

**WELLESLEY COLLEGE
SOCIOLOGY 218**

RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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Office Hours –Mondays 2:00-3:00 and Thursdays 9:30 – 11:00 or by appointment

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Course Description

Both scholars and the public-at-large predicted that religion would not figure large in modern society. As nations became more and more industrialized, rational, and urbanized, the need to believe in a higher power would weaken. But even a relatively inexperienced student of society will notice that religious life in the U.S. and around the world is flourishing. Americans are among the most church-going people. Jews and Christians now sit with Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims at America's religious table. Religious fundamentalism drives social movements in the U.S. and abroad. What explains the persistent salience of religion and what is its effect on life in the U.S. and around the world?

This course offers an introduction to the sociology of religion. We will begin by exploring what religion is and what role it plays in society. We will then answer three critical questions about religion. First, what do religious beliefs and practices look like in the United States? Second, how does religious change take place? Third, what effect does religion have on other social processes? We will explore these questions at the level of society, at the level of organizations within society, and at the level of the individual.

This course will be organized as a seminar. There will be quite a bit of reading and discussion. **PARTICIPATION IS A BASIC REQUIREMENT.** We will host several guest lecturers. In addition to the regularly scheduled class sessions, we will have 1-2 evening sessions at a date and time to be arranged (to be as convenient for as many students as possible). I expect everyone to contribute actively and often. I think of the professor-student relationship as a contract. I take my commitment to you as a teacher very seriously and I expect you to take your commitment as a student seriously as well. Here are some of my expectations.

1. With the exception of sickness or an emergency, I expect students to attend all classes. Poor attendance will be reflected in your grade.
2. I expect students to arrive on time. Please do not come into the classroom if you are more than 10 minutes late.

3. I expect each student to visit me during office hours at least once before the middle of the semester. This is so that I can get to know you a little better and to check in on how the class is going.
4. I place a high premium on good writing and organization. I am very happy to work with you on your writing. We will spend time in class discussing how to construct a good research paper. I can also read drafts of your paper before it is due provided you give me sufficient notice.

The requirements of this class are two written assignments: a 3-5 page paper on a topic to be announced and a 12-15 page research paper on a topic of your choice. The short paper is due in class on October 20th. No e-mail submissions are accepted. The research paper is due on the last day of reading period. All late papers will automatically be graded down.

Required Texts and Readings:

The following books are available at the college bookstore. Two copies are also on reserve at the Knapp Center. Additional readings have been posted on e-reserves.

Ammerman, Nancy. *Pillars of Faith*. University of California Press

Dillon, Michelle. *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. Cambridge University Press

Brown, Karen McCarthy. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. University of California Press.

Cadge, Wendy. *Heartwood: The First Generation of Theravada Buddhism in America*. University of Chicago Press.

Davidman, Lynn. *Tradition in a Rootless World*. University of California Press.

Becker, Penny. *Congregations in Conflict*. Cambridge University Press.

Smith, Christian. *Disruptive Religion*. Routledge Press.

Orsi, Robert. *Madonna of 115th Street*. Yale University Press.

Course grading is as follows:

Attendance and Participation 35%

Assignment One 30%

Research Paper 35%

WEEK ONE – INTRODUCTION AND COURSE DESCRIPTION

September 8 - Course Overview

WEEK TWO – TRADITIONS IN A ROOTLESS WORLD (Lynn Davidman)

Sept. 13 – Chapters 1-4

Sept. 15 – Chapters 5-8

WEEK THREE – WHAT IS RELIGION?

Sept. 20 – Durkheim: Religious experience – myth and ritual.

Durkheim, Emile. 1915. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.

You can read this at at: <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=587580>, but cannot print it.

Introduction (pp. 13-33), Book One, Chapter One, (pp. 37-63), Conclusion, pp. (pp. 462-496)

A good secondary source summary is available from the University of Chicago:

<http://ssr1.uchicago.edu/PRELIMS/Theory/durkheim.html#DURKHEIM2>

Geertz: More myth and ritual

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. “Religion as a Cultural System.” Ch. 4 in *The Interpretations of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Online at: http://www.iwp.uni-linz.ac.at/lxe/sektktf/GG/GeertzTexts/Religion_System.htm

September 22 – Marx and Weber

Marx: Functional vs. Conflict Theories of Religion; Religion and Social Class

Marx, Karl 1844. “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction,” pp. 55-65 in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert Tucker, ed. New York: Norton.

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>

Theses on Feuerbach.” Pp 143-45, online at:

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/original.htm>

WEBER: Charisma and Institutionalization.

Weber, Max. 1904. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Introduction and Part I (chapters 1, 2, 3).

You can read it online here, but cannot print it:

http://www.ne.jp/asahi/moriyuki/abukuma/weber/world/ethic/pro_eth_frame.html

WC library has it as an e-book, which is easy to read and can be printed (with patience):
The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism [electronic resource] / Max Weber; translated by
Talcott Parsons; with an introduction by Anthony Giddens. London: Routledge, 2001, c1930

Also Weber, Max. 1922. *The Sociology of Religion*. Section A – “Origins of Religion”
Posted as e-reserve

Week Four – General Debates in the Sociology of Religion

Sept. 26 - Sherkat, Darren and Christopher Ellison. 1999. “Recent Developments and Current Controversies in the Sociology of Religion.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 25: 363 – 94.

Warner, R. Stephen. 1993. “Work in Progress toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States.” *American Journal of Sociology* 98(5): 1044-93.
Online at: <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/481921.html>

Sept. 29 – Herberg, Will. Protestant, Catholic, Jew. University of Chicago Press. 1955. Chapter 11 – Page 254 – 281.

Schwartz, Joel. 2004. “Protestant, Catholic, Jew... (Reconsiderations).” *Public Interest* 155: 106-26.

Hammond, Phillip H. 1988. “Religion and the Persistence of Identity,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 27(1): 1-11.

Week Five – General Debates in the Sociology of Religion continued

October 3 - Part One – Handbook of the Sociology of Religion – Michele Dillon

October 6 - Guest Lecturer - Nadya Jaworsky

Week Six - General Debates in the Sociology of Religion continued

October 10th – No Class Columbus Day

October 13th – Guest Lecturer - Wasim Rahman on Islam in America

Week Seven – General Debates continued

October 17th - Part Two – Handbook of the Sociology of Religion – Michele Dillon

October 20th - Part Two – Handbook of the Sociology of Religion - Michele Dillon and general summary to date.

Week Eight – Individual Beliefs and Practices

October 24th - Robert Orsi – Gods in the City Intro, Chapters 1-3

October 27th - Orsi - Chapters 6, 9, 10.

Week Nine – Individual Beliefs and Practices

October 31st – Cadge, Wendy. *Heartwood*. Chapters 1-4.

November 3rd - Cadge, Wendy. *Heartwood*. Chapters 5-8.

Week Ten – Religious Organizations in America

November 7th - Chaves, Mark. *Congregations in America*. Harvard University Press, Chapter One.

Niebuhr, Richard. *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. Henry Holt & Company, Inc., 1929. Chapter 1, 6, and 10.

November 10th - Penny Becker - Congregations in Conflict – Chapters 1-2

Week 11 – Religious Organizations: Culture and Change in Different Congregations (complete) and Religion and Politics (begin)

November 14th - Penny Becker - Congregations in Conflict (continued) Read two chapters between Chapters 3 - 7 and Chapter 8.

November 17th - Bellah, Robert N. “Civil Religion in America.” Reprinted by permission of Dædalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, from the issue entitled, "Religion in America," Winter 1967, Vol. 96, No. 1, pp. 1-21.

Online at: http://hrr.hartsem.edu/Bellah/articles_5.htm

Week Twelve - Religion and Politics continued

November 21st - Part Five in Handbook of the Sociology of Religion – Michele Dillon

November 24th - THANKSGIVING

Week Thirteen - Religion and Politics continued

November 28th Christian Smith, Disruptive Religion . Introduction, Chapters One, Two and Four.

Wood, Robert L. 1994. “Faith in Action: Religious Resources for Political Success in Three Congregations.” Sociology of Religion. 55(4):397-417.

December 1st- Turner, Bryan. "Cosmopolitan Virtue: On Religion in a Global Age." *European Journal of Social Theory* 4(2): 131-152.

Lincoln, Bruce. 2003. *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11*. Chicago.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Terror in the Mind of God*. University of California Press, Chapters 1 and 11.

Week Fourteen - The Contemporary Panorama - How Does It Compare?

December 5th Ammerman, Nancy. *Pillars of Faith*. Chapters 1-4.

December 8th Ammerman, Nancy. *Pillars of Faith*. Chapters 5-8.

Week Fifteen - How Do We Study Religion?

December 12th - Wuthnow, Robert. "Is there a Place for 'Scientific' Studies of Religion?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 24, 2003. Available at <http://www.psywww.com/psyrelig/wuthnow.html>