Andrew Greeley, "The Catholic Imagination of Bruce Springsteen,"  
[http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article\\_id=11047](http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=11047)
- Discussion of the film *On the Waterfront*
- Discussion of Fisher, *On the Irish Waterfront*
- **Book Review #2 Due:** Fisher, *On the Irish Waterfront*

### **Week Ten: Vatican II and American Politics**

What were some of the major changes that came as a result of the Second Vatican Council? How did these changes affect the lives of Catholics in the United States? Why did some people embrace while others resist these changes? How did the coincidence of the election of John F. Kennedy facilitate these larger changes in the American Catholic church?

- Discussion of Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, Ch. 5
- Discussion of *Gaudium et Spes*,  
[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html)
- Discussion of John F. Kennedy, “Address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association,”  
<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/johnfkennedyhoustonministerialspeech.html>

### **Week Eleven: Catholic Counterculture and Social Justice in the 20th Century**

There were many countercultural movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—Beat movement, anti-war movement, women’s liberation, civil rights—and many Catholics participated in these new ways of thinking and acting in American society. How is this different from “public Catholicism”? Is this not an example of American (counter)culture affecting the ways in which some American Catholics practiced what they believed? What does the inclusion of Catholic voices in these movements say about the status of Catholics in the United States by the 1970s? Where does “social justice” fit in this picture? Are there many ways to think about “social justice,” and, if so, do they complement or contradict each other?

- Discussion of Dorothy Day interview,  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNMHud0fUg&list=UU4N1xLoIWQI6EMAXtnNEMKg&index=6&feature=plcp>
- Discussion of Mary Daly, “After the Death of God the Father,”  
<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/after/>

### **Week Twelve: Race and Ethnicity in the Catholic Church**

How did people of color influence the history of Catholicism in the United States? Specifically, how did people of African descent experience their Catholicism in light of the many racial prejudices both inside and outside the Catholic church? Moreover, how have Latinos changed the face of Catholicism in the United States, especially during the last half of the twentieth century? How does Nabhan-Warren’s approach to the study of popular forms of Catholicism change the way you thinking about Catholicism in the United States? What does Raboteau’s comparison of Merton and King say about Raboteau’s (himself an African American Catholic) understanding of the relationship between Catholicism and American culture?

- Discussion of Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*
- **Book Review #3 Due:** Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*
- Discussion of Albert Raboteau, “A Hidden Wholeness: Thomas Merton and Martin Luther King Jr,” <http://www.spiritualitytoday.org/spir2day/884057raboteau.html>

### **Week Thirteen: Catholic Intellectual Life**

How do we know what we know about Catholicism in the United States? What major historians, theologians, and philosophers made it possible for us to take a class like this? And how did their American experiences influence their understanding of American Catholic history? What questions were they interested in asking of the past? And what do their answers to those

questions say about the history of Catholicism in the United States? Where do the fields of Catholic studies and religious studies stand today?

- Discussion of Leslie Woodcock Tentler, “On the Margins: The State of American Catholic History,” vol. 45, no. 1 (March 1993): pp. 104-127 (find on JSTOR).

#### **Week Fourteen: Sex and Power in the American Catholic Church**

The Roman Catholic Church is a human institution. How have ideas and practices of sex affected internal and external debates about Catholicism? Celibacy, abortion, contraception, married priests, female priests—these and other issues are important questions having an impact on the present and future state of Catholicism in the United States. What does power and religious authority have to do with how Catholics practice their understanding of Catholicism?

- Discussion of Manseau, Vows
- **Book Review #4 Due:** Manseau, Vows
- Discussion of articles in the following Catholic news sources:
  - National Catholic Reporter, <http://ncronline.org>
  - U.S Catholic, <http://uscatholic.claretians.org>
  - America, <http://www.americamagazine.org>
  - First Things, <http://www.firstthings.com>

#### **Week Fifteen: Course Review and Oral History Presentations**

Do you have any questions left unanswered? Probably so. What are they? After a semester of thinking and talking and reading and writing about Catholic experiences in the United States, can we make any generalizations that might bring some closure to our class?

- **Oral History Project Due**

#### **Week Sixteen: FINAL EXAM**