

Sociology of Religion

SOC 3104

9:00 – 9:50 Monday, Wednesday, Friday, ADM 331

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Dr. Buster Smith

Office: ADM 326, 645-4893

Office Hours: MWF 11-12, MW 2-4, TR 9-11, F 2-3

Religion is a powerful force in the lives of many people. This semester we will be examining religion from a sociological perspective to understand how it shapes cultures, organizations, and individuals. There will be three major sections for this class. First, we will discuss foundational issues including how to define religion and what the original theorists of sociology had to say about religion.

Second, we will explore modern theories and debates in the sociology of religion. We will begin with an overview of the old and new paradigms of the sociology of religion. Specific points of contention that we will explore include pluralism, secularization, and conversion. The final portion of the course will show how religion interacts with other important sociological concepts. We will discuss particular concepts such as deviance, modernization, race, and gender by learning about specific religious groups. These religions will include the Amish, Islam, Scientology, and Aum Shinrikyo, as well as groups that you choose to learn about for your research paper.

One of the best ways to learn any new material is to explain it to others. For this reason, you are expected to engage in class discussion. In addition, each student will give a presentation about a particular religious group and lead a discussion.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course students should be able to do the following:

- 1) Explain the major theories of the sociology of religion.
- 2) Apply these theories to better understand particular religious groups and the effects of religion on society in general.
- 3) Connect issues about religion to other sociological topics such as race, ethnicity, gender, and deviance.
- 4) Understand the different sociological methods for studying religion including qualitative, quantitative, and historical.
- 5) Improve writing, critical reasoning, and presentation skills as they relate to sociological topics.

Required Texts

The Rise of Christianity. Rodney Stark.

Sociology of Religion: Contemporary Developments. Second Edition. Kevin J. Christiano, William H. Swatos, Jr., and Peter Kivisto.

Extraordinary Groups: An Examination of Unconventional Lifestyles. Ninth Edition. Richard T. Shaefer and William W. Zellner.

Evaluation

Examinations (45%): There will be three examinations, two during the semester and a final exam. Each will be an in class essay test. The final exam will not be cumulative, it will only deal with material from the last third of the semester. Students who will knowingly miss an assigned examination are responsible for arranging an alternative exam time in person with the instructor at least 24 hours in advance. Make-up exams must be completed within one week of the scheduled exam date. Without prior arrangement, no make-up exam will be administered.

Thought Pieces (20%): You will write a one page thought piece about each of the sets of readings for this course. This is intended to let you think about what the important points of each text were, note parts that you agree and disagree with, and think of questions about the reading that would make for good discussion topics. Completing the thought pieces will help to facilitate our discussion about each subject. *In fairness to other students, no late thought pieces will be accepted.*

Research Paper (15%): Each student will pick a religious group to study in detail. You will write a 10-12 page paper about this group that connects it to the sociological theories and debates we have covered in the class. At the end of the semester each student will give a presentation about their group to the class and lead a discussion related to their topic.

Participation (20%): Class attendance and participation are very important both for you to understand the material and to help contribute to the learning process of the entire class. As such, all students are expected to attend every class and to participate in group discussions and exercises. This will require completing the readings and leaving enough time to think about them before class.

Grades

Final grades are a sum of the four previous components. Letter grades are calculated from the percentage of credit earned, as follows:

93-100%: A	73-77%: C
90-92%: A-	70-72%: C-
88-89%: B+	68-69%: D+
83-87%: B	63-67%: D
80-82%: B-	60-62%: D-
78-79%: C+	0-59%: F

Expectations

Do not use your cell phone during class. No electronic devices (cell phones, laptops, microwave ovens, etc.) may be used during exams. If a student uses one of these devices during an exam it will result in an automatic grade of zero on the exam.

Students are expected to attend class and complete assignments on time. Regular class attendance is essential. *Any student who misses more than 10 classes will automatically receive a failing grade for the course.* Students are also expected to complete reading assignments and papers on time.

Students with documented disabilities should meet with me as early as possible in the semester to discuss necessary accommodations for assignments or exams.

If any material is unclear it is important to ask questions, either during class or to attend office hours. Particularly because all of the course topics build upon each other, not understanding any section will make it difficult to keep up with subsequent lectures and readings.

The College Honor Code is enforced in this class. Any student who violates the Honor Code will fail the course and be sent to the Honor Court.

The Writing Center

The Catawba College Writing Center provides free, one-on-one consultations to all Catawba students. Our tutors have been intensely trained, and while they won't rewrite students' papers for them, they will give students feedback and encouragement at all stages of the writing process (brainstorming, drafting, revising, polishing). Students who use the Writing Center should be prepared to discuss the assignment they are working on and to begin making revisions, with the tutor's guidance, during the session.

All students are encouraged to use the Writing Center which is open afternoons (in ADMN 211) and evenings (in the Library, Study Room #5). Walk-ins are welcome, but the Writing Center honors appointments first. For more information or to make an appointment, call 704-645-4819 or stop by ADMN 211.

Schedule

Theoretical Foundations	Subject	Assignment
Wednesday, January 11	Introductions	
Friday, January 13	What is Religion?	Read <i>Extraordinary Groups: Chapter 9</i>
<i>Monday, January 16</i>	<i>No Class</i>	<i>Martin Luther King Jr. Day</i>
Wednesday, January 18	What is Religiousness?	Read <i>Sociology of Religion: Pages 3-19</i>
Friday, January 20	How to Study Religion	MEET IN COMPUTER LAB
Monday, January 23	How to Study Religion	Read <i>Sociology of Religion: Pages 27-45</i>
Wednesday, January 25	How to Study Religion	Read <i>Rise of Christianity: Chapter 1</i>
Friday, January 27	Solar Temple	

Monday, January 30	Secularization	Read <i>Sociology of Religion: Pages 55-74</i>
Wednesday, February 1	Modernity	Read <i>Extraordinary Groups: Chapter 2</i>
Friday, February 3	Amish	
Monday, February 6	Conversion	Read <i>Rise of Christianity: Chapter 4</i>
Wednesday, February 8	Conversion	Read <i>Extraordinary Groups: Chapter 6</i>
Friday, February 10	Heaven's Gate	
Monday, February 13	Church/Sect	Read <i>Sociology of Religion: Pages 85-102</i>
Wednesday, February 15	Church/Sect	Read <i>Extraordinary Groups: Chapter 4</i>
Friday, February 17	FIRST EXAM	STUDY
Relation to Individuals	Subject	Assignment
Monday, February 20	Social Class	Read <i>Sociology of Religion: Pages 133-150</i>
Wednesday, February 22	Social Class	Read <i>Rise of Christianity: Chapter 2</i>
Friday, February 24	Montana Freemen	
Monday, February 27	Race and Ethnicity	Read <i>Sociology of Religion: Pages 159-173</i>
Wednesday, February 29	Race and Ethnicity	Read <i>Extraordinary Groups: Chapter 7</i>
Friday, March 2	Jonestown	
<i>March 5 – March 9</i>	<i>No Class</i>	<i>Spring Break</i>
Monday, March 12	Gender and Sexuality	Read <i>Sociology of Religion: Pages 185-209</i>
Wednesday, March 14	Gender and Sexuality	Read <i>Extraordinary Groups: Chapter 3</i>
Friday, March 16	Children of God	
Monday, March 19	Gender and Sexuality	Read <i>Rise of Christianity: Chapter 5</i>
Wednesday, March 21	Deviance	Read <i>Rise of Christianity: Chapter 8</i>
Friday, March 23	SECOND EXAM	STUDY

Relation to Society	Subject	Assignment
Monday, March 26	Globalization	Read <i>Sociology of Religion: Pages 250-270</i>
Wednesday, March 28	Globalization	Read <i>Extraordinary Groups: Chapter 8</i>
Friday, March 30	Aum Shinrikyo	
Monday, April 2	Family	Read <i>Extraordinary Groups: Chapter 5</i>
Wednesday, April 4	Organization	Read <i>Extraordinary Groups: Chapter 10</i>
<i>Friday, April 6</i>	<i>No Class</i>	<i>Easter Break</i>
<i>Monday, April 9</i>	<i>No Class</i>	<i>Easter Break</i>
Wednesday, April 11	Religious Economies	Read <i>Rise of Christianity: Chapter 9</i>
Friday, April 13	Branch Davidian	
Monday, April 16	Student Presentations	
Wednesday, April 18	Student Presentations	
Friday, April 20	Student Presentations	
Monday, April 23	Student Presentations	
Wednesday, April 25	Student Presentations	
Friday, April 27	Student Presentations	
Monday, April 30	Review	Research Papers Due
Monday, May 7	Final Exam 3:00	Study for test