

Sociology of Religion Doctoral Exam October

2017 Day 1 (Student #1 & #2)

1. What are the key problems scholars encounter in crafting an adequate sociological definition of religion? Beginning with classical theories, evaluate the major arguments advanced and solutions proposed in scholars' attempts to define religion. Then answer, do we need a definition of religion for conducting empirical studies? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. How has the historical development of modernity in the West affected the strength and character of religion? Do these same patterns obtain—and if so, in what ways, or how—in non-Western societies of the Global South? How is “modernity” implicated in religious change over time? Does modernity result in the secularization of societies, or not? Review and evaluate the major arguments in this debate.

Day 2

3. Explain what you think are the key *methodological* issues, problems, and opportunities in the sociological study of religion, making reference to specific, significant published works. What have been the characteristic methodological flaws and weaknesses in conceptualization, research design, measurement, and analysis in the sociology of religion? What improvements and advances have been made in recent years? And what do you think holds the greatest promise for methodological improvement in the field?

For Student #1 (Globalization):

4. With globalization—and, therefore, the encounter of the West with a Global South that is less “secular” and in which non-Christian religions are often dominant, older questions about the relation between religion and democracy have received new life. Discussing older works on religion and democracy as well as contemporary scholarship, answer: Is religion antithetical to democracy? Are some religions less compatible with democracy (and modernity) than others? If so, why?

For Student #2 (Gender and Family):

5. Most scholars of religion, gender, and family appear to assume that religion is a conservative institution, and have tended to ask research questions about women's participation in religion *despite* its capacity to reproduce family and gender structures, which are viewed as oppressive and/or constraints upon women's agency and autonomy. What are the major insights and findings these approaches have yielded? What are the limitations and problems with these approaches? How might feminist theories be mined to revise or construct an alternative paradigm for understanding

women's participation in religion that goes beyond the oppression/limited agency paradigm? What would be gained by such a new paradigm?