

*Sociology 250Y / Religion 210Y*

*SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION*

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*“To study without reflection is a waste of time; reflection without study is dangerous”*  
Confucius

*Other things may be seized by might, or purchased with money,  
but knowledge is to be gained only by study...*

Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* #7 (1750)

**Synopsis:** This course will examine religious beliefs, practices, and experiences from a historical-sociological and comparative perspective. We will begin with an overview of the major social science approaches to the study of religious phenomena, highlighting the contributions of various classical as well as contemporary theories. Substantive topics to be explored will include the following: the nature-and-spirit based polytheisms of primal/aboriginal religions; the historic emergence of the major “world religions” (Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam); religious institutionalization, and the heretical/schismatic movements that commonly arise to challenge emerging orthodoxies (with primary focus on early Christianity); the social “embeddedness” of religion, as it finds linkage and integration with other institutional spheres and practices, such as gender and sexuality, economic life, politics, war and revolution, the arts and sciences; religious regulation of the human body and person, by means of mystical, ascetic & penitential disciplines, miraculous and sacramental means of spiritual empowerment or blessing, and through the “social control” promises of afterlife rewards and punishments. We will conclude with an investigation of the opposing modern trends of secularization and fundamentalism, while also examining various new religious movements and cults.

**Text:** Lester Kurtz, *Gods in the Global Village: The World’s Religions in Sociological Perspective*, Third Edition (2012). (hereafter cited as **K**)

**Requirements and Grading:**

one **field report**, ~850 words in length (10%); one short **essay**, ~1400 words in length (25%); three **in-class tests**, to be pace scheduled (30%); one comprehensive **final exam** (35%);

**Academic Integrity** is fundamental to learning and scholarship at the University of Toronto. Familiarize yourself with the University of Toronto’s *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>). It is the rule book for academic behaviour at the U of T, and you are expected to know the rules.

**Plagiarism Policy:** Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to *Turnitin.com*, for the detection of possible plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such papers. You are advised to consult the Rules and Regulations section of the UofT Annual Calendar regarding this matter.

**Email policy:** Owing to the large number of suspect/junk mailings I receive, I do not favor using this medium for class communication, other than for emergencies. My email address and home phone number are in the public domain, but my preference is for you to contact me in class for all course-related matters. *NOTE:* The TAs should be contacted first regarding all course matters.

**Missed Tests:** Owing to the large enrolment, no “make-up” tests will be offered. For students with officially legitimate reasons and documentable proof for absences on test days, the policy will be to double the score on the following test.

**Policy on Extension Requests:** Extensions for completing course assignments can only be given in accordance with university rules, which are limited to medical situations or family emergencies. Documentation will be required to establish compliance. *NOTE:* Late papers without such documentation will not be accepted, and scored as ‘0’ pts.

### **DOCUMENTATION FROM YOUR PHYSICIAN OR COLLEGE REGISTRAR**

If you miss a test or a paper deadline, **do not** contact the instructor or a TA prior to completing the steps described here. In case of **illness**, you must supply a duly completed **Verification of Student Illness** or Injury form (available at [www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca](http://www.illnessverification.utoronto.ca)). A doctor’s note is not acceptable. **The form must be placed in a sealed envelope, addressed to the instructor, and submitted with your work** at class or to your TA during their office hours. If a **personal or family crisis** prevents you from meeting a deadline, you must get a letter from your college registrar (it is a good idea anyway to advise your college registrar if a crisis is interfering with your studies). **The letter must be placed in a sealed envelope, addressed to the instructor, and submitted with your work** at class or to your TA during their office hours.

**Accessibility Services:** If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit <http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility> as soon as possible.

## FIRST TERM

1. Sept. 10 *Introduction: Religion as a Social Phenomenon*  
Reading: **Kurtz**, Preface
2. Sept. 17 *Epistemological and Methodological Challenges in the Study of Religious Phenomena*  
Reading: **K**, Chap. 1 “Religious Life in the Global Village” [pp. 1-8]
3. Sept. 24 *Social Scientific Theories of Religion: Marx, Durkheim, Weber*  
Reading: **K**, Chap. 1 “Tools of the Trade ...” [pp. 8-18]

4. Oct. 1      *Theories (continued): Freud, Frazer & Malinowski*  
                   Reading: **K**, Chap. 1 “Contemporary Approaches ...” [pp. 18-27]
  
5. Oct. 8      *Contemporary Theoretical Approaches: Berger, Geertz, Feminist Theory*  
                   Reading: **K**, Chap. 1 “Religious Rituals ...” [pp. 27-40]
  
6. Oct. 15     *Contemporary Approaches (continued)*  
                   Readings: **K**, review Chapter 1  
                   **Tutorial Session** (5-6 pm): Review in Preparation of Test # 1
  
7. Oct. 22     *Aboriginal/Primal Religions*  
                   \*\*\* **Test # 1** \*\*\*
  
8. Oct. 29     *The Historical Sociology of Religion: Axial Age Foundations and Trajectories*  
                   Reading: **K**, Chap. 2 “A Sociological Tour: Turning East” [pp. 41-64]
  
9. Nov. 5      *Trajectories in the World Religions: The Eastern Traditions*  
                   Reading: **K**, Chap. 2 “Buddhism” and “China ...” [pp. 64-87]  
                   **Tutorial Session** (5-6 pm): Review in Preparation for Essay # 1
  
10. Nov. 12    *Trajectories in the World Religions: The Western Traditions*  
                   Reading: **K**, Chap. 3 “Judaism, Christianity, ...” [pp. 89-106]
  
11. Nov. 19    *Trajectories: A Sociology of Early Christianity*  
                   Reading: **K**, Chap. 3 “Islam” [pp. 106-114]
  
12. Nov. 26    *Heresies and Schisms in Early Christianity*  
                   Reading: **K**, Chap. 3 “Social Construction of ...Traditions” [pp. 114-22]  
                   \*\* **First Essay Assignment Due** \*\*

*Knowledge is praised and desired by multitudes whom her charms could never rouse from the couch of sloth; whom the faintest invitation of pleasure draws away from their studies; to whom any other method of wearing the day is more eligible than the use of books, and who are more easily engaged by any conversation than such as may rectify their notions or enlarge their comprehension.*

Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* #178 (1751)

## SECOND TERM

1. Jan. 7      *Case Study: Max Weber's Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*  
Reading: **K**, Chap. 4 "Religious Ethos" [pp. 123- 36]
2. Jan.14      *Weber's Protestant Ethic (continued)*  
Reading: **K**, Chap. 4 "Religion and Stratification" [pp. 136-58]
3. Jan. 21      *Religion and Social Control: Heavenly Rewards and Hellish Torments*  
Reading: **K**, Chap. 4 "Religion and Politics" [pp. 158-71]
4. Jan. 28      *Religion and Social Control (continued)*  
**Tutorial Session** (5-6 pm): Review in Preparation of Test # 2
5. Feb. 4      *Religious Regulation of the Human Body*  
**\*\*\* Test # 2 \*\*\***
6. Feb. 11      *Religion and Social Cohesion*  
Reading: **K**, review chapters 1-4  
**\*\*\* February 17-20 \*\*\***                      READING WEEK
7. Feb. 25      *Religion and Social Conflict*  
Reading: **K**, Chap. 7 "Religion and Social Conflict" [pp. 243-54]  
**Tutorial Session** (5-6 pm): Review in Preparation for Essay # 2
8. Mar. 4      *Religion and Social Conflict (continued)*  
Reading: **K**, Chap. 7 "Religious Contributions to Nonviolence" [pp. 254-78]
9. Mar. 11      *Religion and Social Change*  
Reading: **K**, Chap. 5 "Modernism and Multiculturalism" [pp. 173-89]  
**Tutorial Session** (5-6 pm): Review in Preparation of Test # 3

10. Mar. 18 *Modernity and Secularization*

Reading: **K**, Chap. 5 “Modernism and Multiculturalism” [pp. 189-210]

**\*\*\* Test # 3 \*\*\***

11. Mar. 25 *New Religious Movements and Cults*

Reading: **K**, Chap. 6 “Religious Movements for a New Century” [pp. 211-42]

12. Apr. 1 *Fundamentalisms Resurgent*

**\*\* Second Essay Assignment Due \*\***

[[ \*\* Final Exam Period: April 8 – 30 ]]

[[ \*\* A “free” Review Session will be scheduled one or two weeks prior to the Final exam ]]