

the SOCIOLOGY of RELIGION
Sociology 480/580 – Winter, 2006
Mid-Term Exam – February 14/23, 2006

According to our syllabus by this time the course should have addressed, at least partially, the following **goals**, under each of which I have listed some of the course materials – lectures, handouts, readings, audio/visual presentations –intended to speak to that goal:

- **Ways in which religiousness is inherently human and therefore how it is significantly present in some form in every society.**
 - Construction of such monolithic structures as the stone henges and cathedrals.
 - Vercor's novel *You Shall Know Them* (in which the discovery of the "missing link" leads to a proposed definition of human-ness based on awareness of the metaphysical).
 - Kahlil Gibran's "parable" called *Satan*.
 - Toth's list of humanity's "bare materials."
 - Framework of fundamental human existential anxieties (ala Schutz, Berger, Toth).
- **A range of organizing concepts through which we may better describe, analyze, and make sense of religious phenomena.**
 - Sequence in which we go from the human condition & existential anxieties to
 - How religion is a social institution apart, unlike any other.
 - Ways in which there is a logical progression from the "human condition" through the fundamental existential anxieties to the response of religion (OMM) and its primary functions.
 - Extended cult-sect-denomination-church/eclessia paradigm.
 - Various functions of religion, both positive (eufunctions) and negative (dysfunctions).
 - The "essential" elements of all religions: identification of the Sacred, rites & rituals, belief systems, social organization.
- **Various sociological theories, explanations, and accounts for religious phenomena.**
 - Key distinction between functional and phenomenological explanations
 - Aspects of functionalism (latent, manifest, individual/group/societal levels of effect)
 - In the text (and to some extent in the lectures) various theories and theorists – functionalism, phenomenological, rational-choice, Marx, Durkheim, Weber.
- **In particular, a solid grasp of Peter Berger's seminal theory, theses, and insights— together with those of Alfred Schutz and Ernest Becker—especially as they go beyond their application to religion alone.**
 - Berger's "three moments" dialectical model – externalization, objectivation, internalization.
 - Schutz's Paramount Reality, multiple realities model.
 - Becker's human dualism (I've added a link to a summary of Becker's work on the course web page).

While this is not an exhaustive list of the various topics we've covered I am offering it here as both a review and a prompt for your active preparation and thinking in regard to the exam which follows.

Answer #1 thru # 5:

1. From the various definitions of religion provided on the on-line list (accessible from the bottom of the course web page) select the one that you would use as the starting point in a course such as this and explain why you would work from this definition.
2. From the various news clippings you have already assembled select out the one which you see as most relevant to one of the major ideas, concepts, insights, or theories from this first part of the course and articulate that relevance as cogently as possible, being sure to clarify exactly which of these elements of the course you are relating it to. (Please include the clipping with your answer.)
3. Using the diagram of Schutz's Paramount Reality and attendant multiple realities (or provinces of meaning), the instructor has made the case that while religion is uniquely different from all the other provinces, science is also distinctive, perhaps even "more distinctive"—or at least unusual, especially as expressed in the sociology (or social sciences) of religion. In your own words, how would you describe these differences. Do you agree or not?
4. An article – "Scarves and Symbols" – from the New York Times is available online via the course web page (2/14/06). The author's thesis seems to echo a central point in the on-line article ("Postmodern Warfare") by Stanley Fish. Identify this similarity as succinctly as you can in your own words. Do you see any similarities, differences, and/or contradictions between the French behavior described in this article and the Danish behavior described in the article "Capture the Flag" from the materials made available online for February 14?
5. The text (CSK) offers, as one of several theoretical perspectives, rational-choice theory (p. 42). Given your understanding of religion as articulated in the class so far, write a brief assessment that identifies the strengths and weaknesses of this theory in accounting for religious behavior from your own point of view.

Answer either #6 or #7

6. In Berger's over-arching model of religious phenomenon (e.g., as diagramed in a class handout), what is the relationship he posits between the nomos and the cosmos? Be sure to clarify what is meant by "nomos" and "cosmos." What "problems" does this relationship solve and/or what functions does it serve?
7. It is widely contended that the institution of religion, however it is put into practice, is unique among human social institutions because of the roles it plays and the functions it serves in the lives of both society at large and the individual members of society. Develop a list and briefly describe these roles and functions. Identify which one(s) you think are most central and say why.

NOTE: Please be sure to indicate which of these last two questions you are answering.

Both diagrams referred to above are available online directly the posting for the exam.

In answering each of these questions you may find it helpful to read each one carefully and identify and respond to each of the different parts of each question. You may also want to re-read each question and your answer once you have completed the exam to make sure you have responded to every part of each question.