MC 498 (section 1): Senior Seminar in Social Relations
Religious and Secular Society:
A European-American Comparison

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Home tel. 333-0221 (no calls after 9:30 pm)     Office hours: Thursdays 11:00am-1:30pm, and by appointment. (If office hours don’t work for you, contact me about other possible times. When arranging an appointment by e-mail, please indicate a range of times you could make a meeting.) And feel free to check if I’m available any time the office door is open. But generally, when the door is closed, either I’m not there or I have a deadline and am not available.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
The aim of this seminar are two fold: First, we investigate theoretical approaches to understanding the growth and decline of religion as well as the relationship between religious and secular social spheres. Among the questions are whether religion and secularism, are truly opposites as commonly supposed. But we take seriously the apparent decline of religious sentiment throughout the West. Indeed, substantively a central focus is why theories of religious change which seem to explain reasonably the Americas–both North and South–do not at least initially seem to explain the decline of religious observation in Western Europe, and vice versa.

A second and equally important goal of the course is for you to apply and develop further your research skills. This is done in a multi-step process. While ultimately you need to produce a paper addressing a theoretically significant question, you do so gradually by building upon both the common syllabus reading and your own reading and research. Most students begin with a substantive interest–whether that’s religion in a particular place, or a specific social group–but you must both deepen your substantive knowledge and have an eye towards analytic focus. Usually deepening your substantive knowledge and sharpening your analytic focus means you end up coming at a research topic from an angle that was not your original intention. The idea of the readings is to give you a sense of the questions that are relevant to understanding the course topic, but then you are to use your own store of knowledge and skills, and what you learn in the course, to ask an important question for your research project.

Because this is a senior seminar, the active engagement of students is central. The excuse, “I’m not a talker,” is by this point in your academic career irrelevant.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This particular seminar explores the role of religion in Western society and the relationship between the religious and the secular. How we understand the relationship between the religious and the secular might differ considerably depending on whether we refer to religious and secular people vs. religious and secular institutions.

There is a reasonable empirical case, based especially on the religious history of the Americas, that religions actually have more success retaining allegiance when there is a separation of church and state, so that in an apparent paradox, religious devotion may thrive when political structures are secularized. That is a common argument made by U.S. sociologists and historians. But European scholars, looking
at their own societies’ experience, are more likely to argue that the separation of church and state is correlated with a general decline in religiosity.

The separation of church and state as we know it is a relatively recent historical phenomenon; a number of modern states were established in a process that involved strong opposition to, and suppression of, religious power in culture and politics. Even today, numerous political conflicts involve the evocation of religious commitment and religious imagery, and skirmishes over the boundary between church and state. Especially in comparative perspective, it becomes clear that even what is meant by the “separation of church and state” is variable and contentious. Among the questions we ask is whether it is ever really possible in practice for a government to be entirely neutral about religion.

While the contrast between U.S. and European paradigms about the relationship between religion and state are particularly visible in both scholarly and public discourse, the course explores additional ways we might understand the social role of religion. For instance, religion arguably is central to national identity in a way that measures of religious observance (such as church attendance) cannot fully capture. Susan Jacoby’s influential secularist history of the United States also implicitly raises, very much in the spirit of Social Relations & Policy, the possibility that even outwardly religious societies may have a long history of distinct, secular countercurrents.

As with all Madison College courses, students in this course should value and seek out extensive communication between faculty and students. Students should consult with the instructor during office hours and at other times about papers, especially research papers, and should take advantage of opportunities for additional interaction, both formal and informal. Assignments will often involve extensive feedback, and students are always welcome to submit written drafts in advance of due dates, during office hours.

COURSE MATERIALS (that is, where to find the readings)

The books listed below are all available for purchase at multiple book stores. All readings are also in hard copy on reserve at the university library. That includes the books listed below and printouts of all the articles.

Books used in the course (listed in the order we use them)

Please note that I expect one copy of each book will be available on reserve at the university library, though I cannot yet be sure the library is willing to purchase each book.

If you purchase books on your own (through an on-line bookseller), be sure you use the ISBNs to avoid accidentally buying the wrong edition of a book. You can use either the ISBN-10 or the ISBN-13; every book published in the world has an ISBN-10 and ISBN-13 specific to that edition of that book. It is also worth having the ISBNs with you if you go to a local bookstore to buy the books, to make sure they don’t sell you the wrong edition.

Several of the books (the first three listed below) have previous editions; if you buy the wrong edition, you will be missing required sections of the book and the page numbers of your edition will not match those used in the correct edition.


**Other readings on the syllabus are available for free to students enrolled in the course, via hyperlinks (to MSU library electronic journal articles) from the Angel syllabus.** When available, always use the **pdf** (not “full text”) version of such readings. Some information on access to those readings:

1. By copyright law, you are allowed to download and save a single pdf copy of all such readings for your own use, as long as you do not distribute that copy to others. Ideally, do that early in the semester for all such readings.

2. **If you have trouble getting access to electronic readings (including if you’re asked to pay):**
   - Start by trying another browser. **Mac Users: Safari seems to have particular problems accessing on-line readings via MSU hyperlinks.**
   - Next, **make sure you’re clicking from the currently posted Angel syllabus, not anywhere else** (e.g., not from Google Scholar). If URLs change, Prof. Burns will update the Angel hyperlinks; if you downloaded and saved a previous version of the syllabus, you would then have outdated hyperlinks.
   - Follow instructions; for instance, note whether the syllabus or the internet page indicates you need to click something else actually to obtain the article.
   - There is an alternative method to find individual articles in case the service provider changed the internet address (as sometimes happens) before faculty have noticed: Go to the **MSU Libraries site, Electronic Resources**, type in the name of the journal (in *italics* on the syllabus), not the name of the article, and find the appropriate volume (the number before the year in the syllabus citation of the reading) and other relevant information and locate the article.
   - Finally, if none of that works, (a) restart your computer and/or wait an hour in case your computer or internet provider is the source of the problem. (b) If still having problems, contact the instructor.

*The New York Times* is available to Madison students on a daily basis, Monday through Friday. They can be found in distribution racks each weekday morning on the first floor of Case Hall. It is likely some of the issues we address will receive attention in the *New York Times*; you’ll be able to see the contemporary relevance of the seminar topic. All students are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this resource.

**Course Outline**

You are required to complete all reading, in the order given, by the beginning of class for the date listed.

**Monday, January 7:** Students should come to class ready to do one of the following (to be done after initial introduction to the seminar): (a) Give your armchair theory (that is, for today *only* it needn’t be based on any actual empirical knowledge!) of why people are religious or are not and what kinds of people or societies are more likely to be religious or less religious. (b) Give your armchair theory of whether you think views of the social and political role of religion in the United States or other countries
are changing, and why. (c) Talk about some group or some experience that leads you to the issues in this course.

**Assignment planning—what you should be doing already:** Read/skim to get a sense of something interesting to you that might ultimately be interested in. For instance, if you’re interested in Latino religion in the United States, read up on it. If you’re interested in atheist student groups, read up on them. If you’re interested in religion in Japan, read up on that. Get a sense of what’s surprising and interesting. Do journal searches, though at this point you needn’t read every word of every article.

**The basic landscape of religion in the U.S.**


**Monday, January 14:** Chaves, *American Religion*, ch. 5 through Conclusion.

**Opposing Paradigms I: Disestablishment and the “Free Market” of Religion**

**Wednesday, January 16** (heavy reading day):

**Monday, January 21:** Martin Luther King, Jr., Day. No university classes. *I would suggest you use some of this time to start reading up on possible research topics.*

**Wednesday, January 23:** Chesnut, *Competitive Spirit*, chap. 3-4.

**Monday, January 28:** Chesnut, *Competitive Spirits*, chap. 5-7.

**DUE Tuesday, Jan. 29, 9:00am, in an Angel drop box:** A summary (at least 3 pages, double-spaced) of an interesting topic/question that might be the basis of your research paper. At this point you do not necessarily have to engage theoretical questions in scholarly literature, though doing so is also very welcome.

**Wednesday, January 30:** Discussion of student research topic interests. **Reading Assignment:** Each student will read before class all other students’ summaries and will be assigned to comment upon one other student’s summary. The aim of the commentary is to suggest a theoretical question that would be relevant to the student’s summary; think in terms of our readings so far and/or MC 280 social theory questions.

**DUE Friday, Feb. 1, 3:00pm** paper on the reading, approximately 5-6 pages double-spaced. Hard copy required.
Assignment planning—the next stage of your research project: You now have to focus on the scholarly literature most relevant to your substantive interest, in preparation for our submitting a literature view just before Spring break. You now need to do systematic searches of scholarly literature, using especially relevant electronic indexes. See the Angel posting on the research project.

Opposing Paradigms II: The European Secularization Paradigm

Monday, February 4: Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead: Secularization in the West*, chap. 2-3, 5, and 1. (Read in that order. Chapters 4 and 6 are not required.)


Monday, February 11: Bruce, *God Is Dead*, chap. 11-12.

The Role of Religion in Contemporary U.S. Society and Politics

The Christian Right


Wednesday, February 20: Wilcox and Robinson, *Onward Christian Soldiers?*, ch. 5

Secular Americans Coming Out

Monday, February 25: The growth of the non-religious population in the U.S.

Wednesday, February 27: The “New Atheism”
3. Nicholas D. Kristof, “Bleeding Heart Tightwads,” *New York Times*, December 20, 2008. [Note: This link should work, but if you hit a paywall block, try this link or find the article through the more circuitous routes from this link.]

[All of the following are from the Washington Post “On Faith” online forum:]

DUE Monday, March 4, 3:00pm: Literature review due. I would suggest you turn this in by Friday, March 1st, before Spring break, but I am allowing you the weekend in case that works for your schedule. This is in effect the first half of your research paper and is graded.

/Spring Break: Week of March 4th-8th/

The Complexities of Church-State Boundaries

Monday, March 11:

Wednesday, March 13: A quick look at alternative paradigms
2. Jose Casanova, “Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective,” Hedgehog Review, vol. 8, no. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 2006). Read only pp. 7-14, not the whole article. Note: After clicking the link on the Angel syllabus, click “View PDF pages” on the right side of the page.

Monday, March 18:
2. Additional readings to be announced.

EXAM Wednesday, March 20: In-class, open-note exam (focusing especially on the material starting February 4th). You may use only notes for which you have yourself written every single word. No rescheduling permitted. Please bring a blue book or blank loose leaf.

Assignment planning: Students must each write two memos--about 2 to 2 1/2 pages each, double spaced--summarizing the central issues for two of the remaining four days of syllabus reading. You may choose with two of the four days (March 25, March 27, April 1, and April 8). And you may write additional memos to boost your “points” grade--see below.

Monday, March 25:

[Monday, March 25th: Passover begins at sundown.]


[Sunday, March 31st: Easter.]

Monday, April 1: Jacoby, Freethinkers, pp. 104-166, 186-193, 227-238, 255 (¶3)-261(¶1).

Wednesday, April 3: Research paper consultation day.

DUE Friday, April 5, 3:00pm: First version of research paper due, including appendix explaining how your found your sources (and why you discarded other topics and sources). You must also resubmit the first version of the literature review and instructor comments on it. Students who turn in papers earlier than the deadline will get quicker feedback (to give you more time for revision for the final version due during exam week).

Monday, April 8: Jacoby, Freethinkers, pp. 292-365. Also first and possibly second presentation.

Students’ individual presentation schedule to be determined. (Grading is likely to be gentler on the first set of presenters!)

Wednesday, April 10: Presentations

Monday, April 15: Presentations.

Wednesday, April 17: Presentations.

Monday, April 22: Presentations.

Wednesday, April 24: Presentations.

DUE Wednesday, May 1st, 3:00pm: Final (revised and expanded) research papers due, as well as final appendix on how you located your sources. Revisions are in response to instructor comments on the first version. Remember that you must resubmit all previous research project materials, including instructor’s comments, even if you changed your topic. If you would like the materials mailed to you after grades are turned in, please include a large (e.g., 10” x 13”) envelope with adequate postage (probably at least $2.00).
COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING (see also handouts and postings relevant to specific assignments)

A quick summary of assignments and grading weights

- Paper on the reading, due Feb. 1, 3:00pm, 16%
- In-class open-note exam, March 20, 16%
- Memos (2 to 2 ½ pages each) summarizing reading of two of the final four days of syllabus reading (March 25 through April 8), 5% each (10% total)
- Research project. See Angel posting that includes detail on requirements and also helpful information in approaching such a topic. Note that the grade for each written part of the project depends on what's new and better than the previous version (except the final version is a mix of that grade and the overall quality of the full product).
  - Summary of topic idea, due Jan. 29th, 9am
  - No grade implications unless it's late or not a good-faith effort
  - Literature review, 8%, due March 4th, pm (but I encourage you to turn it in by March 1st)
  - First version of full paper, due April 5th, 3pm, 10%
  - Revised and expanded version, due May 1st, 3pm, 17%
  - Presentation (1/3 of a class session, including discussion, some time between April 8th and April 24th)
- Remaining 18% of grade based primarily on participation; can also be affected negatively by missing class or being unprepared or positively with extra memos (March 25-April 8th). See explanation below.

The 18% (primarily) participation grade

This is a seminar; it is different from other classes. You are not to be passive but are to be central in making class meetings productive and interesting. The assumption is always that you are to be prepared for, and present, in class every session, on time, unless there is compelling reason. As you signed up for class in this time slot, you are to be available for any class activities (including presentations or leading discussion) for any class session, whether or not that date has been specifically cleared with you. If you have not done required reading, please do not attend. Both failing to attend and failing to be prepared will have negative effects on your grade.

Discussion will require the involvement of every student, in every session. We may at times go around the room, getting comments from everyone.

18% of the course grade will be awarded via a point system focused mainly on participation; your total points will be divided by ten at the end of the semester and that will be your grade. And so, for instance, 40 points means a 4.0 grade for this final 18%. That grade will gradually be determined by the following components:

- Participation in class, based on strong familiarity with course readings:
  - Participation in a given class session, 1 point.
  - Very good participation, 2 points.
- Good commentary on another student’s initial summary of ideas (January 30th), 1 point. Unusually helpful and perceptive commentary (while still within the time limits and not aggressive or showy), 2 points.
In addition, students can earn a point that day for helpful comments and questions on students’ commentaries for which they’re not formally assigned to give feedback.

- Helpful commentary or questions during other students’ presentations, 1 point (per relevant class session in April); unusually helpful and perceptive comments making the class session productive, 2 points.
- Additional memos on final four class days of reading, beyond the first two memos that are required, 3 points each memo (4 points if outstanding).
  - In this case, I’ll grade all memos you write. The two highest grades will count 5% each for your memo grades; if the others are good efforts, they will receive 3 points each, and 4 points if outstanding.

- Deductions
  - Absences
    - No deductions for a compelling religious observance if approved by me at least a week in advance. Convenience of travel or wanting a longer weekend around a religious holiday are not reasons to avoid deductions; class being on the day of an important religious commemoration is.
      - No more than twice per student.
    - In addition, no deduction for the first or second absence (for whatever reason) unless you were scheduled to address a particular matter that day.
    - 1 point deduction each for the third and fourth absences; 2 points each for fourth absence and beyond. In addition, please note you fail the course if you have more than nine absences, whatever the reason.
    - Additional deduction of 1 point if you were absent when specifically scheduled to address a particular matter that day (e.g., you were assigned to summarize a part of a reading or address a reading question).
  - Silence during a class session or lack of preparation for that session, deduction of ½ point.
    - This would not be relevant if there were little opportunity to speak (e.g., if I lectured much of the class session). But it would be relevant if for instance you raised nothing helpful during other students’ presentations in April.
  - Cumulative lateness: ½ a point deduction for each 30 minutes or additional portion of 30 minutes. (So for example if you were five minutes late for each of twenty class sessions, that’s 100 minutes total, and you’d lose 2 points.)
  - Lose 2 points for each date an ungraded assignment (that is, topic idea due Jan. 29th) is late or inadequate (not a good-faith effort).

- Note that I’ll keep a running tally of your points and will occasionally share those with you.
- Also note that, because I’ve never tried this grading approach for participation in senior seminar, if point totals are lower than I expect, I will curve up so that at least one person receives 4.0.

Handouts and Angel postings will explain the assignments in more detail.

Finally, it is essential that you look at our Angel site for additional information supplemental to the syllabus, including information on lateness penalties, academic honesty, and other matters.