SOCIOLOGY 63664: MODERNITY, SECULARIZATION, RELIGIOUS PERSISTENCE, SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION  
University of Notre Dame, Spring 2008

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Time and Place: TR 3:30 -4:45, Main Building 218

Introduction
This seminar provides an introduction to the long-standing and wide-ranging debates in sociology about secularization. Secularization was, of course, a central concern in the thinking of the founding fathers of sociology—Weber, Durkheim, Marx, and others. It has also long been the core concern of the field of sociology of religion. The key question we will explore is: What happens to religion under conditions of modernity, why, and how? This exploration first requires a more fundamental consideration of the nature of “modernity” and “religion” as concepts and realities themselves. It also involves thinking about what we might mean in saying that religion is, for instance, “strong,” “growing,” “declining,” or “losing authority.” Engaging the secularization debate also necessarily raises questions about human beings and their constitutional needs and tendencies, human societies and their requirements and operations, and basic sociological concerns with historical change, causal attributions, research design, data collection methods, measurement, and analysis. Throughout this seminar I want us to attend closely not only to associations between measured variables but also to the causal mechanisms theorized as promoting or preventing secularization. Working through the specific analytical issue of secularization therefore both grounds us solidly in debates at the heart of the field of sociology of religion specifically, and engages us in a variety of important concerns that are crucial to consider for the doing of any good work in sociology generally.

Goals
It always helps in getting somewhere to know where one wants to go. There is no way to know whether we have succeeded if we do not know what success looks like. For present purposes, students who have effectively participated in and completed this seminar should be able to perform at least the following six tasks as specific outcome measures of success:

1. Degree Progress: Solidly pass a doctoral qualifying exam’s questions on secularization and other questions involving answers connected to the secularization literature.
2. Teaching: Prepare and successfully teach a very good undergraduate course in the sociology of religion that involves a significant component on secularization.
3. Original Scholarship: Design and conduct sociological research, perform data analysis, and write up scholarly results in the sociology of religion in ways that are well-informed by the key issues involved in the secularization debate, so that one’s scholarship is well formed by knowledge of the concerns, perspectives, and current findings involved in that debate.
4. Intellectual Insight: To be able to articulate (in whatever setting) how and why different positions in the secularization debate—as one example of what is typical in many scholarly debates—are shaped in part by key underlying presuppositions, situated perspectives, and master framing devices (theoretical, moral, and socially positional) which help to determine scholarly attitudes, thinking, and conclusions.
5. Theoretical Advance: To use what is learned in this seminar as the basis upon which through new, creative work to develop theoretical and scholarly understandings that advance knowledge in accuracy and insight beyond the current state of the art—that is, to contribute to progress in theory and scholarship in the future.
6. Promoting Public Understanding: Provide a well informed, authoritative voice in public debates and informal conversations about the history of, data about, experiences concerning, causal influences on, and likely future prospects for “religion” in “modernity”—that is, to be a good citizens of both a larger community of scholars (academia) and of a larger culture (our society), able to shed light on and bring insights to a topic that is often characterized by misunderstanding and discord.
Requirements
Education at the graduate level is all about time and energy invested by, and intellectual and career payoffs for, the graduate students who are seeking to become professional scholars in their disciplines. It is not really about fulfilling certain course requirements, but rather about mastering the knowledge, perspectives, and intellectual and interactive skills needed to become productive, first-rate scholars and teachers. The requirements of this course therefore are designed to serve those ends. They are:

1. Regular attendance at and active participation in seminar discussions.
2. 2-5 page response papers (typed, 1.5-spaced, Times Roman, 1-inch margins) summarizing and engaging/evaluating the assigned readings for every class meeting. There is no formula for correctness in this assignment; simply read well, think hard and creatively, and let that show in your response papers. I want to see that you’ve read and what you’re making of it, class meeting by class meeting.
3. One 4-6 page (typed, 1.5-spaced, Times Roman, 1-inch margins) sociological research proposal related in some way to the seminar’s concerns—asking a specific research question, setting the question in the relevant literature, proposing a clear research design and data collection and/or analysis strategy, and explaining how findings might contribute to advances in our theoretical understandings (i.e., answer the “so what?” question). To be clear, the assignment is not to conduct the research but simply to formulate a good research proposal that you could conceivably conduct. Due May 2 by 5PM.
4. A final paper synthesizing the issues and perspectives engaged in this seminar and explaining your own intellectual perspective on secularization. Students are encouraged to draft out their thoughts as they develop over the course of the semester, relying in part on the 2-5 page response papers due at each class meeting, rather than waiting to write the paper until the end of the semester. But final papers cannot simply be cut-and-paste versions of the response papers; they must be clear, coherent, well-written arguments. Due May 7 by 5PM.

Books to Purchase
All of the readings for this course are, for anyone interested in a career of scholarship in the sociology of religion, essential to own, and are therefore worth buying now, if one does not already own them. Books we will read in part or in their entirety include:


We will also read journal articles, book chapters, and copied book excerpts as listed below (downloadable for printing from the course website)

(“→ REC” below means recommended but not required)
Meeting and Reading Schedule

WEEK 1 – SECULARIZATION THEORY

TUE JAN 15

THURS JAN 17

WEEK 2 – PHILOSOPHICAL EXCURSUS: POSITIVISM, HERMENEUTICS, CRITICAL REALISM

TUE JAN 22

THURS JAN 24

WEEK 3 – MORE SECULARIZATION THEORY

TUE JAN 29

THURS JAN 31

WEEK 4 – DOUBTS AND RECONSIDERATIONS

TUE FEB 5

THURS FEB 7 (*Chris in Utah*)
WEEK 5 – RELIGIOUS PERSISTENCE THROUGH PRACTICAL PROBLEM SOLVING

TUE FEB 12

THURS FEB 14

WEEK 6 – RELIGIOUS PERSISTENCE THROUGH RATIONAL REWARD SEEKING

TUE FEB 19

THURS FEB 21

WEEK 7 – RELIGIOUS PERSISTENCE THROUGH SUBCULTURAL IDENTITY

TUE FEB 26

THURS FEB 28

SPRING BREAK

WEEK 8 – SECULARIZATION THROUGH MATERIAL WELLBEING

TUE MARCH 11

THURS MARCH 13

WEEK 9 – SECULARIZATION THEORY AGAIN DEFENDED

TUE MARCH 18

THURS MARCH 20  (Easter after)
WEEK 9 – SECULARIZATION AS INTERESTED POLITICS

TUE MARCH 18

THURS MARCH 20

WEEK 10 – RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY, CIVIL RELIGON, & MTD

TUE MARCH 25

THUR MARCH 27

WEEK 11 – “INTERNAL” SECULARIZATION

TUE APRIL 1

THURS APRIL 3

WEEK 12 – SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATIONS

TUE APRIL 8

THURS APRIL 10

WEEK 13 – SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATIONS

TUE APRIL 15

THURS APRIL 17

WEEK 14 – GLOBAL SOUTH RELIGION

TUE APRIL 22

THURS APRIL 24
WEEK 15 – MULTIPLE MODERNITIES

TUE APRIL 29
More TBA

➔ Research Proposal Papers Due May 2 by 5PM.
➔ Final Papers Due May 7 by 5PM.