Readings for Comprehensive Exam in Sociology of Religion – Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame (2012-2013)

In addition to whatever specific readings graduate students engage for their own personal research interests, there is a core set of readings with which sociologists of religion should be highly familiar in order to claim professional competence, as background to eventually teaching in the sociology of religion, and as intellectual context to help become an original producer of scholarship in the field. The purpose of doctoral exams is to provide occasions for students to master the core literatures of their fields of interest and research. Scholars differ somewhat on exactly what literature belongs on such core lists of readings. Listed below, however, are the readings which Notre Dame graduate students will be expected to master for their doctoral comprehensive exams in the sociology of religion. Among the core questions in the sociology of religion—which the readings below address in various ways and about which doctoral exams in sociology of religion will ask—are the following:

1. **Subject**: What is “religion?” Why and how are people religious? How is religion expressed in social terms and forms?
2. **Methods**: How can we study religion sociologically? What are the characteristic strengths and weaknesses of different methodological approaches, especially as they relate to larger theoretical interests and perspectives and types of research agendas and questions?
3. **Modernity**: How does the historical transition from “pre-modern” to modern (and postmodern?) society affect the strength and character of religion? Does modernity secularize or not? Are there multiple modernities? What might that mean?
4. **Participation and Communities**: What social factors and processes influence individuals’ religious beliefs, commitments, practices, conversions, switching, etc. and the strength and character of religious communities, traditions, and subcultures?
5. **Reproduction and Change**: What influence does religion exert in maintaining and/or challenging established social practices and institutions, through politics, cultural transformation, or other means?

The following readings are broken into three groups. (1) The first is the “core” readings that all graduate students taking the sociology doctoral exam in religion must master. A core set of exam questions will focus on and make reference to them. (2) A second set of lists are “focus area” readings. These represent readings covering three different, specific areas in the sociology of religion in which Notre Dame faculty have particular expertise and in which students may wish to specialize. Students taking doctoral exams must indicate at least one of these focus areas as literatures they have studied and on which they wish to be examined. (3) The third, “read-on-their-own” list of readings contains works that are arguably important enough that all sociology-of-religion scholars should have read. These works are not strictly required reading for the doctoral exam—even any of them could be used to answer doctoral exam questions. But most of them at least are very strongly suggested for reading sometime before finishing the doctoral program, as part of acquiring a valuable breadth of learning, familiarity with important works, and mastery of the field.

### I. Core Reading List


Engles, Friedrich. The Peasant War in Germany. (various publishers).

James, William. 1902. *Varieties of Religious Experience.* Lectures II and III (Circumscription of the Topic and The Reality of the Unseen). (various publishers)


Weber, Max. [1978]. *Economy and Society.* California (pp. 3-33, 399-602).


II. **Focus Area Lists**

1. **Religion, Civic Engagement, Politics, and Social Activism**


2. Religion, Gender, and Family


3. Religion and Education


III. Sociology-of-Religion-Grads-Should-Read((-on-their-Own))-To-Be-Well-Educated (not required coverage on doctoral exams):


Bellah, Robert et al. 1985. *Habits of the Heart*. California. (Chapters 1-6, 9-10)


Neibuhr, H. Richard. 1929. The Social Sources of Denominationalism. (various publishers)


York: Routledge.