

Soc. 112: Sociology of Religion
University of California, Berkeley
M-Th @ 10am-noon; Goldman School of Public Policy, Room 150
Summer 2018

Instructor: Jerome Baggett jbaggett@scu.edu (510) 549-5060 (w) (510) 846-8274 (c)

Office Hours: Mondays @ 12:30-2pm; if this time slot does not fit your schedule, please feel free call for an appointment. Note that my office is at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University (Office #202), which is located just a few hundred yards north of the Goldman School at 1735 LeRoy Avenue – just ask at the front desk and the receptionist will direct you.

Course Description: Religion is an enormously important and, despite all the talk about us living in a “secular” society, persistent component of human experience. Focusing primarily, although not exclusively, on the United States, this course will attempt to introduce students to the sociological study of religion and provide them with the theoretical tools necessary for thoughtfully analyzing the place of religion in the modern world. Among the topics this course will address are: the manner in which religion functions to provide a sense of individual meaning; the social construction of religious conversion and commitment; the types and dynamics of religious groups; the increasing significance of the “spiritual but not religious” and the religious “nones”; and the impact of religion on social cohesion, conflict and change.

Required Texts:

Mark Chaves, *American Religion: Contemporary Trends* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

Lynn Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World: Woman Turn to Orthodox Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

Phil Zuckerman, *Faith No More: Why People Reject Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

*There will also be selected articles and book chapters assigned for this course; these are identified in this syllabus with an asterisk and listed in the order that I think they might best be read. These articles and chapters are available online (bcourses.berkeley.edu). If you have any trouble accessing this material, feel free to contact me and I'll be happy to e-mail you the appropriate PDFs.

Course Requirements:

1. Classroom preparation, punctuality, attendance, and informed participation. Rather than this being construed as my class, what I'm essentially asking here is that you contribute to making this *our* class by faithfully keeping abreast of the readings, being attentive in class (obviously, no cell phones, Internet browsing, etc.) and sharing your insights and/or criticisms on a regular basis (10% for punctual attendance, 15% for informed participation – 25%).
2. Three 2-3-page critical analysis papers. This course is divided into six weeklong subsections; students are asked to write one paper at the conclusion of any three of these subsections and submit it at the conclusion of that Thursday's class. These papers should come with a title and, while it is unnecessary to label them as such, they should be comprised of the following three sections:
 - Explanation: In this section you are to clearly and succinctly explain an analytical concept or a discrete argument that was introduced in any one (or more) of the assigned readings for the appropriate subsection in the course schedule. Obviously, given the brevity of this assignment, you need to carefully select a topic that is not unduly broad. For example, "religion" is too broad; whereas analytical concepts that would be more appropriate could include "motivations" (Geertz), "collective effervescence" (Durkheim), "sect" (McGuire), "symbolic dilemma" (O'Dea), "marginal situation" (Berger), "investment" (Kanter) and so on. Similarly, writing about Weber's entire Protestant ethic thesis is too broad; whereas such more discrete arguments would include: the contention that people generally overestimate the degree of religiosity in the past (Stark and Finke); the argument that religion functions as a political "opiate" (Marx); the claim that America's "civil religion" creates a sense of national solidarity (Bellah); the thesis that there is a persistent "culture war" in the U.S. (Hunter); the claim that intergroup conflict engenders greater in-group solidarity among religious communities (Smith), and so on.
 - Critique: In this section you are to offer your own critical assessment of the analytical concept or argument you introduced in the first section. You may rely on your own critical acumen (of course!) and you're also free to draw upon other scholars addressed in this class (especially those for this same week) to help you think through your assessment. In terms of being critical, I don't simply mean that you come to the conclusion that you agree or disagree with an author's use of a concept or support for an argument. Rather, you might add nuance, contradictory or additional supporting evidence, distinctions pertaining to when or for whom this concept or argument may or may not apply, and so forth.
 - Application: In this final (likely longest) section – and, importantly, in light of the critiques you delineated in the previous section – you are to discuss how, when or to what extent your specified analytical concept or argument helps to illuminate some aspect of contemporary religion. In other words, you have introduced an important concept or argument (i.e., "explanation"), you have

offered your assessment of an author's use of that concept or argument (i.e., "critique"), so now tell your reader why doing this was worthwhile – how this concept or argument (again, in light of your critique of it) helps you to see something about religion today that you otherwise would not have seen. To do this, you may reflect analytically on some aspect of religion that: a. you are already aware of (or have already experienced or witnessed); b. you have read or heard about from the news, etc.; or c. you do some modest exploration about, which can include visiting a Pentecostal service, listening to some Christian rock music, speaking with an inter-religious couple, reading some pop spirituality literature, attending an AA meeting, viewing a religion-related documentary (there are lots of these on Netflix or at UCB's Media Resource Center), analyzing Zen center websites, watching an atheism-related podcast, exploring an Internet chatroom concerning Ramadan, watching a televised megachurch sermon, analyzing a religious nonprofit organization's mission statement, etc., etc. (45%).

3. Final Exam: This in-class exam will be given on the day of our last meeting, Thursday, June 28th (30%).

Two Summer Rules:

1. The "I'm Worried I'll Fail This Class" Rule: I take attendance at the beginning – and *only* at the beginning – of each class session for two reasons. The first is so I can learn students' names (which I consider important for a number of personal and professional reasons). The second is to ensure that anyone who does all the work for this course and misses or is tardy for no more than two classes will receive no lower than a C as a final grade.
2. The "I Had Serious Case of Writer's Block Last Night" Rule: Even though papers are due in class on Thursdays, if for some reason you are unable to submit it at that time, you may submit it (by handing it to the receptionist at 1735 LeRoy Avenue) by Friday at noon for full credit. After that, papers may be delivered or e-mailed to me, but they will be docked one full letter grade for each day they are late.

Course Schedule:

Week 1: Religion and Meaning in Everyday Life

Monday: Introduction to the Course and to One Another

Tuesday: The Sociological Perspective on Religion

*Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 93-135.

Wednesday: The Provision of Meaning and Belonging

*Bill J. Leonard, "The Bible and Serpent-Handling" in Peter W. Williams, ed., *Perspectives on American Religion and Culture* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 228-40.

NB: Video on Snake-Handling Pentecostals.

Thursday: Religion as Social Construction
Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, chapters 1 and 2.

Week 2: Negotiating Religious Commitment and Belonging

Monday: Memorial Day

Tuesday: Understanding Religious Conversion and Commitment

*John Lofland and Rodney Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," *American Sociological Review* 30 (1965): 862-75.

*Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "Commitment: The Problem and Theory" in *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 61-74.

*Christian Smith, "Toward a 'Subcultural Identity' Theory of Religious Strength" in *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 89-119.

Wednesday: The Dynamics of Religious Collectivities

*Meredith B. McGuire, "The Dynamics of Religious Collectivities" in *Religion: The Social Context* (Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland, 2008), pp. 149-62.

*Thomas F. O'Dea, "Five Dilemmas of the Institutionalization of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1(1) (October 1961): 30-41.

*Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, "Of Churches, Sects, and Cults" in *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 19-30.

Thursday: Thinking about Sects

NB: Video on Hutterites.

Week 3: Official Religion and Nonofficial Religion

Monday: Negotiating Gender, Commitment and Modernity

Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World*, chapters 2-7.

Tuesday: Thinking about Cults

*Douglas E. Cowan and David G. Bromley, "Heaven's Gate: The Question of Cults and Violence" in *Cults and New Religions: A Brief History* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 169-91.

NB: Video on Heaven's Gate

Wednesday: "I'm Spiritual, but Not Religious" – Religious and Generational Change

*Linda A. Mercadante, "The Interviewees" and "Common Themes" in *Belief Without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but not Religious* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 35-91.

*Richard W. Flory and Donald E. Miller, "The Embodied Spirituality of the Post-Boomer Generations" in Kieran Flanagan and Peter C. Jupp, eds., *A Sociology of Spirituality* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), pp. 201-18.

Thursday: Religion and Popular Culture

*Mark D. Hulsether, "Like a Sermon: Popular Religion in Madonna Videos" in Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan, eds., *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 77-100.

*J. Liora Gubkin, "Friday Night Live: It's Not Your Parents' Shabbat" in Richard

W. Flory and Donald E. Miller, eds., *Gen X Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 199-210.

*Michael Jindra, "Star Trek Fandom as a Religious Phenomenon," *Sociology of Religion*, 1994, 55: 27-51.

Week 4: Secularization, Sacralization and Religious Change

Monday: The Secularization Debate

*Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, "Secularization, R.I.P." in *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 57-79.

*N. J. Demerath, "Secularization and Sacralization Deconstructed and Reconstructed" in Suxanne C. Monahan, William A. Mirola and Michael O. Emerson, eds., *Sociology of Religion: A Reader* (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 2011), pp. 265-84.

Tuesday: Trend Data from the U.S. Context

Chaves, *American Religion*, Introduction, chapters 2-5, 7-8.

Wednesday: Letting Go of Presumptions – Thinking about Atheism in the U.S.

*Jerome P. Baggett, "Well, I'll Be Damned! – Considering Atheism Beyond the 'Popular View'" in *The Varieties of Nonreligious Experience: How American Atheists Live (and Thrive) in a Religious Culture* (NYU Press, forthcoming), pp. 1-40

Thursday: Letting Go of God – Becoming Atheist in the U.S.

Zuckerman, *Faith No More*, Introduction, chapters 1-6, 8 and 10.

Week 5: The Role of Religion in Social Cohesion and Conflict

Monday: Religion and Social Cohesion

*Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Karen E. Fields, trans. (New York: The Free Press, 1995 [1912]), pp. 207-25.

*Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America" in *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 168-89.

*Meredith B. McGuire, "Religion and Social Cohesion" in *Religion: The Social Context* (Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland, 2008), pp. 196-208.

Tuesday: Religion and the So-Called "Culture Wars"

*James Davison Hunter, "Competing Moral Visions" in *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), pp. 107-32

*Krista McQueeney, "'We are God's Children, Y'All': Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Lesbian- and Gay-Affirming Congregations," *Social Problems*, vol. 56 (1) (January 2009): 151-73.

Wednesday: Religion as an Opiate?

*Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction" and "The German Ideology: Part I" in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), pp. 53-4, 146-55.

*Meredith B. McGuire, "Religion Supports the Status Quo" in *Religion: The Social Context* (Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland, 2008), pp. 237-245.

Thursday: Religion as an Amphetamine?

Weber, Giddens' introduction, chapters 1-3.

*Meredith B. McGuire, "Religion Promotes Social Change" in *Religion: The Social Context* (Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland, 2008), pp. 245-55

Week 6: Religion and Social Change

Monday: Evaluating the Protestant Ethic Thesis

Weber, chapters 4 (only the first few pages plus Section A entitled "Calvinism") and 5.

Tuesday: Religion Bringing about Social Change

*Christian Smith, "Correcting a Curious Neglect, or Bringing Religion Back In" in Christian Smith, ed., *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movement Activism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 1-25.

NB: Video on the Black Church.

Wednesday: Society Bringing about Religious Change

*Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, "The Post-9/11 Hijab as Icon," *Sociology of Religion*, vol. 68 (3) (October 2007): 253-67.

*Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, "Religiosity in America: Shock and Two Aftershocks" in *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), pp. 91-133.

Thursday: Final Exam