

## Catholicism: A Quick Overview

### Exploring the Jesuit and Catholic dimensions of the university's mission

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Some questions about a Catholic university can only be answered by looking more closely at Catholicism itself and especially at some of the influential movements within the Catholic Church in recent decades, especially the Second Vatican Council and the changes it brought about in the Catholic community, and the rather large body of documents and theory from the last hundred years that are often referred to collectively as “Catholic social thought.”

#### A Quick Overview

Summarizing a vast and complex phenomenon such as Catholicism is probably a quixotic undertaking. There are some useful overviews, however, that try to capture the distinctive characteristics of the Catholic perspective, Catholic style, or the Catholic mind frame:

- Rev. Richard P. McBrien, professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame, has written one of the best selling syntheses of Catholic theology. The [introduction](#) and [conclusion](#) of his Catholicism provide two orientations to this large subject.
- Michael Himes, of Boston College's Theology Department, has written a useful summary of the specifically Catholic hallmarks of education in a Catholic university, "[Living Conversation: Catholic Higher Education in a Catholic Context](#)" (*Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*, Fall 1995), which can serve as a complement to McBrien's survey of the primary characteristics of Catholicism. Another essay by Himes, covering much of the same material, is in *As Leaven in the World: Catholic Perspectives on Faith, Vocation, and the Intellectual Life*, ed. Thomas M. Landy (Franklin, Wisconsin: Sheed and Ward, 2001), 91-103.
- Tom Groome's *What Makes us Catholic: Eight Gifts for Life* (Harper San Francisco, 2002) acknowledges the spectrum of faith from the devout to the lapsed but tries to find amid all the varieties the essential features of Catholic life and identity.
- Rosemary Haughton's *The Catholic Thing* (Templegate Publishers, 1997) is an idiosyncratic but fascinating study. It is thoughtfully reviewed at <http://thewildreed.blogspot.com/2009/06/rosemary-haughton-and-true-catholic.html>.

- Monika Hellwig's *Understanding Catholicism* (Paulist Press, 2002) and Lawrence Cunningham's *The Catholic Faith: An Introduction* (Paulist Press, 1986) are sound guides to the essentials of Catholicism from respected theologians.