

**Sociology 520 – PUBLIC RELIGION; SECULAR DEMOCRACY**  
**Loyola U. Chicago – Spring 2023**

**Time:** Mon, 4:15-6:45pm  
**Instructor:** Fr. Patrick Gilger, SJ  
**Office:** Coffey 429

**Classroom:** Cuneo Hall, Room 318  
**Email:** [pgilger@luc.edu](mailto:pgilger@luc.edu)  
**Office Hours:** Wed 9:00-11:00am

**Course Description:** For those of us who read them with an “Enlightened” minds the four words that make up the title of this course already tell a story. That story goes something like this: because religion is a deeply personal, private, thing it should not be controlled by the government. In exchange for this private freedom neither religious persons nor institutions should attempt to make the state religious by, for example, using government power to accomplish religious goals. Instead, democratic governments – including the public spheres where debate happens – should remain devoutly secular. “Good” religions respect this boundary between church and state while “bad” religions try, through deception, coercion, or outright violence, to enter the public, control the state, and enforce their beliefs on the demos. The role of a secular democratic state, then, is both to protect the right to personal religiosity and to keep “bad” religion away from state power.

This story of the relationship between the four terms that make up the title of this course is very normal for “secular modern” persons like us. Given this normality, our course has two aims, the first diagnostic and the second creative. Our first, diagnostic, goal is to understand why this is the story our rational, educated minds tell before we even start thinking about it. How did we come to expect these four words to relate in this way? What does this relation do to our understanding of what politics should be, of what religion is, and of who we ourselves are? Our second, creative, goal follows on the heels of questions like these. It asks us to imagine whether we can – or should – learn to tell this story otherwise. Can we redefine these four words and rearrange the relations between them? What would telling a different story do to how we understand what secular government is, what it means to be a citizen, and whether religious persons and institutions can “become public”?

Admittedly, accomplishing these two goals within one semester is an ambitious task. Because this is the case I’ve carved the class into five parts, each of which will last about two weeks. As you can see in the course schedule below, in the first part we will become familiar with the state of scholarship on the kinds of questions I posed above. We will read, for example, William Cavanaugh’s genealogical deconstruction of the normal story we tell about the relationship between religion and violence in secular modernity, and we will read some introductory texts from key scholars in the field. This will set us up, I hope, to devote two weeks to the interrogation of each the terms found in the course’s title. This will require us to become familiar with the history of the public sphere and with how “poetic” counterpublics (of gendered, racialized, and religious forms) have been theorized. It will allow us to come to terms with the unacknowledged Protestant-Christian framings of our tacit understanding of what a religion is and how that shapes our stance toward what kinds of religion can become public. And it will compel us to face up to some of the ways that secular norms are embedded in the ways we, as scholars, do scholarship – and therefore also within the kinds of political and ethical outcomes we seek to produce through our scholarship.

It is to be hoped that engaging each of the terms with some depth will allow students enrolled in this course to not only become familiar with the terms of debate but also begin to enter that debate themselves. As such, final research papers – the methods of which can be adjusted based upon the disciplinary expertise pursued by each student – will be attempts to observe (or to suggest or to draw) new configurations of both these contested terms and the social arrangements these terms reify and realize.

**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. Here are the texts I would recommend getting based on the depth of our engagement with them.

1. Craig Calhoun, et. al. 2011. Rethinking Secularism. New York: Oxford University Press.
2. José Casanova. 1994. Public Religions in the Modern World. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
3. William T. Cavanaugh. 2009. The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict. New York: Oxford University Press.
4. Saba Mahmood. 2005. Politics of Piety. Princeton: Princeton 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 – 90 points** = 9 precis' at 10 points each.
  - There are 11 class sessions with readings assigned. You are responsible for writing precis' for 9 classes. I will accept, and include in your final grade, up to 11 total precis'.
  - Weekly precis' are due by midnight the day before class; Sunday night.
  - Please print your precis' and bring hard copies to class. I will collect these for grading.
  - If you would like me to print copies and bring them to class for you just let me know. This is no trouble.
2. **Class Presentation – 45 points**
3. **Final Paper – 115 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 ~750 words to present and analyze the main arguments of the texts you have read.

Strong precis' will lay out the main themes discussed in the readings and then (1) *select one set of ideas*, (2) show how/where those ideas are *located within the main argument*, and (3) show how

they unfold and what kinds of questions they might raise. 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. To do this, I would suggest doing three things. 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) are trying to do.

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. You should plan for your presentation – *including the class discussion* – to take about an hour.

*Notes for the final paper:* Since many of you are coming from different disciplines – sociology, theology; philosophy – your final papers may look different as well. For those in philosophy, for example, you may want to synthesize/criticize a particular set of themes, or you may decide to show how another theorist’s ideas can be used to resolve a problem raised by the course readings. The same applies, *mutatis mutandis*, for those in other disciplines.

These differences notwithstanding, final papers should be efforts to answer the questions raised in the course description above regarding the genealogical construction, and possibility for reconstruction, of the usual story about publicity and religion, secularity and democracy told in our times. As you can see in the course schedule below, we will spend an entire class on April 17<sup>th</sup> presenting and discussing ideas/sketches/outlines of your final papers. Each of you will have ~10 minutes to present your ideas and discuss them with the class.

The final draft of your paper should be between 4500 and 5000 words. It should be submitted on Sakai by 4:15pm on the date our final: Monday, May 1.

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

Precis = 90/250 = ~35% of total grade  
 Presentation = 45/250 = ~20% of total grade  
 Final Paper = 115/250 = ~45% 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 10 minutes. We will then turn to our second 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 an hour. Following this we will take a short break and return for our third segment, for which I will be responsible. Depending on what each presentation covers, this will consist either in a *deeper dive* into particular questions that have been raised or a *review of key topics* that may have been overlooked. 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

Three 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 either on Sakai or the embedded link below.

### **Class 1 – (1/23) – Framing the Question: Violence, Politics & Religion (~90 pages)**

- Cavanaugh, William – “Introduction” and ch.2, “The Invention of Religion,” pp3-14, 57-122 in [The Myth of Religious Violence](#)
- Orsi, Robert – “Everyday Religion and the Contemporary World: The Un-Modern, Or What Was Supposed to Have Disappeared But Did Not,” pp146-61 in [Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: An Anthropology of Everyday Religion](#)

### **Class 2 – (1/30) – Framing the Question: Modernity, Secularity & Religion (~95 pages)**

- Weber, Max – “Science as a Vocation,” pp129-56 in [For Max Weber](#)
- Casanova, José – “Introduction” and ch.1, “Secularization, Enlightenment, and Modern Religion,” pp3-39 in [Public Religions in the Modern World](#)
- Calhoun, Craig, et. al. – “Introduction,” pp3-30 in [Rethinking Secularism](#)

### **Class 3 – (2/6) – What is a Public? (~75 pages)**

- Habermas, Jürgen – “The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article,” pp49-55 in *New German Critique* (1974)
- Calhoun, Craig, et. al. – “Introduction,” pp1-48 in [Habermas and the Public Sphere](#)

- Johnson, Pauline – “Habermas's Search for the Public Sphere,” pp215-236 in *European Journal of Social Theory* (2001)

*Recommended*

- Fraser, Nancy – “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” pp56-80 in *Social Text* (1990)

**Class 4 – (2/13) – What is (and who can inhabit) a Counterpublic? (~100 pages)**

- Sandel, Michael – “The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self” pp81-96 in *Political Theory* (1984)
- Warner, Michael – “Publics and Counterpublics,” pp49-90 in *Public Culture* (2002)
- Hirschkind, Charles – excerpt from “Introduction” and ch.4, “Cassettes and Counterpublics,” pp1-6, 105-42 in The Ethical Soundscape

**Class 5 – (2/20) – What is Religion? (~85 pages)**

- Durkheim, Emile – “Religion and Ritual,” pp219-38 in Selected Writings
- Geertz, Clifford – “Religion as a Cultural System,” pp87-125 of The Interpretation of Cultures
- Asad, Talal – ch.1, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category,” pp27-54 in Genealogies of Religion

*Recommended*

- Cantwell Smith – ch.6, “The English Word ‘Believe,’” pp105-127 in Faith and Belief
- Springs, Jason – “What Cultural Theorists of Religion Have to Learn from Wittgenstein; Or, How to Read Geertz as a Practice Theorist,” pp934-969 of *Journal of the AAR* (2008)

**Class 6 – (2/27) – What is Public Religion? (~85 pages)**

- Knoblauch, Hubert – “Portrait: José Casanova (Deprivatization, the Public Sphere, and Popular Religion),” pp5-8 in *Religion and Society* (2011)
- Casanova, José – “What is a Public Religion?” pp111-139 in Religion Returns to the Public Square
- Stepan, Alfred – “Religion, Democracy, and the ‘Twin Tolerations,’” pp37-57 in *Journal of Democracy* (2000)
- Williams, Rhys – “The Languages of the Public Sphere: Religious Pluralism, Institutional Logics, and Civil Society,” pp42-61 in *Annals of the AAP&SS* (2007)
- Gilger, Patrick – “Powers of Publicity: Religious Innovation & Democratic Renovation,” forthcoming in A Quarter Century of Public Religions

*Recommended*

- Jacob, Marg. – “Private Beliefs in Public Temples,” pp59-84 in *Social Research* (1992)

*Spring Break = no class on Monday, 3/6*

**Class 7 – (3/13) – What is Secularism? (~95 pages)**

- Taylor, Charles – “Western Secularity,” pp 31-53 in Rethinking Secularism

- Asad, Talal – “Introduction,” pp1-21 in Formations of the Secular
- Asad, Talal – “Religion, Nation-State, Secularism,” pp178-196 in Nation & Religion
- Casanova, José – “Secularization Revisited: A Reply to Talal Asad,” pp12-30 in Powers of the Secular Modern
- Knibbe, Kim – “Casanova, Asad, and the Public Debate on Religion in Modern Societies,” pp13-17 in *Religion and Society* (2011)
- Asad, Talal – “Response to Casanova,” pp206-210 in Powers of the Secular Modern

**Class 8 – (3/20) – Seeing Non-Secular Subjects (~110 pages)**

- Mahmood, Saba – ch.1, “The Subject of Freedom,” ch.4, “Positive Ethics and Ritual Conventions,” and “Epilogue,” pp1-39, 118-52, 189-99 in Politics of Piety
- Mahmood, Saba – “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire,” pp323-47 in *Public Culture* (2006)

3/22 – *Hank Center Lecture: “Reading Aquinas after the Holocaust: Beyond Integralism and Secularism”* by Rev. Mr. Bill McCormick, S.J., Ph.D.

**Class 9 – (3/27) – What is Democracy? (~85 pages)**

- Touraine, Alain – “Introduction,” and ch.1, “A New Idea,” pp1-20 in What is Democracy?
- Habermas, Jürgen – “Three Normative Models of Democracy,” pp1-10 in *Constellations* (2001)
- Mouffe, Chantal – “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?”, pp745-758 in *Social Research* (1999)
- Smith, Rogers M. – “Citizenship and the Politics of People-Building,” pp73-96 in *Citizenship Studies* (2001)
- Calhoun, Craig, et. al. – “Introduction,” pp1-17 of Degenerations of Democracy

*Recommended*

- Young, Iris Marion – “Polity and Group Difference,” pp250-74 in *Ethics* (1989)

**Class 10 – (4/3) – Democracy & Social Movements (~85 pages)**

- Gaonkar, Dilip P. – “The Structure of Democratic Degenerations and the Imperative of Direct Action,” pp181-207 in Degenerations of Democracy
- Williams, Rhys – “Religious Social Movements in the Public Sphere,” pp315-330 in Handbook of the Sociology of Religion
- Gorski, Philip – “Why evangelicals voted for Trump: A critical cultural sociology,” pp338-354 in *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* (2017)
- Gilger, Patrick – “[Global Public Religions in an Age of Crisis](#),” in *Democracy Seminar* (2022)
- Hirschkind, Charles – “Heresy or Hermeneutics: The Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd”, pp463-477 in *American Journal of Islamic Social Science* (1995)

*Recommended*

- Touraine, Alain – “Introduction,” and ch.2, “Class, Nation, Democracy,” pp1-10, 35-59 of Solidarity: The Analysis of A Social Movement

*LUC Easter Break = no class on Monday, 4/10*

## Class 11 – (4/17) – Student Presentations

### Class 12 – (4/24) – Reframing the Question (~55 pages)

- Johansen, Birgitte – “Postsecular Sociology: Modes, possibilities and challenges,” pp4-15 in *Approaching Religion* (2013)
- Smith, James K.A. – “Secular Liturgies and the Prospects for a ‘Post-Secular’ Sociology of Religion,” pp159-184 in The Post-Secular in Question
- Asad, Talal – “Thinking about religion, belief, and politics,” pp36-57 in The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies

\*\*\* Final Paper due on Sakai on Monday, 5/1, at 6:45pm \*\*\*

### Remaining Policy Notes:

*Academic Calendar:* The academic calendar can be found here:  
[https://www.luc.edu/academics/schedules/spring/academic\\_calendar.shtml](https://www.luc.edu/academics/schedules/spring/academic_calendar.shtml)

*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](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](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 (<http://www.luc.edu/strategicplanning/plan2020>).

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.

*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.