

**LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES
COURSE OUTLINE FALL 2026**

*“ . . . If I had my way I’d never get the urge to roam
A young man serves his country and an old man guards the home. . . ”
–The Band, “Twilight”*

THST 4090: Major Theological and Religious Thinker

Section 01, CRN 42288: Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:55 to 11:35 am
Classroom: University Hall 3711 (Classics seminar room)

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Course Description:

In the Fall 2026 semester, the major theological and religious thinker course will focus on the life and work of my teacher, the blessed Wilfred Cantwell Smith. We will begin with an overview of the work of Professor Smith, one of the architects of the modern academic study of religion. Following this general introduction, we will do a close reading of one of Professor Smith’s most important books, *The Meaning and End of Religion*. Although it is a text that is almost 65 years old, it remains required reading for anyone doing serious work in the study of religion. One of Professor Smith’s most important contributions was that religion should best be understood as the “vital, living faith of persons”. In addition, Professor Smith was deeply concerned with the place that the study of religion occupied within the humanities, and the need for scholars to make a positive contribution to the well-being of the world with their work

Student Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course students will: 1) demonstrate knowledge of the principles and practice of the comparative study of religion through the study of the life and work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith; 2) demonstrate that they have the ability to interpret texts and other cultural phenomena (such as music, rituals, myths, architecture) that have religious presuppositions or implications; 3) demonstrate that they will think both empathetically and critically about conflicting religious claims; and 4) through class participation, presentations, and written assignments have improved their verbal and written skills.

*Fate comes like a thief to your backdoor
Steals your precious things away
—Jim Cuddy, “Constellations”*

Statement on the University Mission in Relation to Theological Studies:

Courses in the Department of Theological Studies serve the University Mission to encourage learning, educate the whole person, serve faith and promote justice. Theological Studies courses encourage learning within the intellectual and cultural heritage of the Catholic tradition. They value imagination and intellect, seeking an integration of different kinds of knowledge, and promote ecumenical and interreligious discourse. They seek to educate the whole person and serve faith by an academic exploration of the possibilities, challenges, and ambiguities of faith, in dialogue with the contemporary world. By their structure and content, they strive to promote justice by encouraging students to engage their theological understanding in a broken world.

Theological Studies courses require students to think, speak, write, and reflect critically about the largest questions of human existence. To do this, students are required also to “acquire the arts of precise and elegant expression, a sound and critical grasp of ideas, a familiarity with the modern world’s ways of knowing itself, a personal understanding of this nation’s history and multicultural heritage, and an appreciation of other cultures and societies around the globe.” (University Bulletin)

Theological Studies courses invite students to become more reflective and responsible persons in their own intellectual, ethical, and spiritual development.

*And even though
It all went wrong
I’ll stand before the Lord of Song
With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah
—Leonard Cohen, “Hallelujah”*

4-CREDIT HOUR POLICY

At LMU, **one credit hour** is defined as a minimum of 3 hours of work by an average student per week for a 15-week semester. That means that a 4-unit class must average a minimum of 12 hours of work a week and a **minimum total of 180 hours of work for the semester (inclusive of class contact time)**. Typically this will mean one hour of classroom instruction and two hours of out of class student work each week for each unit of a course. This course meets for three hours per week and **expects a minimum of 12 hours per week on class-related assignments**.

Required Texts:

Kenneth Cracknell, Editor, *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Reader*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001. ISBN 1-85168-249-X

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991[1962]. ISBN 0-8006-2475-0

Jack Miles, *Religion as We Know It: An Origin Story*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2020. ISBN 978-1324002789

Lecture outlines and other readings supplied by the professor

*Oh, I am a lonely painter
I live in a box of paints
I'm frightened by the devil
And I'm drawn to those ones that ain't afraid
—Joni Mitchell, "A Case of You"*

Evaluation:

It is important for each student to know at the outset that this course requires weekly reading, two book reviews, a research project and presentation, and participation. Moreover, regular class attendance and participation are required. Clear, grammatically correct composition and standard spelling are expected on all written assignments.

Information on the written assignments and the research paper (which will be on a topic of the student's choice, in consultation with the professor) will be provided separately during the course. Active class participation will positively affect the student's final grade. More than two unexcused absences during the semester will negatively affect the student's grade. Please note that I **do not** round up grades to a higher grade. The University's grading policy, including the plus/minus system, will be used. The University's policy on Academic Honesty (discussed below) will be followed in this course. Grades will be determined as follows:

15%: A review of not more than 5 pages on the Smith book *The Meaning and End of Religion*, due Dec. 8

15%: A review of not more than 5 pages on the Miles book *Religion as We Know It*, due Sept. 29

50%: A research paper of not more than 15 pages

5% Outline due on September 22

35% Research paper due on November 19

10% Presentation about research paper Dec. 8 - 10

20% Participation (which is more than simply attendance).

“Normally persons talk about other people’s religions as they are, and about their own as it ought to be”.

—Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 1962

Statement on Academic Excellence in Theological Studies:

In keeping with the larger context of LMU’s mission, academic excellence is grounded in critical thinking, moral reflection, and articulate expression (both in written and oral form). Such critical thinking, reflection, and expression are rooted in the discipline of academic work. Critical thought and reflection, as well as the ability to articulate one’s beliefs clearly and thoughtfully, are the result of disciplined work, which constitutes the necessary condition for academic achievement.

The Department of Theological Studies maintains high expectations for academic excellence. Students in Theological Studies courses are expected to be engaged listeners and careful readers as well as to write and speak cogently about substantive theological matters. They are expected to understand and analyze pertinent primary texts, scholarly literature, and non-textual sources (such as rituals and the arts), and to assimilate lectures on complex topics. Moreover, students are expected to generate their own questions about the material under consideration, questions appropriate to the sub-field that they are studying and which reflect a firm grasp of the basic course content and methodological approach.

Courses in Theological Studies may require approximately 150 pages of reading a week and 40 pages of writing over the course of the semester. Moreover, class attendance, preparation, and participation are not optional, but essential. Faculty are not required to prepare detailed “study guides” that repeat or summarize class and lecture content, nor are they required to prepare students for quizzes or exams beyond the content of the course lectures. Grading standards are high for all courses in Theological Studies.

Take his rigorous linguistic precision, famous among students, publishers, and secretaries alike. We kids knew it, too—from lessons and games that taught the placement of ‘only’, the use of ‘please’, the difference between ‘which’ and ‘that’. In fact one of my very earliest memories—I can’t have been more than 3 or 4—was of playing hide-and-seek, in the basement, with my siblings. I was crammed behind the furnace, but my brother spied a movement. “It’s me!”, I squealed—in 3-year old delight. Came the deep voice, down the stairs: “It’s I”.

—Brian Cantwell Smith on his father, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, in 2000

Special Accommodations:

Students with special needs who require reasonable modifications, special assistance, or accommodations in this course should promptly direct their request to the Disability Support

Services (DSS) Office. Any student who currently has a documented disability (ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Learning, Physical, or Psychiatric) needing academic accommodations should contact the DSS Office (Daum Hall 2nd floor, 310-338-4216) as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. Please visit www.lmu.edu/dss for additional information.

Academic Honesty:

Academic dishonesty will be treated as an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences that can range from receiving no credit for assignments/tests to expulsion. It is never permissible to turn in any work that has been copied from another student or copied from a source (including the Internet) without properly acknowledging the source.

In this course, you are expected to do your own work and properly cite any sources you use. The use of generative AI (GAI) tools, such as chatbots, text generators, paraphraser, summarizers, or solvers, is strictly prohibited for any part of your assignments. This means, but is not limited to:

- Do NOT use AI to begin a paper (for example, typing in the paper prompt and asking for help generating ideas for paper topics or approaches)
- Do NOT use AI to edit prose (this often changes the tone of a paper, even if the ideas remain the students' own)
- Do NOT use AI to translate writing from your primary language to English, or to translate readings from English to your primary language
- Do NOT use AI to summarize assigned readings
- You MAY use AI to help you begin to find scholarly sources for your research paper, but make sure to do a search for scholarly items, and not simply search it up.

Students must complete all work independently and without GAI-generated content. The use of GAI platforms will be considered as academic dishonesty. It is your responsibility to make sure that your work meets the standard of academic honesty set forth in the "LMU Academic Honesty Policy" (see <http://bulletin.lmu.edu/>).

"But these men are your brothers –your lost, younger brothers. And if the word integration means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it. For this is your home, my friend, do not be driven from it; great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what America must become."

—James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time

Tentative Nature of the Syllabus:

If necessary, this syllabus and its contents are subject to revision; students are responsible for any changes or modifications distributed in class or posted on the professor's web site.

Tentative Schedule of Classes:

- September 1 - 3: "Step Inside This House". Introductions. Who are we, what are we doing in this course, and why? "Too much heaven on their minds". Methodological and other issues in this course. READING: John Berger, "Where Are We?".
- September 8 - 10: Historical perspectives. READING: Material on Wilfred Cantwell Smith; "The Comparative Study of Religion".
- September 15 - 17: "In the Beginning": The Study of Religion. READING: *Religion As We Know It*. Seamus Heaney, "What Passed at Colonus".
- September 22 - 24: "In the Beginning": The Study of Religion. READING: *Religion As We Know It*. **Research paper outline due on September 22.**
- Sept. 29 - Oct. 1: Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A reintroduction. READING: "Wilfred Cantwell Smith and the Study of Islam" by Suzanne Smith; *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Reader*: pp. i to 26. **Miles book review due on Sept. 29.**
- October 6 - 8: Wilfred Cantwell Smith on history and comparative religion. READING: The Historian.
- October 13 - 15: Wilfred Cantwell Smith on history and comparative religion. READING: The Comparativist.
- October 20 - 22: Wilfred Cantwell Smith: Theoretical terms. READING: The Critic and The Theorist
- October 27 - 29: Wilfred Cantwell Smith: The place of theology in the study of religion. READING: The Theologian; The Missiologist; and The Prophet.
- November 3 - 5: The meaning and end of religion. READING: *The Meaning and End of Religion*: Chapters One to Three.
- November 10 - 12: The meaning and end of religion. READING: *The Meaning and End of Religion*: Chapters Four and Five.

- Friday, Nov. 13: Last day to withdraw from classes or to apply for credit/no credit grading.
- November 17 - 19: The meaning and end of religion. READING: *The Meaning and End of Religion*: Chapters Six to Eight. **Research paper due on Nov. 19.**
- Nov. 24 - 26: **No class due to Thanksgiving Holiday.**
- December 1 - 3: The meaning and end of religion continued. READING: *The Meaning and End of Religion*: Chapters Six to Eight.
- December 8 – 10: **Presentations on research papers. Smith book review due on Dec. 8.**

*As he died to make men holy, let us die to make things cheap
And say the Mea Culpa, which you've probably forgot
—Leonard Cohen, "Steer Your Way"*

Responsibilities and Respect:

In this course, as in this life, we all have responsibilities toward each other. I have found that my most successful classes are those in which we respect each other, and understand our mutual responsibilities. With that in mind, I offer my understanding of these responsibilities with the following assumptions. We will discuss them in the first week of class, and I hope that you will consult them throughout the course. Tina Pippin has articulated the following “manifesto” with her students, and it is with their words that I would like to begin:

we have the responsibility for sharing in and contributing to the learning process;
we have the right to voice an opinion that is based on a self-chosen value system;
we have the right to dissent or differ from the professor and from others in class;
we have the right to personal dignity not to be infringed by the conduct of the professor; we have the responsibility for evaluating and suggesting positive directions for the class at informal evaluations throughout the course and at the end of the formal evaluation in order to make the learning process more efficient and valuable; we have a right to a curriculum that is inclusive of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Assumptions I Make About You

1. You have made a conscious, informed choice to be a member of this class. This means that you have read the syllabus, and know the workload required. Be aware that on average, you should spend 3 hours on your own (reading, studying, making notes, working on assignments, etc.) for every hour that you are in class.

2. You will give the basic respect that is due to me and the other students in this class.
3. You will observe basic classroom decorum. In this class that means (but is not limited to!) the following: 1) You will turn off (or set to “silent” mode) watch alarms and cellular phones. You will not text in class. 2) If you come in late, leave early, or need to leave during the class, you will do so with a minimum of disruption. To do this, open the door slowly, and close it slowly behind you. Don’t make a lot of noise packing or unpacking your things. If you are coming in late, it’s a good idea to take off your coat and open your book bag/knapsack in the hallway. 3) You may eat or drink in the class, providing that you don’t disrupt the class (no “noisy” foods, and please clean up after yourself). 4) You won’t start to put away your things until the class is over. 5) You will not interrupt when someone else is speaking.
4. You will do all of the required reading. This means that you will often have to read something more than once in order to fully understand it (remember the 3:1 ratio in the first assumption). You will attend class regularly and on time.
5. You will be responsible for all of the material that we cover in class. If you miss a class, you will contact another student to find out what you missed.
6. If you have a question, any question, you will ask it. You may ask during class, during my office hours, by telephone, or email.
7. You will turn in your assignments on time. If you are unsure of the requirements for an assignment, or when it is due, you will ask me.
8. You will improve your writing skills throughout this class. You will ask me for help, and also contact the Academic Resource Center if you need to at (310) 338-2847.
9. You will share your personality, knowledge, skills and special expertise with the rest of us throughout this semester.

*I remember that time you told me
You said, “Love is touching souls”
Surely you touched mine
‘Cause part of you pours out of me
In these lines from time to time
—Joni Mitchell, “A Case of You”*

Assumptions You Can Make About Me

1. I will give you the respect that I ask you to give me and the other members of this class.
2. I will begin and end the class on time. I will try to follow the schedule of lectures/lecture outlines as closely as possible.

3. I will be available to help you, but you must let me know that you need help. I will be available during my scheduled office hours (and can often schedule appointments at other times), and will return phone calls and emails promptly. Please contact me when you first have a problem. If you wait until it is too late, then it is too late!
4. If you do not turn in an assignment, I will not ask you for it. I will assume that you are content with a grade of zero for that assignment.
5. I will grade fairly and responsibly, returning your assignments to you in a timely manner. I do not grade on a curve, and will grade each assignment on its own merit. Through the “grading standards” outline (given below), I will let you know how I grade. I am willing to explain my grade to you, but if you request a grade change, you must be willing to explain to me (using the same outline) why you deserve another grade.
6. I will follow and enforce the university policy on academic dishonesty, particularly with regards to cheating and plagiarism.
7. I will be receptive to and encourage constructive comments about my teaching (as an example, “you’re ugly and your mother dresses you funny” is NOT a constructive comment. . .).
8. I will do my best to help you, but I cannot learn the material for you.

We must, in other words, reject the falsehoods of nations in our work, and reveal, with the exquisite Ibn ‘Arabi, the virtues of what he more simply calls love. “My heart can take on any form,” he tells us, and then he simply names those temples at which he prays, the temples that inhabit him: the gazelle’s meadow, the monks’ cloister, the Torah, the Ka’ba. These are the temples whose priests we need to be, if we are to understand what any of this history is about, and it is only in them that there can be any future understanding of the complex “identity” of Europe in the Middle Ages. And almost undoubtedly in its present and future as well.

— *María Rosa Menocal, 1997*

Grading Standards:

I use the plus/minus system, so be aware that these ranges themselves contain a range of work.

Please note that I **do not** round up grades to a higher grade.

“A” Work

Superior Strong evidence of original thinking; good organization, capacity to analyse and synthesize; superior grasp of subject matter with sound critical evaluations; evidence of extensive knowledge base.

For written assignments: 1) Responds fully to the assignment; 2) Expresses its purpose clearly and persuasively; 3) Is directed toward and meets the needs of a defined audience; 4) Begins and ends effectively; 5) Provides adequate supporting arguments, evidence, examples and details; 6) Is well-organized and unified; 7) Uses appropriate, direct and inclusive language; 8) Correctly acknowledges and documents sources; 9) Is free from errors in grammar, punctuation, word choice, spelling and format; and 10) Maintains a level of excellence throughout, and shows originality and creativity in realizing 1) through 7).

“B” Work

Good Evidence of grasp of subject matter, some evidence of critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; evidence of familiarity with the literature.

For written assignments: Realizes 1) through 9) well, but not fully and completely. Demonstrates overall ability but shows little apparent originality or creativity.

“C” Work

Satisfactory Student who is profiting from his/her university experience; understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material.

For written assignments: Realizes 1) through 9) adequately and demonstrates overall competence. Contains a few minor errors or flaws. A “C” assignment may show great creativity and originality, but those qualities don’t make up for poor or careless writing. A “C” assignment usually looks and reads like a penultimate draft.

“D” Work

Poor Some evidence of familiarity with subject matter and some evidence that critical and analytic skills have been developed.

For written assignments: Fails to realize elements of 1) through 9). Contains several serious errors or flaws, or many minor ones. A “D” assignment often looks and reads like a first draft.

“F” Work

Failure Evidence of familiarity with only some subject matter; presence of some critical and analytic skills.

or Little evidence of even superficial understanding of subject matter; weakness in critical and analytic skills; with limited or irrelevant use of literature.

For written assignments: Fails to realize several elements of 1) through 9). Contains many serious errors or flaws, and many minor ones as well. An assignment that violates the university’s policy on academic dishonesty (e.g., cheating or plagiarism) will at minimum receive a failing grade.

“Rather, his example —what he lived, taught, recommended, and inspired— was to stay firmly grounded in one’s own tradition (not dogmatically, but honestly, openly), and, from there, to reach across to those in other traditions —to speak to them, to love them, to celebrate life’s personal plurality. To be bettered, not lessened, by differences”.

—Brian Cantwell Smith on his father, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, in 2000
