Summer Session, 2013 (second four-week session, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:50 – 9:40 PM, July 23 – August 15)

Soc 480/580  Sociology of Religion

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We approach the sociological study of religion by engaging perspectives from various religious traditions across the globe. Our own experience and understanding influences our interpretation of religion and society, so let us keep in mind our biographies as we explore together the broad socio-religious context.

The course draws on classics in the sociology of religion, life experiences in the encounter between religion and society, cases of specific religious figures, and my own special interest in the relationship between religion, justice, war, peace, conscience, character, and nonviolent social power.

We shall work to gain awareness of how sociological perspectives can shed light on the relationship between religion and society in our world in an era of unprecedented globalization.

Our course draws on the sociological imagination. We use our imaginations to engage personal biography and public history as we explore the social significance of religion. We study the processes of religious ritual, myth, and theory. We examine the social power (and limitations) of religion. A special focus will include the role of religion in relation to both violence and nonviolence.


Gods in the Global Village includes an excellent list of religion and society sources for further reading interests on your part. We will cite various books, films, Internet sites, and other sources throughout the course.

Week I  Tuesday July 23 and Thursday July 25

Our sociological imaginations, how we view mortality and the question of what lies beyond this mortal existence, religious figures of importance in our lives. religions in global perspective, sociological understandings of religion, key dimensions of religious traditions; please read: Gods in the Global Village, Chapter 1, Religious Life in the Global Village.
Week II  Tuesday July 30 and Thursday August 1

The question of religion and social conflict; please read: Gods in the Global Village, Chapter 8, Religion and Social Conflict and also Chapter 2, A Sociological Tour: Turning East (for context for our focus on the Dalia Lama). The case of the Dalai Lama, religion and nonviolence in the struggle for freedom and justice; please read: The Open Road (all). We will watch a documentary this week: 10 Questions for the Dalai Lama.

Week III  Tuesday August 6 and Thursday August 8

Religions with roots in the ancient Middle East, the social construction of religious traditions, the elementary forms of religious life; please read: Gods in the Global Village, Chapter 3 The Tour: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and please read: Indigenous Religions, Gods in the Global Village, Chapter 4; please read: Chapter 5 on The Religious Ethos and Chapter 6 on Modernism and Multiculturalism.

Week IV  Tuesday August 13 and Thursday August 15

Civil religion, religious nationalism, and new religious movements; please read: Gods in the Global Village, Chapter 7, Religious Movements for a New Century.

This week, on Thursday, we will share the results of our research & reflection papers.

Assignments:

Please read the assigned pages for each week; this is essential for thoughtful class discussion and participation (attendance and participation are worth 50% of the course grade). This is a seminar course in the true sense of the term; thoughtful and informed discussion grounded in shared reading, careful listening, engaged conversation, and critical reflection.

Develop a ten-page paper (research, analysis, and reflection) —guidelines to be spelled out in class during the first week (this paper is worth 50% of the course grade)—due at the beginning of class on Thursday, August 15, of our fourth week.