

Sociology 441 – Sociology of Religion
Loyola U. Chicago – Fall 2024

Time: Mon, 4:15-6:45pm
Instructor: Fr. Patrick Gilger, SJ
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Classroom: IC – Room 111
Email: pgilger@luc.edu
Office Hours: Wed 8:30am-12:00pm

Course Description: Strange as it might be for those of us with “modern ears” to hear, it is not unfair to say that the discipline of sociology was born in a religious world. As such, from the time of the founders, religion occupied a central place in the discipline’s attention. For Marx, for example, religion provided the clue to unlocking the ideology of a fetishized capitalistic society. For Weber, religions had for centuries guided and shaped the rationalization of the human lifeworld. And for Durkheim, religion was nothing less than society’s *esprit de corps*. Despite these very different understandings of what it was, in other words, religion has been a central sociological concern since the foundation of the field.

The aim of this graduate-level course in the sociology of religion is help you familiarize yourselves not only with these foundations, but also to trace out the radical transformations in the way that religion has been studied and theorized within our shifting discipline over the past 175 years. Following our first class, in which we will attempt to get our bearings in the ocean of possible approaches to the social scientific study of religion, this will take place in three parts.

In the first part we will review the thought of four classic thinkers: Karl Marx and Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons. The goal here is to help you get familiar enough with these thinkers – their major ideas, how they talk to and around one another; how that conversation shapes the field – that you can begin to tell the story of sociology as a discipline in your own idiom and with your own emphases – and without overlooking in the impact of religion. Following this, in the second part of the class we will turn our attention to how the work of the founders led to contentious debates over a concept that once went all-but-unquestioned in sociology: secularization theory. This will centrally happen through a close reading of most of Peter Berger’s classic statement on secularization: The Sacred Canopy. Following this familiarization, we will turn our shared attention to criticisms of this theory as these arose from a variety of paradigms.

In the wake of these radical criticisms of secularization theory the field of the sociology of religion has, more or less, fragmented into a variety of conflicting paths, theories, and methodological approaches. We will spend time, in the third and final part of our class, exploring a few of these “new paths.” This will allow us to learn both from those who prefer to study religion from below, as a “lived” phenomenon and from those who take religion to be a particular type of action. This will, further, allow us not only to become familiar with ways of studying the interplay of religion and gender, but also to learn how sociologists of religion are analyzing the rise of what is termed White Christian Nationalism in the United States.

This course, then, is an attempt to help you “enter the field” – to help you become a scholar who is competently familiar with the history, theory, methodology and conceptual apparatuses used in the sociological study of religion. I look forward to going on this *itinerarium* with you all.

A Few Idiosyncrasies: Since this is a seminar, let’s try our best to have our attention be collective. One of the biggest inhibitors to collective attention is, sadly, technology. In all honesty, I don’t know how to best handle this. Just eliminating computers/iPads doesn’t seem helpful. But, having been a student for a long time myself, I know that laptops often serve as a kind of... psychic buffer to the kind of shared attention that lets a class come alive. In light of this I want to ask you to consider:

- Not bringing technology to class.
- Taking notes by hand.
- Buying hard copies of the books with which we will spend more time.
- Printing off the readings instead of reading them on your computer.
- N.B., I have had students in the past bridge this gap nicely by using tablets.

***N.B., I leave this to your freedom.*

*These are considerations made in hopes of helping us achieve shared attention. ***

Recommended Texts: There are *no required texts* for this class. For your own professional development as sociologists, here are the texts I would recommend that you consider purchasing (based mainly on the depth of our engagement with them).

1. Durkheim, Emile. 2008. The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. New York: Oxford University Press.
2. Berger, Peter. 1967. The Sacred Canopy: Elements of A Sociological Theory of Religion. New York: Anchor Books.
3. Ammerman, Nancy (ed). 2007. Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religion Lives. New York: Oxford University Press.
4. Smith, Christian. 2017. Religion: What it Is, How it Works, and Why it Matters. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
5. Gorski, Philip and Samuel Perry. 2022. The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy. New York: Oxford University Press.

Course Requirements: There are three requirements for our course: (1) weekly participation (evaluated by a written “precis”), (2) a class presentation, and (3) a final research paper. All three of these requirements are meant to support the central goal of the course: to help you engage the classical social tradition with critical rigor. Detailed descriptions follow.

1. **Weekly Participation – 110 points** = 11 precis’ at 10 points each.
 - There are 12 class sessions with readings assigned. You are responsible for writing precis’ for 11 classes. I will accept, and include in your final grade, up to 12 total precis’.
 - Weekly precis’ are due by midnight the day before class; i.e., Sunday night.
 - Precis’ should be submitted to Sakai. I will print these and grade them such that you can expect them to be returned to you at the start of class.
2. **Class Presentation – 40 points**
3. **Final Paper – 100 points**

What is a precis? A precis is a short summary and analysis of the week’s assigned texts. Given the difficulty of the assigned readings, you will likely require ~800 words to present and analyze the main arguments of the texts you have read.

Strong precis’ will do four things. First, it will include a brief paragraph in which you lay out the main themes discussed in the readings. In a second paragraph you will then (2) *select one set of ideas*, and (3) show how/where those ideas are *located within the main argument*. Finally, you will close (4) by showing how these ideas unfold and what kinds of research questions they might

generate. Precises of the highest quality will not only do the preceding but also track arguments taking place between various theorists.

How to prepare a presentation: Preparing well to present for a given class means, more or less, being prepared to teach. Most of the strongest presentations I have seen have consisted of (1) a handout, (2) a power point, and (3) some questions that can be used to generate conversation amongst the class. Here are a few tips:

- First, give careful attention to the preparation of your precis. It is perfectly acceptable, for example, to read your precis to the class as an opening statement on the main themes of what we have read.
- Second, it may be helpful to have an outline of the readings – including key quotes, major ideas, etc. – that can help you keep track of how the ideas we are discussing flow into one another. This will allow you to help the class walk through what the author(s) is doing.
- Third, I would recommend preparing questions that you can pose to the class. These can be of two types: comprehension or analysis. Questions of the first type help ensure that the class is on the same page and grasps the author’s argument. Questions of the second type build from shared comprehension and seek to open up lines of criticism, engagement, and public relevance. Successful presentations will help the class with both comprehension and analysis.
- Lastly, your presentation – *including the class discussion* – should take about 40 minutes.

Notes for the research paper: More information will be forthcoming about the shape of the final project after Midterm break, but the final project for this class is less a fully developed research paper than a combination of literature review, theoretical discussion, methodological choice, and organized research agenda that you might follow to complete a future project in the sociological study of religion.

As you can see in the course schedule below, we will spend an entire class on December 2nd presenting and discussing ideas/sketches/outlines for these projects. I will break the class into groups of ~4 that day, and each of you will have ~20 minutes to present your ideas and discuss them with one another.

The final draft of your paper should be between about ~4000 words. It should be submitted on Sakai by 6:45pm on Monday, December 9th.

Point Totals & Grading Scale: 250 points are available in our class. Here’s the breakdown:

Precis’ = 110/250 = ~45% of total grade
 Presentation = 40/250 = ~15% of total grade
 Final Paper = 100/250 = ~40% of total grade

POINTS EARNED	PERCENTILE	LETTER
232+	93+	A
225	90-92%	A-
217	87-89%	B+
207	83-86%	B
200	80-82%	B-
192	77-79%	C+

182	73-76%	C
175	70-72%	C-
167	67-69%	D+
150	60-66%	D
Below 150	0-59%	F

Class Organization: although we will certainly have to be flexible in our execution, my ambition is to split each class into four segments.

Each class will begin by reading and discussing, in pairs, each other's written precis'. This will take perhaps 20 minutes. We will then turn to our second segment, a class discussion for which I will be responsible. Depending on what the student presentation will cover that week, this will consist either in a *deeper dive* into particular questions that have been raised or a *review of key topics*. Following this we will take a short break and return for our third segment: the scheduled class presentation. This which will consist of (1) an organized, synthetic statement on the assigned readings and (2) the conducting of class discussion over what is most essential in what we've read. It is expected that the presentation and discussion will last about 45 minutes. If we've hit our marks, this will leave 15-20 minutes for the final segment of our class: a pre-lecture on the readings for the coming week. This short lecture aims to orient your attention to what is most essential in the upcoming week's assigned readings.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Four notes precede the daily schedule:

1. Because of intellectual property laws, the digital materials we use in the course ought not to be shared elsewhere.
2. I will do my best to help us stick to the schedule below. But... you know... life. So, the plan is for us to do our best to follow this calendar. If changes are required, we'll discuss them together.
3. All of the readings for the course can be found on Sakai.
4. Anything listed under the "*For Further Reading*" heading should be considered optional (although you may want to include it in the literature review part of your final paper).

Class 1 – (8/26) – Overview & Orientation to the Sociology of Religion (~80 pages)

- Michelle Dillon – excerpt from "The Sociology of Religion in Late Modernity"
- Grace Davie – "The Evolution of the Sociology of Religion: Theme and Variations"
- Peter Beyer – "Social Forms of Religion and Religions in Contemporary Global Society"
- Linda Woodhead – "Five Concepts of Religion"
- Bryan Turner – "Religion and contemporary sociological theories"

For Further Reading

- Robert Wuthnow – "Studying Religion, Making It Sociological"
- Christian Smith et. al. – "Roundtable on the Sociology of Religion: Twenty-Three Theses on the Status of Religion in American Sociology"

Labor Day = no class on Monday, 9/2

Class 2 – (9/9) – The Classics, Part 1: Marx and Weber (~115 pages)

- Randall Collins – “The Classical Tradition in Sociology of Religion”
- Karl Marx – “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” “Theses on Feuerbach,” and “Fetishism of Commodities”
- Max Weber – “Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions”
- Max Weber – “Science as a Vocation”

For Further Reading

- Max Weber – “Social Psychology of the World’s Religions”
- Max Weber – “Forward” and chapters 1-2 of The Sociology of Religion

Class 3 – (9/16) – The Classics, Part 2: Durkheim and Parsons (~100 pages)

- Emile Durkheim – excerpts from Elementary Forms
- Emile Durkheim – “Religion and Ritual”
- Richard Fenn – “Talcott Parsons”
- Brian Turner – “Talcott Parsons’s Sociology of Religion and the Expressive Revolution”

For Further Reading

- Emile Durkheim – “Secularisation and Rationality”
- Talcott Parsons – “Durkheim on Religion Revisited: Another Look at The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life”
- Hans Joas – “The Gift of Life: The Sociology of Religion in Talcott Parsons’ Late Work”

Class 4 – (9/23) – Secularization Theory, Part 1 (~140 pages)

- Peter Berger – chapters 1-2, 5-7 of The Sacred Canopy

For Further Reading

- Olivier Tschannen – “The Secularization Paradigm: A Systematization”

Class 5 – (9/30) – Secularization Theory, Part 2 (~100 pages)

- R. Stephen Warner – “Work in Progress toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States”
- Jose Casanova – excerpts from Public Religions in the Modern World
- Mark Chaves – “Secularization as Declining Religious Authority”

For Further Reading

- Rodney Stark – “Bringing Theory Back In”
- David Yamane – “Secularization on Trial: In Defense of Neosecularization Paradigm”
- Steve Bruce – excerpts from Secularization: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory

Mid-Term Break = no class on Monday, 10/7

***** 7pm, Thursday, October 10, on the 4th floor of the Information Commons, the annual McNamara Lecture by Professor Mucahit Bilici *****

Class 6 – (10/14) – Secularization Theory, Part 3 (~90 pages)

- Malcom Hamilton – “Rational Choice Theory: A Critique”
- Phillip Gorski – “Historicizing the Secularization Debate”
- Christian Smith – excerpt from chapter 1 of The Secular Revolution
- Charles Taylor – “Western Secularity”

For Further Reading

- Jose Casanova – “The Secular and Secularisms”
- David Martin – excerpts from On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory

Class 7 – (10/21) – New Paths 1: Lived Religion (~90 pages)

- Meredith McGuire – excerpts from Lived Religion
- Three excerpts from Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religion Lives
 - Nancy Ammerman – “Introduction: Observing Modern Religion Lives”
 - *EITHER*: Meredith McGuire – “Embodied Practices”
 - *OR*: Courtney Bender – “Touching the Transcendent”
 - Nancy Ammerman – “Studying Everyday Religion”
- Robert Orsi – “Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live in?”

For Further Reading

- Nancy Ammerman – “Rethinking Religion: Toward a Practice Approach”
- Gustavo Morello, S.J. – excerpts from Lived Religion in Latin America

Class 8 – (10/28) – New Paths 2: Religion as Action Type (~130 pages)

- Christian Smith – excerpts from Religion: What it Is, How it Works, and Why it Matters

For Further Reading

- Martin Riesebrodt – excerpts from The Promise of Salvation

Class 9 – (11/4) – New Paths 3: Religion as Culture (~120 pages)

- Clifford Geertz – “Religion as a Cultural System”
- Talal Asad – “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category”
- Robert Bellah et. al. – “Religion” in Habits of the Heart
- Penny Edgell – “A Cultural Sociology of Religion: New Directions”

For Further Reading

- Kevin Schilbrack – “Religion, Models of, and Reality: Are We Through with Geertz?”
- Jason Springs – “What Cultural Theorists of Religion Have to Learn from Wittgenstein; Or, How to Read Geertz as a Practice Theorist”
- Talal Asad – “Thinking about Religion through Wittgenstein”

*** 4pm, Thursday, November 7, on the 4th floor of the Information Commons,
the 2nd Annual Leibman Lecture by Professor Jose Casanova:
“World Religions in the Emerging Global Dis/Order” ***

Class 10 – (11/11) – New Paths 4: Religion, Gender, and Sexuality (~100 pages)

- Meredith McGuire – “Gendered Spiritualities”
- Mary Jo Neitz – “Gender and Culture: Challenges to the Sociology of Religion”
- Orit Avishai – “‘Doing Religion’ In a Secular World: Women in Conservative Religions and the Question of Agency”
- Todd Fuist – “LGBT Religious Identities in Context”
- Orit Avishai – “Religious Queer People Beyond Identity Conflict: Lessons from Orthodox LGBT Jews in Israel”

For Further Reading

- Saba Mahmood – excerpts from Politics of Piety
- Carolyn Chen – “A Self of One’s Own: Taiwanese Immigrant Women and Religious Conversion”

Class 11 – (11/18) – New Paths 5: White Christian Nationalism Home & Abroad (~135 pgs)

- Phillip Gorski & Samuel Perry – excerpts from The Flag and The Cross
 - When you need a break check out the [“Uncivil Religion” webpage](#)
- Saba Mahmood – “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation”

For Further Reading

- W.E.B. Du Bois – “The Souls of White Folks”
- Emerson & Smith – “Color Blind: Evangelicals Speak on the ‘Race Problem’”
- Sarah Riccardi-Swartz – excerpts from Between Heaven and Russia

Class 12 – (11/25) – New Paths 6: the Sociology of Spirituality in a Secular Age (~100 pages)

- Brian Steensland et. al. – “Eminently Social Spirituality”
- *Pick ONE of:*
 - Candy Gunther Brown – “Yoga Spirituality in the Context of US Institutions”
 - Wendy Cadge et. al. – “Training Spiritual Caregivers”
 - Rachel Rinaldo – “Spirituality and Islam: Sufism in Indonesia”
- Birgit Meyer – “Religious and Secular, ‘Spiritual’ and ‘Physical,’ in Ghana”
- Peter Beyer – “Religion in Interesting Times”

- Brian Steensland – “Three Questions about Spirituality”

For Further Reading

- James K. A. Smith – “Secular Liturgies and the Prospects of a ‘Post-Secular’ Sociology of Religion”
- Daniel Winchester – “Embodying the Faith: Religious Practice and the Making of a Muslim Moral Habitus”
- Robert Wuthnow – “The Practice of Spirituality” from After Heaven

Thanksgiving Break from Wednesday, 11/27 to Sunday, 12/1

Class 13 – (12/2) – Student Presentations

**** Final Research Proposal due on Sakai on Monday, 12/9, at 6:45pm ****

Remaining Policy Notes:

Academic Calendar: The academic calendar can be [found here](#).

Academic Integrity: Please be sure that the work you submit is your own. The easiest way to do this is to cite your sources. While I will fit the consequences to the level of academic dishonesty, the first time that dishonesty occurs you may expect to receive a zero on the assignment without the opportunity to make up the grade. If it happens a second time you may expect to receive a zero in the course along with a written report to the Dean of the College.

In my experience most students who plagiarize do not intend to do so. Let me recommend three bumpers that can keep you from plagiarizing unintentionally: First, whenever you’re unsure, cite. It’s better to have an awkward looking paper with too many citations than an accidental plagiarization. Second, please remember, just changing the wording/phrasing of another’s work is still plagiarizing. Third, if you still have questions read the info in the links I’m including below.

Two last notes. First, you should be aware that when you turn in written work to Sakai it is automatically run through a plagiarism-checking software program. Second, if, to my great chagrin, I find that you plagiarized, I will send you an email letting you know, *and I have to report the incident to the Dean’s office – including a record of our emails about the incident*. Alright, enough of this, here are the links:

1. http://wpacouncil.org/aws/CWPA/pt/sd/news_article/272555/_PARENT/layout_details/false
2. https://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml

Accommodations: The office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD) coordinates accommodations and services for students with disabilities. The SSWD Office is located in the Sullivan Center for Student Services, 6339 N. Sheridan Rd, Suite 117. If you have a disability, you can request services by calling 773-508-3700.

Authorized Class Absences: If you need to miss class for a university-sponsored event (i.e., official athletic games, etc.) please let me know as soon as possible (one week ahead is great). Come see me during office hours and we can talk.

Mental Health: Look, there's a lot going on. Stress is real and can come from many places – some of which may seem “logical” and others of which may not. It's actually quite normal for college students to deal with insomnia, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and other serious mental health issues. None of these are – either to me or to professionals in the field – signs of failure or unsuitability. In all honesty, they are part of being human. Another part of being human is doing our best to not go through these things alone.

All to say: If mental health issues are interfering with your ability to do your class work, please talk to me. Both as a priest and as a professor I would be more than happy to help. Of course, that help can be academic (rearranging deadlines, etc.) but it might also be just listening or helping you get in touch with a professional.

Finally, the Counseling Center can be reached at: 773-508-8883.

Department Values Statement: As scholars and teachers, the faculty in the Department of Sociology at Loyola University Chicago share in the mission of the University, with its paramount focus on human dignity, as [articulated in Plan 2020](#).

We reaffirm our commitment to social justice, diversity, inclusion, scientific inquiry, and academic freedom. We reject bigotry and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexuality, disability, political orientation, and documentation status. We stand in solidarity with and will actively support students and colleagues who face such discrimination. We hold strongly to the principle that scientific examination of systematically collected empirical evidence, in conjunction with sociological concepts and theoretical frameworks, is irreplaceable for reasoned discussion of the problems and solutions facing society. This discussion must be open and mutually respectful of diverse perspectives. We also support and advocate for the analysis of the complex interplay between individuals and society that structures inequalities, constraints, and opportunities in life chances. Our purpose is to foster open and mutually respectful discussions that contribute to intellectual and moral leadership that advances a just society. Our determination in remaining wedded to these ideals through our scholarship, teaching, and service is unwavering.

Faculty Reporting Obligations: As an instructor, I am a Responsible Campus Partner (“RCP”) under Loyola’s [Comprehensive Policy and Procedures for Addressing Discrimination, Sexual Misconduct, and Retaliation](#) (available at www.luc.edu/equity). While my goal is for you to be able to engage fully and authentically with our course material through class discussions and written work, I also want to be transparent that as a RCP I am required to report certain disclosures of sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, sexual harassment, intimate partner and/or domestic violence, and/or stalking) to the [Office for Equity & Compliance](#) (“OEC”). As the University’s [Title IX](#) office, the OEC coordinates the University's response to reports and complaints of sexual misconduct (as well as discrimination of any kind) to ensure students' rights are protected.

As an instructor, I also have an [obligation under Illinois law to report disclosures](#) of or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect.

The University maintains such reporting requirements to ensure that any student who experiences sexual/gender-based violence receives accurate information about available resources and support. Such reports **will not generate a report to law enforcement** (no student will ever be forced to file a report with the police). Additionally, the University’s resources and supports are available to all

students even if a student chooses that they do not want any other action taken. If you have any questions about this policy, you are encouraged to contact the OEC at equity@luc.edu or 773-508-7766.

If you ever wish to speak with a **confidential** resource regarding gender-based violence, I encourage you to call [The Line](tel:773-494-3810) at 773-494-3810. The Line is staffed by confidential advocates from 8:30am-5pm Mon-Fri, and 24 hours on the weekend when school is in session. Advocates can provide support, talk through your options (medical, legal, LUC reporting, safety planning, etc.), and connect you with resources as needed – without generating a report or record with the OEC. More information about The Line can be found at luc.edu/wellness.

Statement of Intent: By remaining in this course, students are agreeing to accept this syllabus as a contract and to abide by the guidelines outlined in the document. Students will be consulted should there be a necessary change to the syllabus.