**University of Waterloo**
**Department of Sociology and Legal Studies**
**SOC 260 / RS 262: Spirituality, Secularity, and Religion in Sociological Perspective**

Mondays & Wednesday @ 11:30am – 1:00pm
Location: HH 139
Instructor: Galen Watts
Office Location and hours: PAS 2059, 1:00pm – 4:000pm on Tuesday (or by appointment)
Contact: galen.watts@uwaterloo.ca

**Welcome**

Hi everyone! Welcome to SOC 260/RS 262, otherwise known as Spirituality, Secularity, and Religion in Sociological Perspective. The best way to think about the next 12 weeks together is as a crash course in the contemporary sociology of religion. So rather than a deep dive into a specific topic, the goal will be to offer a broad survey of the field so that you get a good sense of what sociologists of religion today are up to. And as you'll soon find out: there's a lot going on!

A word of counsel: my hope is that over the course of our time together you'll have a lot of your preconceptions and taken-for-granted assumptions challenged, and potentially even upended. To make this more likely, I encourage you to keep your mind as open as possible. If you do this, my guess is that you won't just learn something, but you may even end up being better for it.

**Course Description**

To study religion sociologically is to study it as a *social* phenomenon. In other words, for sociologists, while religion may refer to, or depend upon, a supernatural or transcendent reality, it is always simultaneously grounded in *social reality*—in the world of flesh-and-blood individuals, emotions, beliefs, values, relationships, social practices, rituals, subcultures, and institutions. One way to think about the sociology of religion, then, is as an attempt to understand an *other-worldly* thing (religion) by studying its *this-worldly* dimensions. But it's also more than this. Because to study religion sociologically is in effect to study *how religion shaped the modern world*, and *how the modern world in turn shapes religion*. Indeed, there's a sense in which studying religion sociologically is always in some sense to also study the modern world. In turn, while it will likely seem counterintuitive, a central subtext underwriting this course is the claim that, far from being marginal to modernity, religion—in one form or another—resides at its core.

- What has led to the decline of organized religion (especially Christianity) in liberal democratic societies?

- What are the social and political implications of living in a "secular" age?

- What has led to the rise in "spiritual" self-identification, along with the rise of Eastern traditions and practices such as meditation and yoga?

- What is fuelling the rise of neo-Pentecostalism and other forms of Charismatic Christianity?

- What is the nature(s) of "nonreligion"?

- How do (non)religious identities intersect with other axes of identity and social formations—be they, race, gender, sex, class, or national identity?

- What might be the religious implications of sociological inquiry?

These questions strike to the heart of central debates within the sociology of religion—and thus will serve as guiding lights for us over the next 12 weeks.

**Key Learning Outcomes:**

- Gain an understanding of the history of the sociology of religion, and how it has developed over time.

- Develop a familiarity with some of the most important theoretical and methodological debates within the sociology of religion.

- Understand how sociologists today think about the concepts of religion, spirituality, nonreligion, and secularity.

- Understand and appreciate how religion intersects with other social and political formations—be they, those of race, gender, class, or nationalism.

- Get firsthand experience conducting fieldwork.

- Critically apply concepts, theories, and methods from the sociology of religion in the production of sociological knowledge.

**Course Material:**

Throughout the course, we will read a mix of journal articles, book chapters, and essays. You do not need to purchase any of the material, as I will make it freely available on LEARN.

**Course Requirements:**

**Attendance/Class Participation (10%):** Each class I will take attendance. **For every class you attend you will receive 0.5% of your final grade**. Thus, if you attend 20 classes you will receive the full 10%. (Needless to say, actual participation in class is much appreciated).

**Discussion Memos (10%):** Over the course of the term, **you must write 10 (1-2 paragraph) discussion memos, and post them to the appropriate LEARN "Discussions" forum.** These are short reflections on the assigned readings/material for that week. In them, you can choose to highlight an argument or claim you found interesting, troubling, or confusing; outline a counter-argument to the piece; note questions the readings raise for you; or something else. It's ultimately up to you. They will be graded on a complete/incomplete basis. For every memo you complete, you will get 1% of your final grade.
**Due: by the start of the relevant class**

**News Story Analysis (20%):** Use one of the theories, concepts, or set of arguments introduced in readings and lectures to contextualize, complicate, or problematize a recent news story. The idea here is to bring the course material to bear on what is taking place in public media. **Your analysis must be 3-5 pages** (double-spaced) (Detailed instructions will be posted early in the term).
**Due: February 14, 2023 by midnight**

**K-W Fieldwork Paper (35% total):** I want you to conduct fieldwork of your own, and then write a paper based on it. You must select a site to conduct research somewhere in Kitchener-Waterloo. This site need not be explicitly "religious," although it certainly can be. The goal is for you to gain firsthand fieldwork experience, and to test your ability to relate the course material to what you observe. You must submit a short project proposal (between 250-500 words) to me prior to submitting your paper, so that I can sign off on it. The final papers must be **8-10 pages (double-spaced)** (Detailed instructions will be posted later in the term).
**Due: Friday, March 22, 2023 by midnight**

**Creative Group Project/Presentation (25%):** In groups of 4-5 (which I will assign early in the term), I would like you to create a 20-minute project/presentation that creatively engages with the course material. More specifically, I would like your project/presentation to draw from some of the course readings and lectures in order to directly or indirectly answer the following question: *Why study religion?* Regarding the kind of project/presentation you create, I am purposefully leaving this wide open, as I want to encourage you to think outside of the box. However, potential options could include (but are not limited to): giving a PowerPoint presentation on a specific case study; recording a podcast; writing and performing a dialogue or script; filming a YouTube video; interviewing friends, family, or strangers. The project/presentation itself should be no more than **20 minutes**, and **should be followed up by a 10 minute in-class activity.** Groups will present their projects in the final two classes. The final grade of the assignment will be the result of an assessment from me in combination with (confidential) peer evaluations.
**Due: Presentations on April 1 & 3**

**Late Policy:**

Assignments that are submitted late will receive a 5% grade (e.g., 75 → 70) deduction each day. If there is an extenuating circumstance that you would like me to consider, please e-mail me *before* the deadline rather than after it has passed.

# COURSE SCHEDULE

## Week 1a: Monday, January 8

### Introductions

*In this first lecture, I will introduce myself, go over the entirety of the syllabus, and answer any and all questions you may have about the course. I highly recommend coming, if only because I don't want to lecture to an empty classroom!*

- No readings.

## Week 1b: Wednesday, January 10

### What is Religion? A Sociological Perspective

*What is distinctive about a sociological approach to the study of religion? In this week we look at different ways sociologists have thought about and studied religion.*

- Keith A. Roberts and David Yamane. 2016. "Part I: Introduction to the Sociology of Religion." In *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, 23-53. Los Angeles: Sage.

## Week 2a: Monday, January 15

### Secularization Theory

*If you want to understand how sociologists have studied religion then you must begin with secularization theory, according to which religion and modernity are fundamentally incompatible.*

- Bryan R. Wilson. 1976. "Aspects of Secularization in the West." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 3(4): 259-276.

- Linda Woodhead, "Classical Secularisation Theories." YouTube video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FX_E8rao96I

## Week 2b: Wednesday, January 17

### The Heretical Imperative

*What happens when we have no choice but to choose whether or not to be religious?*

- Peter Berger. "Chapter 1: Modernity as the Universalization of Heresy." *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*. 1-29. New York: Anchor Books.

- CBC Documentary, 2015. "Religion in Canada: Are We Godless?" , https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6MHjPqJ87Q

## Week 3a: Monday, January 22

**Critiques of Secularization Theory**

*Does modernity really undermine religion? Was there really a golden age of faith? Should we continue to accept secularization theory or chuck it?*

- Rodney Stark. 1999. "Secularization, R.I.P" *Sociology of Religion* 60 (3): 249-273.

## Week 3b: Wednesday, January 24

**Gendering Secularization Theory**

*Does secularization theory have a blind spot for gender?*

- Linda Woodhead. 2008. "Gendering Secularization Theory." *Social Compass* 55(2): 187-193.

## Week 4a: Monday, January 29

**Desacralizing Secularization**

*Does secularization theory simply naturalize modern prejudices against religion?*

- Jeffrey K. Hadden. 1987. "Toward Desacralizing Secularization Theory." *Social Forces* 65(3): 587-611.

- John Gray. 2015. "What scares the new atheists." *The Guardian*, March 3. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/03/what-scares-the-new-atheists

## Week 4b: Wednesday, January 31

**Revising Secularization Theory**

*The secularization thesis has long been the target of intense critique. But it has also been a source of genuine and generative insights, with many unwilling to fully abandon it, and so committed to reworking it.*

- David Martin. 2005. "Chapter 9: Secularization: Master Narrative or Several Stories?" In *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory*, 123-140. Aldershot: Ashgate.

## Week 5a: Monday, February 5

**Political Backlash**

*Are recent religious trends in the West the result of a "backlash" against the Religious Right?*

- Ruth Braunstein. 2022. "A Theory of Political Backlash: Assessing the Religious Right's Effect on the Religious Field." *Sociology of Religion* 83(3): 293-323.

- Ryan Burge. 2021. "Why 'Evangelical' is Becoming Another Word for 'Republican'" *New York Times*, October 26. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/26/opinion/evangelical-republican.html

**Week 5b: Wednesday, February 7**

**The Role of Religion in Liberal Democracies**

*Does religion no longer play a role in the public sphere? Or has its role simply been restructured?*

- Ole Riis. 1989. "The Role of Religion in Legitimating the Modern Structuration of Society." *Acta Sociologica* 32(2): 137-153.

**Week 6a: Monday, February 12**

**Charismatic Christianity**

*The main storyline for Christianity in the West has been one of decline, but there is a parallel, if less dominant, story that can be told about the growth in Charismatic or neo-Pentecostal forms of Christianity.*

- Gerardo Martí. 2017. "The Global Phenomenon of Hillsong Church: An Initial Assessment." *Sociology of Religion* 78(4): 377-386.

- *#Blessed*, CBC Documentary, https://gem.cbc.ca/cbc-docs-pov/s04e02

**Week 6b: Wednesday, February 14**

**Easternization of the West?**

*Since the 1960s, Westerners have increasingly turned "East" to traditions like Buddhism. But how Eastern is Buddhism in the West?*

- Philip Mellor. 1991. "Protestant Buddhism? The Cultural Translation of Buddhism in England." *Religion* 21: 73-92.

- Ann Louise Bardach. 2011. "How Yoga Won the West." *New York Times*, October 1. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/02/opinion/sunday/how-yoga-won-the-west.html

**\*News Story Analysis Due Today\***

# **\*READING WEEK (February 18 – 25)\***

## Week 7a: Monday, February 26

**The Spiritual Turn**

*Across North America and Western Europe, and increasingly beyond, individuals self-identify as "spiritual but not religious." What is going on here?*

- Galen Watts. 2020. "The religion of the heart: 'Spirituality' in late modernity." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 10(1): 1-33.

## Week 7b: Wednesday, February 28

**Spiritualization**

*Has the spiritual turn made inroads into Islam?*

- Signe Aarvik. 2020. "'Spiritualized Islam': Reconfigurations of Islamic Dogma Among Young Non-Organized Muslims in Norway." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 32(1): 1-16.

## Week 8a: Monday, March 4

**Spirituality and Gender, Part I**

*In general, women are more likely to identify as "spiritual" than men. Why might this be? And what does it tell us?*

- Eeva Sointu and Linda Woodhead. 2008. "Spirituality, Gender, and Expressive Selfhood." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47(2): 259-276.

## Week 8b: Wednesday, March 6

**Spirituality and Gender, Part II**

*What happens when working-class men get into spirituality?*

- Mar Griera. 2020. "Is yoga a girl's thing? A case study on working-class men doing yoga in jail." In *Secular Societies, Spiritual Selves*, edited by Anna Fedele and Kim E. Knibbe, 198-215. New York: Routledge.

## Week 9a: Monday, March 11

- *No class and no readings. Enjoy.*

## Week 9b: Wednesday, March 13

**Becoming a Religious None**

*The percentage of religious "nones" has grown by leaps and bounds since the 1960s. Who are they?*

- Joel Thiessen and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme. 2020. "Becoming a Religious None: Irreligious Socialization and Disaffiliation." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56(1): 64-82.

## Week 10a: Monday, March 18

**Leading a Nonreligious Life**

*How do the nonreligious create meaning and community in their lives?*

- Jacqui Frost. 2023. "Ritualizing Nonreligion: Cultivating Rational Rituals in Secular Spaces." *Social Forces* 101(4): 2013-2033.

## Week 10b: Wednesday, March 20

**Religion and Politics**

*Does religion explain why evangelicals overwhelmingly support Donald Trump?*

- Philip Gorski. 2017. "Why evangelicals voted for Trump: A critical cultural sociology." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 5(3): 338-354.

- MSNBC Interview with Tim Alberta. 2023. "Why White evangelicals continue to support Donald Trump." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvkHKsM9vsU

**\*K-W Fieldwork Paper Due Friday, March 22 by midnight\***

## Week 11a: Monday, March 25

**Religion and National Identity**

*How does religion interact with nationalism? In what ways is nationalism religious? In this week we analyze the complex relationships between religion and nationalism.*

- Lydia Bean, Marco Gonzalez, and Jason Kaufman. 2008. "Why Doesn't Canada Have an American-Style Christian Right? A Comparative Framework for Analyzing the Politics Effects of Evangelical Subcultural Identity." *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 33(4): 899-943.

## Week 11b: Wednesday, March 27

**Sociology as Religion**

*Is sociology religious?*

- Robert Bellah. 1970. "Chapter 15: Between Religion and Social Science." *Beyond Belief: Essays on Belief in a Post-Traditionalist World*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

## Week 12a: Monday, April 1

- Group Project/Presentations

## Week 12b: Wednesday, April 3

- Group Project/Presentations

---

## STATEMENTS AND LINKS TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL COURSE OUTLINES:

**Academic integrity**: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. [Check the Office of Academic Integrity for more information.]

**Grievance:** A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4. When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department's administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. [Check the Office of Academic Integrity for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71, Student Discipline. For typical penalties, check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties.

**Appeals:** A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71, Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72, Student Appeals.

**Note for students with disabilities:** AccessAbility Services, located in Needles Hall, Room 1401, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

**Turnitin.com:** Text matching software (Turnitin®) may be used to screen assignments in this course. Turnitin® is used to verify that all materials and sources in assignments are documented. Students' submissions are stored on a U.S. server, therefore students must be given an alternative

(e.g., scaffolded assignment or annotated bibliography), if they are concerned about their privacy and/or security. Students will be given due notice, in the first week of the term and/or at the time assignment details are provided, about arrangements and alternatives for the use of Turnitin in this course.

It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor if they, in the first week of term or at the time assignment details are provided, wish to submit alternate assignment.

**Statement on the use of Generative AI:** Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) trained using large language models (LLM) or other methods to produce text, images, music, or code, like Chat GPT, DALL-E, or GitHub CoPilot, may be used in this course with proper documentation, citation, and acknowledgement. Permitted uses of and expectations for using GenAI will be discussed in class and outlined on assignment instructions.

Recommendations for how to cite generative AI in student work at the University of Waterloo may be found through the Library: https://subjectguides.uwaterloo.ca/chatgpt_generative_ai. Please be aware that generative AI is known to falsify references to other work and may fabricate facts and inaccurately express ideas. GenAI generates content based on the input of other human authors and may therefore contain inaccuracies or reflect biases.

In addition, you should be aware that the legal/copyright status of generative AI inputs and outputs is unclear. Exercise caution when using large portions of content from AI sources, especially images. More information is available from the Copyright Advisory Committee: https://uwaterloo.ca/copyright-at-waterloo/teaching/generative-artificial-intelligence

You are accountable for the content and accuracy of all work you submit in this class, including any supported by generative AI.