

Nazarene Theological Seminary
Spring Module 2010
Sociology of American Evangelicalism
MSS790
Ron Benefiel

Course Description

A sociological analysis of religious practices, beliefs, institutions and trends with special attention given to American evangelicalism.

Purpose

The purpose of this course is to:

- 1) equip the student with analytical sociological tools for the purpose of reflecting on the social dimensions of religion in contemporary American evangelical Christianity;
- 2) utilize sociological perspectives to better understand the nature of the church as a social organization in its cultural context, and,
- 3) to increase missional effectiveness in pastoral ministry.

Course Requirements

The student will be expected to:

- 1) attend all class sessions and excursions and participate in class discussions;
- 2) read all assigned readings and submit a 3-4 page synopsis/critique of each of the required texts;
- 3) present an overview and analysis of a book from the recommended reading list in class; and
- 4) submit a 15-20 page research paper.

Grading

Grades will be based on the student's satisfactory participation in and completion of course requirements according to the following percentages:

Text Synopsis/Critiques	40%
Research Paper	30%
Class Presentation	20%
Class Participation	10%

Text Synopsis/Critiques

Each student will submit a 3-4 page synopsis/critique of each of the required texts. The synopsis/critique should give a brief overview of the main ideas of each text and briefly analyze/critique the author's work. Due date is the day the schedule calls for the book to be discussed in class.

Research Paper

Each student will submit a 15-20 page research paper. The topic must be approved by the professor. The due date for the paper is March 15, 2010. The project may be focused on any topic related to Sociology of Religion with preference given to topics related to American Evangelicalism. Possible approaches include:

- 1) library research project on a course-related topic;
- 2) sociological analysis of a religious group including library research and on-sight visits and analysis (e.g. Unity, the immigrant church, Community of Christ, Salvation Army); and/or,
- 3) a research project using social research methods to collect data which test particular hypotheses or measure normative attitudes or patterns of behavior related to religion.

Class Presentation

Each student will have 45 minutes to an hour of class time to present an overview and critical analysis of one book from the recommended reading list. The presentation should allow ample time for class discussion.

Class Excursions

The class will visit different religious groups both in regularly scheduled meeting times and on Sunday, January 24. Participation in class excursions are required and considered in the student's class participation portion of the grade. Alternate arrangements may be made with the professor as necessary.

Required Texts

- Balmer, Randall. *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*. Oxford University Press. Fourth Edition. 2006.
- Finke, Roger and Rodney Stark. *The Churching of America, 1776 – 2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. Rutgers University Press. 2005.
- Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870 – 1925*. Oxford University Press. 2006.
- Smith, Christian and Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. Oxford University Press. 2009.
- Smith, Christian. *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*. Oxford University Press. 2003.
- Stark, Rodney. *What Americans Really Believe*. Baylor University Press. 2008

Recommended Reading

- Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of Sociological Theory of Religion*. Doubleday. 1967.
- Carter, Stephen L. *Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion*. Doubleday. 1993.
- Conn, Harvey. *The American City and the Evangelical Church*. Baker Books. 1994.
- Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom*. Oxford University Press. 2002.

- Kelley, Dean. *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in the Sociology of Religion with a New Preface for the ROSE Edition*. Mercer University Press. 1986.
- Law, Eric H.F. *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*. Chalice Press. 1993.
- Marty, Martin E., R. Scott Appleby, Nancy T. Ammerman, and Robert Eric Frykenberg (The Fundamentalist Project). *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*. 2004.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. Harper and Row. 1975.
- Noll, Mark. *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell. 2001.
- Smith, Christian. *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want*. 2002.
- Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster. 2001.
- Stark, Rodney and Roger Finke. *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. 2000.
- Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*. Princeton University Press. 1996.
- *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism and Western Success*. 2006.
- Webber, Robert E. *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World*. Baker Books. 2002.
- Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Routledge. 2001.
- Wolfe, Alan. *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith*. Free Press. 2003.
- Wuthnow, Robert. *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*. 2007.
- *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*. 2007.