

St. Francis Xavier University
Department of Religious Studies
Rels 215/Soci 227 Sociology of Religion
Fall 2017

Dr. Ronald Charles

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Class times: Mondays (3:45-5:05), and Wednesdays (3:45-5:05)

Meeting in: KC 2020

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday: 11:00-1:00 or by appointment

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the key theories, concepts, methods, and findings utilized by sociologists and religious studies scholars in the sociological study of religion. Attention will be given to social factors that influence religion at individual and communal levels, especially in Canada.

Course Objectives

After this course the student will:

- 1) Understand the functions of religion as agent of social cohesion and social conflict
- 2) Grapple with the impact of pluralism and globalization on religion today
- 3) Understand a variety of sociological theories of religion in order to interpret the interaction between religion and power structures
- 4) Apply the understanding of the sociological study of religion in the specific Canadian context

Texts

Required: Lorne L. Dawson and Joel Thiessen, *The Sociology of Religion: A Canadian Perspective*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2014. ISBN: 9780195435574

Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1967

Course Requirements and Evaluations

1. Book Review: 15%.

The book to review is by Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1967.

The review consists of: a) a summary of the main arguments advanced by the author. The summary means that you articulate, in good English prose, what the overall purpose of the book is (What does the author hope to accomplish), and what the principal arguments of each chapter are. Obviously, it can be difficult to include all the information of the chapter in your summary; thus, the need to be thoughtful about which information you choose to include in your summary. B) A critical engagement with the arguments advanced by the author (what you understand, what you do not, what is not clear, what could be clearer, what you find helpful, disturbing, and what are some other questions that could be addressed. The review needs to be of 900 words.

3. Midterm: 25 %. The midterm will be based on the readings as well as on the first 5 lectures and it will be held on week 7.

4. **Small paper: 25 %**. This paper should be typed, **double-spaced** and should follow appropriate guidelines for the submission of a written work. The length of this paper is 8-10 pages (double space). The paper will be on a topic chosen by the student—in conversation with the Professor. **No assignments will be accepted after the due date**. If there is a medical emergency or a family situation that prevents you from handing your work it is your responsibility to provide evidence for such circumstances. Note: In the unlikely event that a student cannot give the paper on the due date (except for the clause above), a reduction of 10 points will apply on every missing day.

5. Final exam: 35 %. The final exam will be based on all the lectures and assigned readings from week 6 to week 12.

Topics and Readings

Week 1:

Wednesday, September 6: Introduction
Religion as a Social Phenomenon.

Week 2:

Monday, Sept. 11: Chapter one of the book: Religion in Canada, the West, and the Rest of the World

Wed., Sept. 13: Defining Religion (chapter 2)

Week 3:

Monday, Sept. 18: The Dimensions of Religion (chapter 3)

Wed., Sept. 20: Social Scientific Theories of Religion: Marx, Durkheim, Weber (chapter 4)

Week 4:

Monday, Sept. 25: Case Study: Close analysis of Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Talcott Parsons. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958a [1904].

Wed., Sept. 27: Close analysis of Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (continued)

Week 5:

Monday, October 2: Secularization: Arguments For and Against (Chapter 5)

Wed., Oct. 4: Rational Choice and the Sociology of Religion (the chapter will be provided)

Week 6:

Monday, Oct. 9: **No classes! Thanksgiving Day!**

Wed., Oct. 11: Religion and Late Modernity (chapter 6)

Week 7:

Monday, Oct. 16: Review

Wednesday, Oct. 18: **Midterm (based on lectures and assigned readings of the first 6 weeks).**

Week 8:

Monday, Oct. 23: The Religious life of Contemporary Canadians (chapter 7)

Wednesday, Oct. 25: The Religious life of Contemporary Canadians (continued)

Week 9:

Monday, Oct. 30: TBA (Depending on how we are doing I may leave you that space to finish up your paper)

Wed., Nov. 1: The New Religious Diversity (chapter 8) and Summary and Conclusions (chapter 9)

Small paper due on Wednesday November 1

Week 10:

Monday, Nov. 6: The Religious Habitus: Embodiment, religion, and Sociological Theory

Wed., Nov. 8: Women, Religions, and Feminism

Week 11:

Monday, Nov. 13: **Remembrance Day (No classes)**

Wed. Nov. 15: The place of Women in the Catholic Church

Book review due on Wednesday November 15.

Week 12:

Monday, Nov. 20: The Sociology of Spirituality

Wednesday, Nov. 22: Religion, Science, and Public Morality

Week 13:

Monday, Nov. 27: Documentary on a specific issue related to the sociology of Religion

Wednesday, November 30: Wrap up, review.

Final Exam [Scheduled by the University]

Academic Policies

Students should pay attention to the academic policies on class attendance and academic offences as outlined in the University's catalogue. These policies will be applied in this course. StFx strives to offer an environment where the learning done in the classrooms are conducted in a respectful and equitable way.

Email policy

- a) No non-STFX email addresses should be used to send an email to the instructor
- b) Emails need not be about matters that are clearly stated in the syllabus
- c) Emails need not be about substantial matters
- d) Office hours are available to discuss or to clarify some of the materials covered in class

General Statement on Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is constituted by the five core fundamental values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. These values are central to the building, nurturing and sustaining of an academic community in which all members of the community will thrive. Adherence to the values expressed through academic integrity forms a foundation for the "freedom of inquiry and exchange of ideas" essential to the intellectual life of the University. Departures from academic integrity include plagiarism, use of unauthorized materials, facilitation, forgery and falsification, and are antithetical to the development of an academic community. Given the seriousness of these matters, actions which contravene the regulation on academic integrity carry sanctions that can range from a warning or the loss of grades on an assignment to the failure of a course to a requirement to withdraw from the university.

Grading Scale for the paper

Percentage	Letter Grade	Grade Point Value	Grade Definition
90-100	A+	4.0	Excellent Strong evidence of original thinking; good organization; capacity to analyze and synthesize; superior grasp of subject matter with sound critical evaluations; evidence of extensive knowledge base.
85-89	A	4.0	
80-84	A-	3.7	
77-79	B+	3.3	Good Evidence of grasp of subject matter, some evidence of critical capacity and analyticability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; evidence of familiarity with literature
73-76	B	3.0	
70-72	B-	2.7	
67-69	C+	2.3	Adequate

Percentage	Letter Grade	Grade Point Value	Grade Definition
63-66	C	2.0	Student who is profiting from the university experience; understanding of the subject matter and ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material.
60-62	C-	1.7	
57-59	D+	1.3	Marginal Some evidence of familiarity with the subject matter and some evidence that critical and analytic skills have been developed.
53-56	D	1.0	
50-52	D-	0.7	
0-49	F	0.0	Inadequate subject matter; weakness in critical and analytic skills; Little evidence of even superficial understanding of limited or irrelevant use of literature.

GRADING SYSTEM of StFX: The list below indicates some important signposts along the grading scale.

- 80 - first class honours
- 75 - honours
- 50 - clear pass

EXAMINATIONS:

- a) All examinations must be held at the times indicated in the Timetable. In no instances may a Christmas or final examination be held in class time instead of the regularly scheduled time block. In particular, examinations **will not** be rescheduled to accommodate airline travel arrangements.
- b) Students have the right to review their exams/quizzes with their professor.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY – The Academic Integrity Policy may be found at:

http://www.sites.stfx.ca/registrars_office/academic_integrity. Section 3.8.2 b (v) reads

“**Possession** of unauthorized aids or assistance including copying during tests and examinations.” This means that students do not need to be caught USING a device like a cell phone or smart watch (for example) during a test or exam to be in violation of the policy.

Simply having the unauthorized device on their person during the test or exam is a violation of the policy.

