Sociology of Religion Doctoral Exam – Student #1 (March 2016)

DAY 1

Instructions: Answer Questions 1 and 2. Spend roughly one-half of your time on each question. Be sure to answer all parts of the questions. Be as specific as possible in your answers. A list of readings has been attached below to assist your referencing of some of the potentially relevant literature.

1. What is “religion,” sociologically considered? Describe important different approaches to defining religion and implications for addressing and analyzing it empirically. To what extent do those different approaches create disagreements and difficulties among scholars in the sociology of religion, and to what extent do they enrich our understanding of complex social realities? What do you think is the best definition of “religion” and why? Be specific.

2. 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? What might that mean? Review and evaluate the major arguments in this debate.

I. Core Reading List
Free Press. [Chris Smith has a reading guide available for this book.]
Engels, 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)
II. Focus Area Lists

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


3. Religion and Education


And feel free to draw on any other relevant literature in the field to answer your questions.
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DAY 2

Instructions: Answer Questions 1, and then either Questions 2 or 3 below (for a total of 2 answered questions). Spend roughly one-half of your time on each question. Do not significantly repeat your arguments or draw on much of the same published scholarship for examples in your answers to different questions. Be sure to answer all parts of the questions. Be as specific as possible in your answers. A list of readings has been attached below to assist your referencing of some of the potentially relevant literature.

1. (Required) Although education in the U.S. and in many developed countries in the world is provided as “public” by governments, religious communities are also often involved in the provision of education; furthermore, religion in the lives of families of students may influence educational interests, experiences, and outcomes. Develop a set of themes that organize and describe the most important contributions that sociological studies of religion and education make to our understanding of the relationship between these two “institutional sectors.” What influence of various sorts does religion have on schooling and education, at the personal, institutional, and possibly other levels?

2. 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?

OR:

3. A major approach in the sociology of religion has focused on analyzing the social dynamics of religious communities (congregations, denominations, organizations, etc.). Discuss the major methodological issues involved in and substantive insights gained from this tradition of religious community and organizational studies, making reference to time-honored and significant recent works in the literature. What are the relative strengths and weaknesses of this kind of analytical approach?

I. Core Reading List


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


And feel free to draw on any other relevant literature in the field to answer your questions.
Sociology of Religion Doctoral Exam – Student #2 (March 2016)

DAY 1

Instructions: Answer Questions 1 and 2. Spend roughly one-half of your time on each question. Be sure to answer all parts of the questions. Be as specific as possible in your answers. A list of readings has been attached below to assist your referencing of some of the potentially relevant literature.

1. What is “religion,” sociologically considered? Describe important different approaches to defining religion and implications for addressing and analyzing it empirically. To what extent do those different approaches create disagreements and difficulties among scholars in the sociology of religion, and to what extent do they enrich our understanding of complex social realities? What do you think is the best definition of “religion” and why? Be specific.

2. 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? What might that mean? Review and evaluate the major arguments in this debate.

1. Core Reading List
Free Press. [Chris Smith has a reading guide available for this book.]
Engels, 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)

2. Spend roughly one-half of your time on each question. Be as specific as possible in your answers. A list of readings has been attached below to assist your referencing of some of the potentially relevant literature.


II. Focus Area Lists

I. Religion, Civic Engagement, Politics, and Social Activism


And feel free to draw on any other relevant literature in the field to answer your questions.
1. (Required) The issues of gender and family play important roles in the sociological study of religion, including, among other things, by addressing theoretically-significant matters such as the private/public spheres of social life; embodiment and religious practice; agency, power, and structure; and making sense of the modern Western project of liberal individualism. (1) What are the most important findings concerning gender and family that sociologists of religion have learned? (2) What does sociology of religion (specifically religion) have to teach scholars in the fields of gender and family who might otherwise not be interested in religion? (3) What are the most important future directions you think future research on religion, gender, and family needs to take, and why?

2. 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?

OR:

3. A major approach in the sociology of religion has focused on analyzing the social dynamics of religious communities (congregations, denominations, organizations, etc.). Discuss the major methodological issues involved in and substantive insights gained from this tradition of religious community and organizational studies, making reference to time-honored and significant recent works in the literature. What are the relative strengths and weaknesses of this kind of analytical approach?

I. Core Reading List


### 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)
And feel free to draw on any other relevant literature in the field to answer your questions.