

Saints, Sects, and Society – Spring 2017

Midterm Guide

(March 8th, in class)

You are responsible for knowing everything we have covered in this course—in class, in readings, or through other means (congregational visits, films, group presentations, materials posted on the website, *etc.*). You are also responsible for pulling this knowledge together into an intellectual whole. That is the purpose of exams: to give you a chance to focus the disparate materials that we have encountered into a comprehensive package.

I suggest that you study together, to help each other with this process.

For the Midterm, be prepared to write essays on three of the following questions. You should expect to write for about 25 minutes on each essay, using as much of the material you learned as is needed to craft a coherent answer. You will have no choice about which questions to answer, so you should study them all.

You may bring one 5x8 card with notes to the exam, plus enough pens or pencils to last you the hour. Please leave all other materials at home. I shall provide paper. (Yes, you may write on both sides of the card; you may even write on the edges, though reading zero-point type is no easy task.)

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1. What distinguishes the sociological approach to religion from other approaches? Be as specific and complete as possible, focusing on the central questions that sociology asks (and answers) about religious life. You should include McGuire's four-element depiction, but you may also criticize it, if needed.
 2. What roles does religion play in contemporary people's lives? Make sure that you take account of both official and nonofficial religion, civil religion, the role(s) that religion can play for atheists.
 3. Write a letter to a foreign friend describing American religion. What is the current state of the religion in the U.S.? What trends are evident? Paint a picture (in words) of the American religious landscape, including recent developments. (You will want to review Chaves' book as well as McGuire's.)
 4. What are the differences between sectarian and denominational religions? Give important characteristics for each, and describe how these differences work at both the group and the individual level.
 5. Compare and contrast two of the religious groups profiled in the seven case studies presented in class. How are these groups similar? How are they different? How does each typify one of the directions in which American religion is currently moving?
 6. Analyze the congregation that you visited, using as many of the sociological concepts we have encountered so far in this course. What type of religiosity does this congregation encourage? What types of people does this congregation attract? Which of the contemporary religious trends noted by Chaves can you see operating in this congregation's religious life? (Note that this question has a different focus than did your observation paper.)