

University of Georgia  
Fall 2009  
**SOCI 8030 Seminar in the Sociology of Religion**  
Tu Th. 11:00-12:15, Baldwin 322  
Dr. David Smilde

*Contact:* Tel. 583-8071  
e-mail [dsmilde@uga.edu](mailto:dsmilde@uga.edu)

*Office hours:* Baldwin 115,  
drop in anytime you see me or make an appointment

From the Nineteenth Century through the 1960s it was common wisdom that religion was on its way out, progressively ceding ground to the secularizing forces of modern science, rationality, pluralism and the grinding wheels of capitalism. What religion survived the onslaught of modernity would be privatized—withdrawn from the public sphere and restricted to the family or personal realm. Nevertheless, from the 1960s on, social reality stubbornly refused to cooperate and religion came roaring back on to the public stage. The 1960s saw African American Baptists leading civil rights marches and “Jesus freaks” predicting the end of the world. The 1970s saw an Islamic revolution in Iran that undermined the presidency of Jimmy Carter. The 1980s saw a new US president brought to power in large part by mobilized Christian Conservatives.

This seminar is oriented towards providing social scientific tools for analyzing religion in the contemporary world. We will begin by looking at the classic perspectives on religion and secularization. Then we will look at religious resurgence around the world. We will go on by looking at the “new paradigm” in sociological thought about religious vitality in the context of pluralism. We will end by looking at attempts to critically engage the new paradigm.

### **On Seminars...**

This class will be a “seminar.” While a *survey* class aims to survey the intellectual landscape in any particular discipline, a seminar is meant to be “seminal.” It is meant to provide some basic seeds that will be carried outside of the classroom to flower in graduate student work. We will necessarily leave out more interesting authors and topics than we include, and we will frequently stop and get hung up on the same dilemmas over and over. This class will not provide you with everything you need to know. Rather it will get your feet wet in grappling with the handful of dilemmas that exist in the sociological study of religion. My goal is to help you develop habits and abilities of thought that will facilitate your making sense of the sociological issues involved a dimension of social existence referred to as “religion.”

In a seminar, the professor is a supervisor, not a lecturer or a guide. This seminar will only be as good as the students make it. On the one hand, vigorous participation is expected from all. This participation includes voicing your opinion, and responding to those you disagree with. Simply getting mad and silently storming out is not helpful (although if this anger leads to obsessively

revisiting an issue until the point that you send me an e-mail in the middle of the night or come to class asking for the right to riposte, it is most helpful indeed). If you disagree with somebody, attempt to set her straight. On the other hand, participation that contributes to the collective achievement of a good seminar requires a degree of professional courtesy and respect

### **On Class Participation**

Student participation is the foundation of seminars and I will be grading yours. There is a challenge here for everyone. Some people have a tendency to talk a lot. Many others have a tendency to listen but not speak. Avoid the extremes of talking so much you diminish broad participation or of talking so little that you become a passive bystander. Do what you can to contribute to the collective achievement of a brisk and stimulating discussion that includes everyone. Encourage or provoke others. Take positions you might not even believe in just for the sake of argument. Remember that we are enjoying the privilege of being in a face-to-face university classroom and therefore bear the historical burden of promoting dynamic and open-ended discussion. Because of this emphasis on discussion and debate over note taking, I do not allow laptops in my graduate seminars.

### **Prerequisite knowledge**

This class is part of our Department's graduate program in sociology and is designed for students who already have some sociological knowledge. If you are not a sociologist, it is your responsibility to gain the basic sociological knowledge you will need for this class.

[There are a number of texts that can give you this background. A good beginning source is Meredith McGuire, *Religion: the Social Context*. Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1992. A fun and helpful reader is Lester Kurtz, *Gods in the Global Village: the World's Religions in Sociological Perspective*. Pine Forge, 1995.]

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation will come from several different manifestations of competence. First, each student will be responsible for leading two classes. This will amount to writing up discussion questions to be distributed 24 hours in advance, and developing a presentation to lead discussion. I will provide a contextual introduction and the student will lead the rest of the discussion. Second, every student is responsible for contributing to class discussion. This means both contributing actively when you have ideas or questions, as well as self-monitoring so as not to silence others. Third, each student will hand in a five page paper that asks how one of our classic authors would deal with the fact of religious resurgence. It will be due at the beginning of class fifteen. Fourth, each student will hand in a final paper on a topic addressed in this class. This topic needs to be approved by me. The point breakdowns follow.

Lead Class (15pts x 2)	= 30 pts.
Participation	= 10 pts
First paper	= 20 pts
<u>Final paper</u>	<u>= 40 pts</u>
Total	= 100 pts

## Class Schedule

1. Intro: Logistics and Introduction
2. Lecture on David Hume and Karl Marx.

### I. Classic Perspectives on Religion and Secularization

3&4. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Free Press, 1995.  
[pp.1-55, [207-41], 418-48].

*[Discussion leaders: Phil & Zac]*

5&6 Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*. Beacon Press, 1993.

Ch.s [I-V], [VI-VII, XIII-XIV]

*[Discussion leaders: Laura & Barrett]*

7&8 Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, Anchor Books, 1990.

*[Discussion leaders: Stephen & Stephen]*

### II. Religious Resurgence

9 James Davidson Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. Basic Books, 1991.

Ch.s 1, 2, & 4

*[Discussion leader: Barrett]*

10 Paul Dimaggio, John Evans and Bethany Bryson's "Have American's Social Attitudes Become More Polarized?" *AJS* 102:3.

*[Discussion leader: Laura]*

11&12. Mansoor Moaddel. *Islamic Modernism, Nationalism and Fundamentalism: Episode and Discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

pp.[1-51],[195-96, 240-64, 320-44]

*[Discussion leaders: David & Jamie]*

13. David Smilde. 2007. *Reason to Believe: Cultural Agency in Latin American Evangelicalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press. (ch.s 2-4).

*[Discussion leader: Becca]*

14. Writing day [October 1]

### III. Beyond Secularization

15. Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith*. University of California Press, 2000.  
Ch.s 3 & 4

*[Discussion leader: Matt]*

**[First paper due]**

16. R. Stephan Warner. 1993. "Work in Progress Towards a New Paradigm in the Study of US Religion." *American Journal of Sociology*.

*[Discussion leader: Jamie]*

### IV. Religion and Pluralism

[for classes 17-24 you picked the following four books from a list distributed the first day]

17-18. Paul Froese. 2008. *The Plot to Kill God: Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization*. Berkeley: U of California P.

*[Discussion leaders: Tim & Phil]*

19-20. Stephen Ellingson. 2007. *Megachurch and the Mainline: Remaking Religious Tradition in the Twenty-first Century*. Chicago: U of Chicago P.

*[Discussion leaders: Nora & Carrie]*

21-22. Michael Lindsay. 2007. *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite*. New York: Oxford UP.

*[Discussion leaders: Tim & Daniel]*

23-24. Phil Zuckerman. 2008. *Society without God: What the Least Religious Nations Can Tell us about Contentment*. New York: New York UP.

*[Discussion leaders: Carrie & Zach]*

### V. Reassessing Secularization

25. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge 2004

Part I, pp.3-78.

*[Discussion leader: Nora]*

26. Charles Taylor. 2007. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Belknap Harvard.

Pp.1-22, 423-59, 475-95

*[Discussion leader: Becca]*

## VI. Beyond the New Paradigm

27. Christian Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2003;

Ch.s 2 & 5

*[Discussion leader: Daniel]*

28. Smilde, *Reason to Believe*. pp.45-53, Ch.s 5 & 8.

[Discussion leader: Becca]

29. Martin Riesebrodt, 2008. "Theses on a Theory of Religion." *International Political Anthropology* Vol. 1 (2008) No. 1.

*[Discussion leader: Lauren]*

30. David Smilde and Matthew May. 2009. "The Emerging Strong Program in the Sociology of Religion: A Critical Engagement of the Last Thirty Years." Social Science Research Council Working Paper;

Courtney Bender, Wendy Cadge, Peggy Levitt and David Smilde. "Opportunities on the Edge: An Overview" *Religion on the Edge: De-Centering and Re-Centering the Sociology of Religion* [Introduction to book manuscript in progress].

*[Discussion leader: Matt]*