

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

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*“...the historiography of the Islamic-Christian encounter will be moved to a new level when we have learned to see it as the intertwining destiny of human beings whose relation to God has for now fourteen centuries taken these two classes of forms.  
The religious history of the world is the history of \*us\*. Some of us have been Muslims, some Christians. Our common history has been what it has been, in significant part because of this fact. Yet it is a common history for all that; and cannot be properly understood otherwise.  
And if that be true of the past fourteen centuries, how much more so of the coming fourteen.”*  
—Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 1977

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**THST 6080: Comparative Theology**

Section 01:     Thursdays 4:30 to 7:00 pm  
Classroom:     University Hall 3442 (located behind the History department)  
Zoom:           <https://lmu.zoom.us/j/9926008006>

**Professor:**     **Amir Hussain, PhD**  
**Office:**         University Hall, Room 3722  
**Phone:**         (310) 338-5987 (or Department of Theological Studies at 338-7670)  
**Email:**          [amir.hussain@lmu.edu](mailto:amir.hussain@lmu.edu)  
**Web Page:**      <https://amirhussain.lmu.build/>  
**Office Hours:**   Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:00 to 4:00 pm, and by appointment

**Course Description:**

The realities of religious diversity cannot be ignored. Increasingly, people live, work, and pray alongside persons of many faith traditions. It is therefore essential to learn how to negotiate this reality: theologically, ethically, and spiritually. This course will introduce graduate students to the study of comparative theology. It examines and evaluates relevant methodological proposals for comparative theology and clarifies the relationship of comparative theology to interreligious dialogue, the history of religions, and the Christian theology of religions. The first part of the course will be an introduction to comparative theology through the Christian tradition. The second part of the course will focus on the Muslim tradition, but will also include examples from the Jewish tradition.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

At the end of this course students will: 1) demonstrate knowledge of the principles and practice of comparative theology, particularly as applied to the religions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism; 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.

The learning outcomes for this course map onto these learning outcomes for the MA in Pastoral Theology: perform biblical exegesis with attention both to historical contexts and contemporary pastoral contexts; situate contemporary theological developments and pastoral practice in light of historical trajectories; and establish strategies and habits for the integration of one's faith, theological vision, and critical understanding of pastoral ministry. For the MA in Theology, the following learning outcomes are addressed in this course: perform biblical exegesis with attention to historical contexts, the history of interpretation, and contemporary theological developments; engage in critical reflection on major theological themes, including the ability to articulate different perspectives and place them in dialogue; perform critical historical analysis, reading and interpreting primary sources of theology in their broader context; discern accurate and credible knowledge about diverse religious traditions and expressions; and engage the question of the theological significance of religious diversity.

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

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### **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.

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*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”*

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**Required Texts:**

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, Vintage, [1963] 1993

Jack Miles, *God in the Qur'an*, Knopf, 2018

Jack Miles, *Religion As We Know It: An Origin Story*, W. W. Norton, 2020

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Patterns of Faith Around the World*, Oneworld, 1998

Selected songs of Leonard Cohen, from *Live in London* and *You Want It Darker*

Lecture outlines and supplementary readings supplied by the professor

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*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”*

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**Evaluation:**

***It is important for each student to know at the outset that this course requires weekly reading, two book reviews, two theological reflections, a research project and presentation, and participation. Moreover, regular class attendance and participation are required, both in person and on Zoom. 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 one unexcused absence 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 due on October 22.
- 15% A review of not more than 5 pages on Miles' *God in the Qur'an* book due on Dec. 3.
- 50% A research paper of not more than 15 pages.
  - 5% Outline due on Oct. 1
  - 35% Research paper due on Nov. 19.
  - 10% Presentation about research paper Dec. 3 - Dec. 10.
- 10% Two theological reflections (about 2 or 3 pages each, worth 5% each) one about music (due on Sept. 17), and the other about the course (due on Dec. 10).
- 10% Participation (which is more than simply attendance).

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*“Normally persons talk about other people’s religions as they are, and about their own as it ought to be”.*  
*—Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 1962*

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### **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 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, 310-338-4216) as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. Please visit [www.lmu.edu/dss](http://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 do a google search.

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/>).

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*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*

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### **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.

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*"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*

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### **Tentative Schedule of Classes:**

September 3: **Meeting in Person.** "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 10: **Meeting in Person.** “In the Beginning”: The Study of Religion. READING: *Religion As We Know It*. Seamus Heaney, “What Passed at Colonus”.
- September 17: **Class on Zoom.** “In the Beginning”: The Study of Religion. READING: *Religion As We Know It*. **Theological Reflection on Music due on Sept. 17.**
- September 24: **Class on Zoom.** Historical perspectives. READING: Material on Wilfred Cantwell Smith; “The Comparative Study of Religion”.
- October 1: **Meeting in Person.** Faith, diversity, and ritual. READING: *Patterns of Faith Around the World*: Preface, Introduction, Hindus, Buddhists. **Research paper outline due on October 1.**
- October 8: **Class on Zoom.** Creedal statements and religious art. READING: *Patterns of Faith Around the World*: Muslims, The Chinese, Implications.
- October 15: **Class on Zoom.** Pluralism and dialogue. READING: *Patterns of Faith Around the World*: Conclusion, Part Two.
- October 22: **Meeting in Person.** Religious music and celebration: *You Want it Darker*. READING: Material on Leonard Cohen. **Review of *Patterns of Faith Around the World* due on Oct. 22.**
- October 29: **Meeting in Person.** Salman Rushdie, “The New Empire Within Britain”. James Baldwin, race, and religion in the USA. READING: *The Fire Next Time*.
- November 5: **Class on Zoom.** “*Other Voices, Other Rooms*”: Baldwin, Cohen, and the poetry of difference. READING: “Unlearning the Myth of American Innocence”.
- November 12: **Class on Zoom.** Theography: God in the Bible and in the Qur’an. READING: *God in the Qur’an*: Pages 1 through 80.
- Friday, Nov. 13: Last day to withdraw from classes or to apply for credit/no credit grading.
- November 19: **Class on Zoom.** Theography continued. READING: *God in the Qur’an*: Pages 81 through 170. **Research Paper due on Nov. 19.**
- November 26: No class due to Thanksgiving Holiday

December 3: **Meeting in Person.** Theography continued. READING: *God in the Qur'an*: Pages 171 through 241. **Review of *God in the Qur'an* due on December 3. Presentations on research papers.**

December 10: **Meeting in Person.** Doing theology comparatively. READING: Fr. Pat Ryan, "Perhaps it is True After All". **Presentations on research papers. Theological Reflection about the course due on Dec. 10.**

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*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"*

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### **Guidelines and Expectations for Zoom Classes:**

1. You are expected to be an active participant in your own learning. This means being an active participant in all Zoom sessions, including the breakout sessions.
2. Find a dedicated place of study that minimizes distractions.
3. Do not have your cellphone nearby unless I ask you to use it.
4. Turn off and/or close social media apps and other browsers that are not relevant to the class.
5. Attend class with an open mind and an eagerness to learn from other class members.
6. Be kind and forgiving. Approach the online environment with resilience and compassion for ourselves and each other.
7. There will be many of us in the Zoom sessions. Please keep your microphones muted until it is your turn to speak. Please keep your camera on unless you are on a break.
8. Please raise hand or use the chat feature if you have a question or comment.
9. All synchronous Zoom sessions will be recorded and put on the Brightspace page. Please review these if you are unable to attend or need to leave early.

### **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. You will make use of our graduate writing specialist Arina Sadé.

9. You will share your personality, knowledge, skills and special expertise with the rest of us throughout this semester.

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*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"*

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### **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. I will not use generative AI in my teaching.
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.

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*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.*

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— María Rosa Menocal, 1997

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### 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.

|                 |                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>"A" Work</b> | <b>Superior</b> | 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>"B" Work</b> | <b>Good</b> | 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      Passing**      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.

**“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.

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*“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*

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