

**LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES
COURSE OUTLINE SUMMER I 2024**

“The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. . . Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” —Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

THST 3741: Religion and Film

Section 01: Mondays and Wednesdays 12:00 pm to 3:45 pm
Classroom: University Hall 1401
Core: Interdisciplinary connections

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Course Description:

This course is as much about the use of film to study religion as it is about the use of religion to study film. In other words, we will use different films to facilitate discussion about various dimensions of and issues in religion. And conversely, we will use images, metaphors, and teachings found in religion to discuss the layers and elements visually and audibly portrayed on screen. Through different critical approaches, this course will examine how religion, as variously defined, pervades the modern cinema and how one may engage in dialogue with this phenomenon.

As a course in interdisciplinary connections, we will use methods and theories from both theology and religious studies. Those methods and theories will be contrasted with those in film studies and cultural studies, giving students exposure to four different disciplines.

The films under discussion will not be limited to Christianity, and so there will be considerable work done on comparative religions as well as on competing truth claims.

WARNING: Some of the films viewed in this course contain scenes of explicit violence, sexuality, sexual brutality, and offensive language. It is not my intent to de-sensitize students, but rather to enable them to discuss the relevant issues that these films introduce.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1) To think and discuss critically film from both religious studies and theological perspectives; 2) To broaden understanding of the term “religious” and then to realize its significant role in film plot, narrative, and imagery; 3) To demonstrate thinking both empathetically and critically about conflicting religious claims; and 4) Through class participation and assignments have improved their verbal and written skills.

Interdisciplinary Connections Outcomes: 1) Demonstrate the ability to recognize and analyse similarities and differences between at least two disciplinary perspectives or modes of knowing; 2) Know discrete characteristics of each discipline; 3) Be able to integrate different disciplinary approaches to explain or solve a phenomenon, issue, or problem; 4) Value different ways of knowing and thinking about the issues and value the use of multiple perspectives and viewpoints to address a given issue; and 5) Demonstrate an understanding of the core concepts of one of the five interdisciplinary thematic connections (Virtue and Justice; Culture, Art and Society; Power and Privilege; Globalization; Science, Nature and Society).

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.

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:

John Lyden, editor, *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* (Routledge, 2009). This book is available as an e-book from the library.

Course Readings Distributed in Class.

Relevant Web Sites:

The Internet Movie Database <<http://imdb.com>>

The *Journal of Religion and Film* <<http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/>>

Evaluation:

It is important for each student to know at the outset that this course requires daily reading, written assignments and watching films outside of class time. 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 one unexcused absence during the semester will negatively affect the student's grade. The University's grading policy, including the plus/minus system, will be used. Please note that I **do not** round up grades to a higher grade. The University's policy on Academic Honesty (discussed below) will be followed in this course. Grades will be determined as follows:

- 20% Written assignments (4 assignments of 4 pages each, worth 5% each)
- 15% Class participation (which is more than simple attendance)
- 55% A research paper of about 15 pages, due June 12
 - Outline and preliminary bibliography due May 20 (15%)
 - Finished research paper due June 12 (40%)
- 10% Presentation about research paper, June 12 or 17

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.

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 Internet) without properly acknowledging the source. Nor is it permissible to use artificial intelligence (AI) in your course work. 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/>).

The Writing Center at LMU:

An important part of improving your writing is getting feedback and revision suggestions on your writing projects in progress. The Writing Center offers free tutoring sessions (online or face-to-face) in which you can get feedback from a peer writer on your digital and print texts for any class at any stage in your process. For more information, including hours of operation, check out the Writing Center's website: <https://academics.lmu.edu/arc/writingcenter/>. When you're ready to make an appointment with a writing tutor, just call or visit: **(310) 338-2847 | Daum Hall, second floor.**

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.

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

Tentative Schedule of Classes:

- May 13: "Too much heaven on their minds". Introductions. Who are we, what are we doing in this course and why? Methodological and other issues in this course. John R. Cash, *Hurt*. *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Darmok*. Historical perspectives on religion and film.
- May 15: Sacrifice: *Of Gods and Men* and *Gran Torino*.
- May 20: Redemption songs: *The Apostle*, *The Fisher King*, and *The Dark Knight Rises*. **First written reflection due May 20 on Part I. Research paper outline and preliminary bibliography due on May 20.**
- May 22: No class, work on course assignments
- May 27: No class due to Memorial Day holiday

- May 29: Race and religion: *One Night in Miami*, *Blinded by the Light*, and *Blindspotting*. **Second written reflection due on May 29 on Part II.**
- June 3 – 5: Jesus films: *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Life of Brian*. American Judaism: *A Serious Man*. **Third written reflection due on June 5 on Part III.**
- Friday, June 7: Last day to withdraw from classes or to apply for credit/no credit grading.
- June 10 – 12: “This Woman’s Work”: *Mississippi Masala* and *The Wrestler*. **Presentations on research paper. Finished research paper due on June 12.**
- June 17: **Presentations on research paper. Fourth written reflection due on June 17 on Part IV.**
- June 19: No class

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.

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.

Grading Standards:

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

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
