

Course Title	Religion and Contemporary Society LAH316	Instructor	Fabio BOLZONAR
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Class Style	Lecture	Office Hours (face-to-face or online)	Tuesday 1 st period (senior theses students) Wednesday 4 th period (all students) Or by appointment (please send an email to request an appoint- ment)
Track		Mode of Instruction	Solo/team
Credits	2	Allocated Year	Fall 3 rd year
Active Learning	Category 2: 3 Category 3: 2, 3, 4 Category 4: 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10	Compulsory or Elective	
Course Overview	<p>This course is designed to introduce students to the study of religion in current times. The course is composed of three modules. The first module explains some of the major sociological theories of religion. The lectures discuss the theories of secularization and postsecularity, the rational choice theory of religion, and the emergence of reflexive and 'personal' religiosity. The second and the third modules have a more empirical focus than the first module. While the second module debates how and why religion has exerted remarkable influence on some domains of the public sphere, the third module is concerned with the re-organization of established religions and the emergence of new actors that are acquiring a prominent role in the religious sphere. The course instructor presents theoretical and empirical works, reviews the major methodological approach in the sociology of religion and, through an active learning approach, stimulates students to think critically about the role played by religions in contemporary societies.</p>		
Course Objectives	<p>The intended learning outcomes of this course are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing the major theories, issues, and debates in the current sociology of religion; • Understanding the role played by churches, faith-based organizations, and religious movements in contemporary societies; • Grasping the internal pluralism and dynamics of religious organizations; • Applying the sociological theories of religion to understand social reality; • Enhancing communication skills in English by developing the capacity to synthesize complex arguments and expose them accurately and concisely; • Improving the ability to think critically about the place of religion in contemporary societies. 		
Prerequisite	<p>The course is open to any student who wishes to understand the role played by religions in contemporary societies. Those students who do not have the required background knowledge of sociology and are interested in attending the classes are invited to contact the course instructor.</p>		

Course Schedule	No	Contents	Homework
	1	<p>Introduction to the Course <i>Understanding Religions in Contemporary Societies</i></p> <p>The first part of this lecture presents the course structure, explains the work expected by each student, and describes the grading scheme. The second part discusses some distinct features of the sociology of religion to show how it helps to understand the place of religions in contemporary societies.</p>	Reading for the next class.
	2	<p>Module 1: Theoretical Approaches <i>The Secularization Debate</i></p> <p>This lecture discusses the secularization theory that has been one of the most influential paradigms through which social scientists, politicians, and journalists have understood religions in contemporary societies. It outlines its central tenets and it explains its weaknesses that led several scholars to reconsider the paradigm of secularization.</p>	Critical reading of class material. Preparing questions to raise in class and reflection.
	3	<p><i>A Rational Choice Theory of Religion</i> <i>Reflection 1 (due by Tuesday 23:59)</i></p> <p>Several leading social scientists have used rational choice theory concepts to understand the dynamics of religion in contemporary societies, notably in the United States. This lecture assesses their contributions and highlights their weaknesses.</p>	Critical reading of class material. Preparing questions to raise in class.
	4	<p><i>A Personal God</i></p> <p>Contemporary religiosity is increasingly characterized by a kind of individualistic and reflexive spiritual approach whereby people choose which religious prescriptions they wish to believe and respect. This lecture discusses this widespread phenomenon in current religiosity.</p>	Critical reading of class material. Preparing questions to raise in class and reflection.
	5	<p>Module 2: The Public Role of Religions <i>Religion and Social Solidarity</i> <i>Reflection 2 (due by Tuesday 23:59)</i></p> <p>The sacred texts of major religions have encouraged believers to help poor and deprived people. This class outlines the salient principles of Catholic social teaching and explains how it promotes the establishment of modern welfare states.</p>	Critical reading of class material. Preparing questions to raise in class.
	6	<p><i>Religion and Politics</i></p> <p>Religion and politics have often been closely intertwined in world history. Since the late 1990s, right-wing populist movements have hijacked religious tropes to seize new political opportunities. This lecture covers the relationships between religion and contemporary right-wing populism.</p>	Critical reading of class material. Preparing questions to raise in class and reflection.

7	<p><i>Religious Fundamentalism and Violence</i> <i>Reflection 3 (due by Tuesday 23:59)</i> <i>The emergence of religious fundamentalism on a world scale has been one of the most dramatic phenomena that characterized the 21st century. This lecture introduces the different kinds of fundamentalism (i.e., Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish) and considers their outcomes.</i></p>	<p>Critical reading of class material. Preparing questions to raise in class.</p>
8	<p><i>Midterm Exam</i></p>	<p>Studying for the exam.</p>
9	<p><i>Religion and Migrations</i> The current migration waves are having a remarkable impact not only on the political and economic spheres but also on the religious domain as migrants bring with them their religion and can promote a renewal of local religious traditions. This lecture debates this phenomenon that is happening in several economically advanced societies.</p>	<p>Critical reading of class material. Preparing questions to raise in class and reflection.</p>
10	<p><i>Religion, Gender, and Sexualities</i> <i>Reflection 4 (due by Tuesday 23:59)</i> The complex relationships between religion, gender, and sexualities have recently attracted the great attention of social scientists and mass media. This lecture focuses on the central tenets of monotheistic religions (i.e., Christianity, Islam, Judaism) about homosexuality and sexual minorities.</p>	<p>Critical reading of class material. Preparing questions to raise in class.</p>
11	<p>Module 3: New Actors <i>The Nones ('non-believers and non-practising')</i> Atheism is on the rise in contemporary societies. This class discusses the reasons why a growing number of people reject their religion and decide to be non-believers and non-practising ('nones').</p>	<p>Critical reading of class material. Preparing questions to raise in class and reflection.</p>
12	<p><i>New Religious Movements</i> <i>Reflection 5 (due by Tuesday 23,59)</i> The religious field has always been characterized by several internal developments that led to the emergence of new actors and movements. This class covers the distinguishing characteristics, ideas, and actions of some new churches by focusing on charismatic religious congregations.</p>	<p>Critical reading of class material. Preparing questions to raise in class.</p>
13	<p>Conclusion <i>Student Presentations 1</i> This class is devoted to student presentations.</p>	<p>Studying for the presentation and class discussion.</p>
14	<p><i>Student Presentation 2</i> This class is devoted to student presentations.</p>	<p>Studying for the presentation and class discussion.</p>

	15	<p><i>Wrap Up</i></p> <p>This final lecture summarizes and reviews what we have learnt about the relationships between politics and society in Europe. Students will also have the opportunity to raise further questions about the class material and the course instructor will provide some advice for the preparation of the final assignment.</p>	Debate and course overview.
		<p><i>Final Exam</i></p>	Studying for the final exam.
Grading	<p>Class Participation: 30 %</p> <p>Students are expected to engage in discussions. Participation will be evaluated on the basis of the contribution to collective learning. If a student does not feel comfortable speaking in class, she/he is encouraged to contact the course instructor to arrange an alternative way to participate in discussions. The course instructor would do his best to accommodate students' requests. Student presentations will be counted as extra participation.</p> <p>Midterm exam: 30%</p> <p>There will be a midterm exam related to the course material discussed in Module 1. This exam will be composed of several multiple choice and true/false quizzes and one open questions. Grades will be based on the understanding of the course material and the answers given by each student.</p> <p>Final exam: 40%</p> <p>There will be a final exam related to the course material discussed in Module 2. This exam will be composed of several multiple choice and true/false quizzes and three open questions. Grades will be based on the understanding of the course material and the answers given by each student.</p>		
Textbooks	A detailed list of readings will be provided by the instructor on Moodle.		
References	<p>A detailed list of references will be provided on Moodle.</p> <p>WEBSITES</p> <p>Columbia University, Middle East and Islamic Studies: Online Resources, https://guides.library.columbia.edu/mideast</p> <p>Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html</p> <p>Internet East Asian History Sourcebook: Religious Traditions, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/eastasia/eastasiabook.asp#Religious%20Traditions</p> <p>Pew Research Center, https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/religion/</p> <p>MASS MEDIA, NEWSPAPERS, AND MAGAZINES</p> <p>BBC (Religions), https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/</p> <p>The Financial Times (Religion), https://www.ft.com/religion</p> <p>The Japan Times (Religion), https://www.japantimes.co.jp/tag/religion/</p> <p>Al Jazeera (Religion), https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/religion/</p> <p>Le Monde (Religion), https://www.lemonde.fr/en/religions/</p> <p>The New York Times (Religion), https://www.nytimes.com/international/section/opinion/religion</p> <p>Der Spiegel (Religion), https://www.spiegel.de/thema/religion_en/p2/</p>		

NOTES	<p>Short reflections (max 150 words) aim to evaluate student understanding of the course material and participation. They are due two days before each class at the latest.</p> <p>Students with disabilities or special needs (including stress and anxiety problems) should talk to the course instructor as soon as possible to discuss likely arrangements to let them attend the course properly. Confidentiality will be granted to all students.</p> <p>Plagiarism is not tolerated under any circumstance. If students have any queries about plagiarism and the quotation style, please do not hesitate to contact the course instructor.</p> <p>Artificial intelligence (AI) tools (such as ChatGPT and Google Gemini) for learning purposes should be used cautiously. Even though AI tools can explain complex concepts, organize workload efficiently, and enhance writing skills, they can also provide inaccurate information, lead to unintended plagiarism, and undermine the enhancement of critical thinking. If students wish to use AI tools, they are strongly encouraged to discuss this topic with the course instructor.</p>
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