

SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION (sample – lower level undergraduate course)

Term: Fall 2015

Time: Thursdays 1pm – 4pm

Location: TBA

Instructor: Samuel L. Perry

Office hours: XXX

Office: XXX

Contact: samperry@uchicago.edu

“[R]eligion is an eminently social thing. Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities; rites are ways of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain, or recreate certain mental states of those groups.” – Emile Durkheim, 1912

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Religion has been one of the most powerful and pervasive forces throughout history and it remains so today in our society. Religion is a factor in the outcomes of political elections at all levels, it influences how we raise our families, how we select romantic partners and spouses, how we answer life’s big questions (e.g., life after death, the problem of evil, ultimate purpose or meaning of life, etc.), how we evaluate issues of race, gender, and class, and, for many, whether or not we engage in violence toward others. Because of the incredible influence that religion has in the United States and elsewhere, it behooves every citizen (whether they consider themselves religious or not) to understand how religion functions and the various roles it can play within a society.

In this course we will approach religion as a purely social phenomenon. This should not be construed as an *ontological* statement about religion, but merely a statement about the methodological perspective that social scientists typically employ. Using the perspectives and methods of a sociologist, we will examine the common social dimensions of all religions including moral definitions, group membership and dynamics, prescribed ritual practices, and the life-cycle of religious institutions. We will survey the various attempts at a sociological definition of religion and also examine the major theoretical contributions to the field such as those of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber. We discuss the relationship between religion and modes of both *vertical* stratification (e.g., race, class, and gender) and *horizontal* differentiation (e.g., sects, NRMs, and denominations) in the United States. We will also study the more recent debates between secularization theorists and religious-market theorists. Lastly, we will survey the sociological dimensions of six major world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Know and understand the terms and definitions that sociologists have traditionally used to study the social phenomenon of religion.
- Understand how four dominant sociological paradigms (i.e., functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, and rational choice theory) generally interpret religious behavior.
- Appreciate the importance of a general knowledge of the major world religions and their various sociological dimensions.
- Appreciate the complexity of religious behavior and the benefits of applying a sociological approach to the study of religion.



- Be able to apply the perspectives and methods of a sociologist to study a particular religious tradition.

REQUIREMENTS & GRADING:

Attendance: Attendance and participation are crucial. While attendance will not be taken formally, you WILL NOT do well on the exams if you do not attend class *and* take good notes.

Readings: Course discussions/lectures will typically follow the readings, but I will not lecture directly from the book or articles. Rather, the readings will typically prepare you for what will be discussed in class that day. Thus, you are expected to read the assigned chapters before you come to class. About 50% of exam questions will be taken directly from the readings and 100% of quiz questions will be from the reading so it is in your best interest to read assigned chapters and articles carefully.

3 Pop Quizzes: 15% of your grade will come from three **unannounced** quizzes. These will be brief quizzes over the reading given at the beginning of class (5% each). They will not be difficult if you keep up with the reading, but they can be given on any day. No make-up quizzes.

3 Exams: 60% of your grade will consist of three exams (20% each). Exam questions will be taken from **both** the lecture notes and the readings. Thus, it is imperative that you **ATTEND CLASS** and **READ** the assigned materials! Exams will consist of a variety of question formats.

2 Field Reports: You will be required to conduct “participant observation” at **two** religious communities or groups outside of your own religious background. You should attend a service, talk to people there, and take copious notes about what you observe. What are the demographic of those in attendance? What are the gender roles there? What is the liturgy like? What sorts of teachings are expressed from up front? For each trip, students should write a 2-3 page field report about the experience, drawing connections with theories and concepts from class (30% of course grade). These can be turned in at any time during the second half of the semester.

Grading:

3 Quizzes (15%)
Exam 1 (20%)
Exam 2 (20%)
Exam 3 (20%)
Field Report 1 (12.5%)
Field Report 2 (12.5%)
= 100%

COURSE MATERIALS:

- Michael O. Emerson, William A. Mirola, and Susanne C. Monahan. 2011. *Religion Matters: What Sociology Teaches Us About Religion in Our World*.
- Mary Pat Fisher. 2010. *Living Religions*. Eighth Edition.
- Various articles and book chapters will either be on reserve at the library or accessible via the web.

COURSE POLICIES:

Respect for Me and The Class Itself: Cell phones should be turned off. Also, after today, unless you have a disability that requires you use a laptop, these are NOT permitted. Lastly, if you are going to come in late, please do so quietly.

Respect for Fellow Students: Religion is one of the most controversial topics we could possibly discuss. People feel very strongly about their religious beliefs (or lack thereof), and things could get uncomfortable quickly if someone feels that their beliefs have been disrespected or caricatured in some way. Therefore, in this course we will seek to go above and beyond in respecting one another's opinions. Comments and opinions should be expressed in a way that is non-confrontational and respectful of all other students.

Make-up Exams: You will have 1 hour to take each exam FROM THE TIME I HAND THE EXAM OUT. I will not permit make-up exams except in the cases of (1) you are an athlete and needed to be away or (2) verifiable emergency. By verifiable, I mean that I will need to see a doctor's note, a receipt from the car mechanic, etc. Issues such as accidentally sleeping in, missing your ride, and so on, do not count as emergencies.

Academic Honesty: Academic honesty is expected. Cheating will result in a zero for the exam/assignment, and will likely be taken up with the Dean of Students.

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change):

Week 1 Introduction to the Course

Read: Emerson et al., chapter 1

Read: Berger. 1967. "Appendix 1. Sociological Definitions of Religion." And "Appendix 2. Sociological and Theological Perspectives." In *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Week 2 Sociological Approaches to Religion

Read: Johnstone. *Religion in Society* (selections).

Read: Marx on religion (selections)

Read: Durkheim. 1995/1912. *Elementary forms of the Religious Life* (selections).

Week 3 Becoming "Religious"? Conversion, Socialization, and "Religiosity"

Read: Johnstone, *Religion in Society* (selections).

Read: Willer. 2009. "No Atheists in Foxholes: Motivated Reasoning and Religious Belief." In *Social and Psychological Bases of Ideology and System Justification*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Read: Winchester. 2008. "Embodying the Faith: Religious Practice and the Making of a Muslim Moral Habitus." *Social Forces* 86(4):1753-1780.

Week 4 The Social Organization of Religious Life: Growth, Decline, and Transformation

Read: Emerson et al., chapter 3

Read: Iannaccone. 1994. "Why Strict Churches Are Strong." *American Journal of Sociology* 99(5):1180-1211.

Read: Berger. 1967. "The Process of Secularization." In *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Week 5 Religion and Conflict: Inherently Divisive or Mere Justification?

Read: Emerson et al., chapter 4

Read: Smith. 1998. "Toward a 'Subcultural Identity' Theory of Religious Strength." In *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago press.

Week 6 Religion and Conflict: Fundamentalism and Terrorism

Read: Emerson et al., chapter 6

Read: Woodberry and Smith. 1998. "Fundamentalism et al." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24:25-56.

Read: Emerson and Hartmann. 2006. "The Rise of Religious Fundamentalism." *Annual Review of Sociology* 32:127-44.

Read: Juergensmeyer, "Terror Mandated by God." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 9(2):16-23.

EXAM # 1

Week 7 Religion and Conflict: Politics, Culture Wars, and Increasing Polarization

Read: Emerson et al., chapters 7 and 8

Read: Bellah. 1967. "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96(1):1-21.

Read: Chaves "Polarization" in *American Religion: Contemporary Trends*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Week 8 Religion and Social Stratification: Class

Read: Johnstone. *Religion in Society*. (selections).

Read: Weber. *Sociology of Religion* (selections).

Week 9 Religion and Social Stratification: Gender/Sexuality

Read: Emerson et al., chapter 9

Read: Cadge. 2004. "Gendered Religious Organizations: The Case of Theravada Buddhism in America." *Gender and Society* 18(6):777-793.

Read: Chen. 2005. "A Self of One's Own: Taiwanese Immigrant Women and Religious Conversion." *Gender and Society* 19(3):336-357.

Week 10 Religion and Social Stratification: Gender/Sexuality

Read: Wilcox. 2012. "Sexuality, Gender, and Religious Attendance." *Fieldwork in Religion* 7(2).

Read: Wilcox. 2010. *Queer Women and Religious Individualism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press (selections).

Read: Sherkat. 2002. "Sexuality and Religious Commitment in the United States: An Empirical Examination." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 41(2):313–23.

Week 11 Religion and Social Stratification: Race/Ethnicity

Read: Emerson et al., chapter 10

Read: Cone. 1997. "Chapter 3: The Social Context of Theology." In *God of the Oppressed*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.

Read: Emerson and Smith. 2000. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. New York: Oxford University Press. (selections).

EXAM # 2

Week 12 Religion and Social Stratification: Race/Ethnicity

Read: Emerson et al., chapter 11

Read: Yang and Ebaugh. 2001. "Transformations in New Immigrant Religions and Their Global Implications." *American Sociological Review* 66(2):269-288.

Read: Chen. 2002. "The Religious Varieties of Ethnic Presence: A Comparison between a Taiwanese Immigrant Buddhist Temple and an Evangelical Christian Church." *Sociology of Religion* 63(2):215-238.

Week 13 Religion, Education, and Science

Read: Emerson et al., chapter 12

Read: Evans. 2011. "Epistemological and Moral Conflict Between Religion and Science." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50(4):707-727.

Read: Whitehead and Baker. 2012. "Homosexuality, Religion, and Science: Moral Authority and the Persistence of Negative Attitudes." *Sociological Inquiry* 82(4):487-509.

Read: Sherkat. 2011. "Religion and Scientific Literacy in the United States." *Social Science Quarterly* 92(5):1134-1150.

Week 14 A Sociological Analysis of World Religions

Read: Fisher, chapters 3, 5, and 6.

Skim: Emerson et al., chapter 2

Week 15 A Sociological Analysis of World Religions

Read: Fisher, Chapters 8-10.

Week 16 Whither Religion?

Read: Emerson et al., chapter 14

Read: Chaves, Chapters 3 and 4 in *American Religion: Contemporary Trends*. Princeton, NJ:
Princeton University Press.

EXAM # 3