

# SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

Canadian Bible College  
Fall 2002  
Dr. Margi Hollingshead



## Objectives

This course examines the current state of Canadian religion in general and Christianity in particular from a sociological perspective. By the end of the course, the student should be able to:

- Articulate the rationale for sociologic inquiry in Christian study and thought
- Discuss the basic sociologic theories used to understand the social dimensions of religion
- Examine, sociologically, the dialectic of religion and culture over time
- Analyze a particular Christian church, sect or denomination ethnographically

## Schedule

- Sept. 4 – What is religion, anyway?  
 Sept. 9 – A sociological perspective – chap. 1  
 Sept. 11 – The sources of religion (tour First Baptist)– chap. 2  
 Sept. 16 – Religion as a group phenomenon – chap. 3  
 Sept. 18 – The sacred canopy – read chaps. 1 & 2  
 Sept. 23 – The sacred canopy – read chap. 5 (105-113; 124-125) and chap. 6  
 Sept. 25- Becoming religious – chap. 4  
 Sept. 30 – Religious organization – church-sect continuum – chap. 5  
 Oct. 2 – Religious conflict – chap. 6  
 Oct. 16 – Berger-Hall discussion **Interaction Papers Due**  
 Oct. 21 – Religion and politics – chap. 7  
 Oct. 23 – Religious fundamentalism – chap. 8  
 Oct. 28 – Religion and the economy – chap. 9  
 Nov. 4 – Religion and the class system– chap. 10  
 Nov. 6 – Myths, rituals, and symbols  
 Nov. 13 – The old believers (video)  
 Nov. 18 – Women and religion – chap. 11  
 Nov. 20 – Homosexuality and the church  
 Nov. 25 – Racism and the church – chap. 13  
 Nov. 27 – Denominational society – chap. 14  
 Dec. 2 – The future of religion – chap. 15  
 Dec. 4 – Ethnography discussion **Ethnographies Due**

## Assignments

- **35% Interaction Paper** – In The sacred canopy, Peter Berger presents “elements of a sociological theory of religion” as he understood Western culture in 1966. In what ways is the “sacred canopy” still a reality in 2002 North America? Your response should integrate the perspectives of D.J. Hall as its primary focus, as well as reflect personal experiences and insights. You should demonstrate an understanding of these 10 Berger terms: externalization, objectivation, internalization, nomization, cosmization, legitimation, location, integration of marginal situations, plausibility structures, and carriers of secularization. Length: 12 pages. Due Oct. 16.
- **45% Ethnographic Study** – select a church/sect/denomination which is quite different from any traditions with which you are familiar. Using a variety of methods (observations, interviews, document analysis, etc.) develop an ethnography of the church. It is expected that you would attend at least four (4) services or events at the selected church and talk to at least three people associated with it.  
Your ethnography should include myths, symbols and rituals; commitment criteria and expectations; use of the human resources; social stratification levels; evidences of discrimination; responses to secularization; and assessment, a la Berger, of the church’s plausibility structures. This study should clearly demonstrate your understanding of sociologic terms and theories.  
Lastly, choose several areas of interest from your study to compare with a church familiar to you from your background or present practice. Length: 15 – 20 pages. Due Dec. 4.
- **20% Class Participation** – attendance is required and includes your presence in body, mind, and spirit. You are expected to come prepared to enter fully into discussion, having read the assigned material. A lack of preparation or thoughtful participation, or more than a few needed absences will lower your mark. [Remember, school policy calls for course failure if more than 4 classes are missed].

## Guidelines

- All written work is to be original copy, typed, double-spaced and carry appropriate documentation in the APA or MLA format (see guide in Bookstop). Grammar and mechanics should reflect college level work; substandard work will lower your mark.
- Inclusive language is to be used in all work. Failure to comply will affect your mark.
- All assignments need to be completed by the last class day (Dec. 4) to pass the course, and are to conform to the requirements for length, due date, and time. Extensions are rarely given and only at the discretion of the professor for unusual circumstances. Late work for the interaction paper will cost 5% per day up to one week (including weekends) at which time half credit is recorded. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the specified date.
- The instructor reserves the right to alter the course schedule if necessary, with adequate notice to the class members.
- School guidelines, as given in the catalogue and student handbook, will be honoured and are the responsibility of the student to uphold.

## Required Reading

Berger, Peter L. 1967. The sacred canopy. Doubleday.

Hall, Douglas John. 1997. The end of Christendom and the future of Christianity.  
Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International.

Johnstone, Ronald L. 2001. Religion in society: A sociology of religion, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Prentice Hall.