

RELIGION AND SOCIETY

SOCL 145 || Loyola U. Chicago || Spring 2024

Time: M/W/F from 11:30AM-12:20PM

Classroom: Mundelein 514

Instructor: Fr. Patrick Gilger, S.J., Ph.D.

Email: pgilger@luc.edu

Office Hours: Monday, 1:30-4:00PM

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Office: TBD

Course Description: Religion is an enormously important and, despite the supposed “secularization” of western society, persistent component of human experience. Focusing primarily on the United States, this course will introduce you to the sociological study of religion and give you some theoretical tools that can be used to study personal religion, institutional religions, and intuitional experiences of religion.

We will pursue this goal together in four units. The first will both give us a sense of what religion looks like in the U.S. today and help us see what how concepts like: meaning, belonging, belief, ritual, personal religious experience, and community fit into this picture. Following this, the second unit of our class will step back and look at the history of religion here in America. We’ll take a look, in other words, at how we got to where we are.

This historical detour will let us turn more directly to personal religion in its official and unofficial – or individual and institutional – forms. We will turn to individual religion/religiosity in the third unity. There we’ll learn about how sociologists understand religion and spirituality as overlapping, interweaving, and rivalling one another today. Then we’ll ask whether things like fandom or work can serve as “surrogate” religions in our secular age, as well as spend one class reading a great new essay about an atheist parent’s understanding of what a blessing is. In this third unit, then, we’ll think together about how slippery religion and spirituality and the sacred are for individuals today.

Then, in a short final unit, we’ll look at one example of how people negotiate with institutional religion. We’ll do that by spending a week reading a chunk of my former teacher Prof. Jerome Baggett’s lovely book *Sense of the Faithful*. In that book he presents the results of nearly 250 interviews he did with Catholics of very different types, showing how members of this supposedly inflexible institution negotiate with it in their daily lives. This is just one example, in other words, of how people make institutional religions “their own.”

There is so much more we could do – much of it very interesting (for example, we could have taken up the question of religion and the body, or whether religions spark or inhibit social change, or what difference race and ethnicity have on types of religions practice, etc.) But this will be enough to get you started on the path of understanding how the sociological study of religion can shed light on the tensions we live in as contemporary, post-modern persons in what the great philosopher Charles Taylor has called our “secular age.”

While this class will be challenging, it should also be a lot of fun. I look forward to going on the journey it maps out for us with you over the course of the semester.

Dear students,

I am very much looking forward to our class. In part this is because religion is... well... fairly important to me personally. But there are two other reasons that are more centrally important for our class. The first is that I'm convinced that religious institutions, personal negotiations with religious traditions, and individual religious inclinations and resistances are as relevant today as they have ever been. And the second is that I'm excited to think and talk through some of the themes we will cover with each of you.

So, if this class is an opportunity for us to think, in community, about the shape and purpose, the problems and opportunities, of the social location of contemporary religion, then I am convinced that this can best be accomplished when we make a real attempt to become a scholarly community together.

As you already know, such a community can only take place – and this class can only be as fun as I think it can be – if we take responsibility for creating it together. I cannot do it for us. Instead, we have to do it. All this is to say that what I hope this course will be is an instantiation of the best experiences I've had of being a student myself. These experiences happened in courses that were intellectually challenging, communal, and fun. That's what I hope this class will be as well. My goal as a teacher is to help us make that happen together.

This is why I'm asking for you to consider:

- *Making our class a cell phone and laptop free zone (as much as possible). This is because laptops serve as barriers to communal thinking. Too often they become things we hide behind so that we don't have to risk thinking together.
 - *N.b., I mean this as less a law than a goal. Let's do this the best of our ability. In other words, there is no punishment here, there is no threat. It's just that learning is better, deeper, when we can focus together.**
- *Buying print copies of the books we will use in class and printing out the articles before coming to class. (I am happy to help with this – I will make copies of the readings for you if you run out of money.)
 - *Alternately, I have had students bring iPads with them that they use to read and take notes on. This has seemed to work quite well.**
- *Risking. What I mean here is that I hope our class will be a place where you're not afraid of being wrong and, because you're willing to be wrong, you can risk thinking. This is part of our goal of being a scholarly community that thinks together about the world.*
- *Preparing well. This means not only doing the reading but having sat with it – it means giving the material a chance to form you.*

A final point: if there is something going on in your life that prevents you from living up to these hopes that is... actually just fine. We live in the real world. School is a part of your life, hopefully a significant part, but it's not the only thing. So, when "life" happens, please come talk to me. I'm sure we can find a way – in the real world – to keep pursuing the aims of a real education.

Yours,



Fr. Patrick Gilger, S.J.

Required Texts: I am asking that you purchase three books for our class (links to the press that published them and to that one company are included). All the other readings will be on Sakai.

1. Burton, Tara Isabella. 2020. Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World. New York, NY: PublicAffairs Books. You can buy this from [the publisher](#) or [from Amazon](#).
2. Jerome P. Baggett, Sense of the Faithful: How American Catholics Live Their Faith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). You can buy this from [the publisher](#) or [from Amazon](#).
3. Meredith B. McGuire, Religion: The Social Context, 5th ed. (Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press, 2008). You can buy this from [the publisher](#) or [from Amazon](#).

Course Requirements: there are five requirements for the course: (1) attending and participating in class; (2) being able to show that you've prepared by taking 9 (irregularly scheduled) reading quizzes and writing 9 précis'; (3) taking zero exams; (4) writing 3 ~750-word papers and (5) 1 final paper.

1. Collaborative Participation – **70 points** (35 required classes at 2 points each)

- In total there are 39 class sessions. For *attending* each class you will receive 1 point. For *participating* actively in class you may receive 1 point.
- *You may miss four classes* with no questions asked or permissions needed from me. Missing more than four classes will begin to affect your final grade.
- Yes, you may receive credit for attending/participating in more than 35 classes.
- Participating doesn't have to mean talking all the time. Really, what I am hoping for is shared attention on the texts. If you are with us, attentive and engaged, I will be very happy to give you participation credit. (And if you're wondering how you're doing just ask me. Nothing is hidden that shall not be revealed.)
 - N.B., introverts: I know that talking in class is not always easy. Instead of forcing yourself to do that, I suggest preparing something to say ahead of time. For example, write a note to yourself about a comment you'd like to make.
 - N.B., extroverts: Sometimes being a good thought-partner means pulling the best out of your partners – which means listening is as essential as speaking.

2. Reading Quizzes & Reading Précis' – **128 points** (16 quizzes/précis at 8 points each)

Do the readings. Invest time in trying to understand them. The class will be more fun if you do. I've worked hard not to assign too much reading for each class, and I've done this because I will expect you to have read and worked to comprehend the reading I have assigned. I hope the following two evaluation tools will help support this goal.

- There will be a total of 18 quizzes and/or précis. The 2 lowest grades will be dropped.
- Quizzes: We will have 9, unannounced, reading quizzes throughout the semester. I will only ask you factual questions on these with the aim of assessing whether you have done the assigned reading.
 - If you are absent for a reading quiz you may write a précis to be turned in not later than a week (or three classes, whichever is longer) after the quiz.

- Précis': We will have 9, announced, writing assignments called précis' throughout the semester. *Bring a printed copy with you to class.*

What is a precis? A precis is a short summary and analysis of the week's assigned texts. Often, I will pose questions to you about the text. If I do so, these should constitute the focus of your short papers. Speaking of "short," I would like these papers to be 250-300 words, or about one double-spaced page (going just over is fine).

If I do not pose questions for you, a strong precis can be written by doing three things: (1) very briefly laying out the main themes discussed in the readings and then (2) *select one set of ideas* and (3) how those ideas unfold and what questions they raise. Précis' of the highest quality will not only do the preceding but also track arguments taking place between various theorists.

If you are absent, précis' may be turned in at start of the next class at no penalty.

3. Three critical analysis papers – **105 points** (three papers at 35 points each)

After the first three units I am asking you to write a short, 750-word (~3-page) paper. Because they are short, I expect them to be tightly written. Each should follow this format:

- *Section 1: the Analytical Concept.* In this section you are to explain one analytical concept that was introduced in any of the assigned readings for the appropriate subsection in the course schedule. Here you should also describe how the author(s) employed this concept in the assigned readings to better explain some facet of religion in the modern world.
- *Section 2: the Author's Use of the Analytical Concept.* In this section you are to offer your own evaluation of the extent to which the author's use of the analytical concept and overall analysis was insightful and what, if anything, they could have improved upon. Was it consistent? Is there a conflict with another author? Articulate that here.
- *Section 3: Your Use of the Analytical Concept.* In this final section, based on your evaluation of the concept, you are to apply it to some aspect of contemporary religion. In other words, here you are to use the concept to look more deeply at some religious phenomenon, event, group, ritual, doctrine, experience, leadership position, practice – you name it.

If you are ambitious... in the final section of your paper you can apply the concept not to something you are already aware of but to something that is new to you. You might, in other words, visit a Pentecostal service, go to the Bahai temple in Evanston, talk with an inter-religious couple about how they balance their religious lives, talk with a friend about what religion is to them, visit a storefront congregation here in Chicago, or attend an AA meeting. The important thing is to *be creative* and to *use the analytical tools* you learn in this class.

4. Final Project – **97 points**

For your final, you will be responsible for writing paper in which you *apply the three concepts about which you have written during the semester* to either *your own religious life*, or to the religious life of *another person you choose to interview*. You will, in other words, use the work you have already done to analyze the way an individual's religiosity.

- Length: ~3000 words (about 12 double spaced pages)
- Due Date: Monday, 4/29 at 11:59pm

Point Totals & Grading Scale: 400 points are available in our class. Here's the breakdown:

- Participation = 70/400 = 18% of total grade
- Quizzes/Précis = 128/400 = 32%
- Critical analysis papers = 105/400 = 26%
- Final project = 97/400 = 24%

POINTS EARNED	PERCENTILE	LETTER
372+	93+	A
360-371	90-92%	A-
348-359	87-89%	B+
332-347	83-86%	B
320-331	80-82%	B-
308-319	77-79%	C+
292-307	73-76%	C
280-291	70-72%	C-
268-279	67-69%	D+
240-267	60-66%	D
Below 240	0-59%	F

COURSE SCHEDULE

Three notes precede the schedule:

1. Because of intellectual property laws, the digital materials we use in the course ought not to be shared elsewhere.
2. I'm really going to do my best to help us stick with this schedule. But, listen, things come up. So, the plan is for us to do our best, together, to make this schedule happen. And, if changes need to be made, we'll (1) talk about it in class, and (2) I'll notify you via email.
3. Our readings come from multiple places. Some the texts I've asked you to purchase, others will be on Sakai. Readings that can be found on Sakai are marked with this symbol: [§§]

Class 1 (Wed, 1/17) – introductions

Unit 1: Studying Religion in a Secular Age

Class 2 (Fri, 1/19) – religion today

Read for today: Burton, Strange Rites, "Introduction" (pp1-13)

Class 3 (Mon, 1/22) – who are the religiously remixed?

Read for today: Burton, Strange Rites, 1st half of ch.1 (pp15-25) **AND** Feliba, "A faith healer in skinny jeans is bringing Catholics back to Mass" (4 pages)

Class 4 (Wed, 1/24) – sociological characteristics of religion

Read for today: Burton, Strange Rites, 2nd half of ch.1 (pp25-34) **AND** Burge, "Gen Z and

religion in 2022” (4 pages)

Class 5 (Fri, 1/26) – looking at religion sociologically

Read for today: McGuire, Religion: The Social Context, 1st half of ch.1 (pp1-15) **AND** Burge, “Religion has become a luxury good” (8 pages [but mostly charts])

Class 6 (Mon, 1/29) – a substantive definition of religion

Read for today: [§§] excerpt from Christian Smith, Religion, 1st half of ch.1 (pp20-42)

Class 7 (Wed, 1/31) – a functional definition of religion

Read for today: [§§] excerpts from Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System” in Investigation of Cultures (pp87-91, 98-105)

Class 8 (Fri, 2/2) – aspects of religion: belief, ritual, experience & community

Read for today: McGuire, Religion, 2nd half of ch.1 (pp15-24)

Class 9 (Mon, 2/5) – religion, meaning, and belonging

Read for today: McGuire, Religion, 1st half of ch.2 (pp25-39)

Class 10 (Wed, 2/7) – modernity & ritual

Read for today: [§§] Scott Beauchamp, Did You Kill Anyone? ch.2 (pp19-37)

Class 11 (Fri, 2/9) – modernity & community

Read for today: [§§] Scott Beauchamp, Did You Kill Anyone? ch.3 (pp38-57)

Class 12 (Mon, 2/12) – summary & discussion of Unit 1

*** PAPER 1 DUE TODAY ***

Unit 2: How Did We Get Here?

Class 13 (Wed, 2/14) – a brief history of intuitional religion

Read for today: Burton, Strange Rites, ch.2 (pp35-53)

Class 14 (Fri, 2/16) – history of American religiosity (part 1)

Read for today: [§§] Putnam & Campbell, American Grace, ch.3 (pp70-90)

Class 15 (Mon, 2/19) – what is America’s religion?

Read for Today: [§§] Robert Bellah, “Civil Religion in America” (~20 pages)

Class 16 (Wed, 2/21) – history of American religiosity (part 2)

Read for today: [§§] Putnam & Campbell, American Grace, ch.4 (pp90-120)

Class 17 (Fri, 2/23) – history of American religiosity (part 3)

Read for today: [§§] Putnam & Campbell, American Grace, ch.4 (pp120-133)

Class 18 (Mon, 2/26) – understanding cultural conflict (part 1)

Read for today: [§§] Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action” in *ASR* (pp273-284)

Class 19 (Wed, 2/28) – understanding cultural conflict (part 2)
Read for today: [§§] James Davison Hunter, Culture Wars, ch.1 (pp31-51)

Class 20 (Fri, 3/1) – an American backlash?
Read for today: [§§] Hout and Fisher, “Explaining Why Americans Have No Religious Preference” in *Sociological Science* (pp423-444)
Optional: Coley, “Creating Secular Spaces” in *Sociological Forum* (pp649-665)

LUC Spring Break = no classes from March 4th to 8th

Class 21 (Mon 3/11) – today’s Great Awakening
Read for today: Burton, Strange Rites, ch.3 (pp 53-62) AND

Class 22 (Wed 3/13) – what now?
Read for today: [§§] Meador, “The Misunderstood Reason Millions of Americans Stopped Going to Church” AND [§§] Kirsh, “The Power of Our New Pop Myths” AND [§§] Hurst, “My generation longs for community” AND [§§] Post, “A Church for ‘Nones’” (in total of ~14 pages)

Class 23 (Fri 3/15) – summary & discussion of Unit 2
*** PAPER 2 DUE TODAY ***

Unit 3: Negotiating Individual Religion, or The New Great Awakening

Class 24 (Mon, 3/18) – facets of individual religion
Read for today: McGuire, Religion, parts of ch.4 (pp97-107, 113-17, 123-24)

Class 25 (Wed, 3/20) – from religion to spirituality
Read for today: [§§] Roof, “Religion & Spirituality” in Handbook of the Sociology of Religion (pp137-148)

Class 26 (Fri, 3/22) – individuality & authenticity
Read for today: [§§] excerpts from Guignon, On Being Authentic, (~10 pages) AND [§§] Christian Smith, “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (~10 pages)

Class 27 (Mon, 3/25) – negotiating individual religion: new attempts
Read for today: Burton, Strange Rites, ch.4 (pp63-90)

Class 28 (Wed, 3/27) – negotiating individual religion: fandom or fiction?
Read for today: [§§] Davidsen, “From *Star Wars* to Jediism” (pp376-389)

LUC Easter Break = no class Friday, 3/29 or Monday, 4/1

Class 29 (Wed, 4/3) – negotiating individual religion: tensions in religion & spirituality (part 1)
Read for today: [§§] Ammerman, Sacred Stories, 1st half of ch.2 (pp23-34)

Class 30 (Fri, 4/5) – negotiating individual religion: tensions in religion & spirituality (part 2)
Read for today: [§§] Ammerman, Sacred Stories, 2nd half of ch.2 (pp34-55)

Class 31 (Mon, 4/8) – negotiating individual religion: atheism & spirituality
Read for today: [§§] Charles Comey, “Blessing for Atheists” (~15 pages)

Class 32 (Wed, 4/10) – negotiating individual religion: work as religion (part 2)
Read for today: [§§] excerpts from Carolyn Chen, Work, Pray, Code, (pp1-5, 88-100)

Class 33 (Fri, 4/12) – negotiating individual religion: work as religion (part 3)
Read for today: [§§] Carolyn Chen, Work, Pray, Code, 2nd half of ch.4 (pp100-120)

DePaul Enchantment Conference on Friday, 4/12

Class 34 (Mon, 4/15) – summary & discussion of Unit 3
*** PAPER 3 DUE TODAY ***

Unit 4: Negotiating Institutional Religion

Class 35 (Wed, 4/17) – negotiating institutional religion: Catholicism (part 1)
Read for today: [§§] Andrew Greeley, “The Sacraments of Sensibility” (pp1-21)

Class 36 (Fri, 4/19) – negotiating institutional religion: Catholicism (part 2)
Read for today: Baggett, Sense of the Faithful, part of ch.1 (pp3-23)

Class 37 (Mon, 4/22) – negotiating institutional religion: Catholicism (part 3)
Read for today: Baggett, Sense of the Faithful, 1st half of ch.3 (pp59-75)

Class 38 (Wed, 4/24) – negotiating institutional religion: Catholicism (part 4)
Read for today: Baggett, Sense of the Faithful, 2nd half of ch.3 (pp75-88)

Class 39 (Fri, 4/26) – bringing it all back home, or religion in America today

Finals Week starts on Monday, 4/29

*** FINAL PAPER DUE on MONDAY, 4/29 by 11:59PM ***

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. (Plus, what's the point? I want to hear from *you* about what *you* learned.) Third, if you still have questions read the info in the links I'm including below. Everything you need to know is there.

Three 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, AI. You may use AI tools that improve the presentation of your own work (i.e., Grammarly or QuillBot). But, the knowing use of generative AI tools – including ChatGPT and other AI writing assistants – for the completion of assignments in our course may be considered an academic offense. Third, 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:

- http://wpacouncil.org/aws/CWPA/pt/sd/news_article/272555/_PARENT/layout_details/false
- 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 contacting SSWD at 773-508-3700.

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

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. 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.