Readings for Comprehensive Exam in Sociology of Religion –
Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame (2019-2020)

All sociologists of religion should be familiar a core set of readings 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 significant 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 on exactly what literature belongs on such core lists of readings. Listed below, however, are the readings which ND graduate students will be expected to master for the program’s 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 when it comes to religion? 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 two 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 four different, specific areas in the sociology of religion in which ND faculty have particular expertise and in which students may wish to specialize. Students taking doctoral exams must prior to their exams indicate to the faculty exam chair at least one of these focus areas as literatures they have studied and on which they wish to be examined.

Core Reading List


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


Focus Area Lists

A. Global Religion


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


**C. Religion, Education, and Schooling**


**D. Religion, Gender, and Family [temporarily not being offered]**


