**Losing God? Secularization**

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Liberal Studies

Fall 2023

Time and Location: Aug. 28 to Dec. 16, Mondays, TBD

**Losing God? Secularization: Theory, History, and Evidence**

***Overview***

Are we losing God? This course provides a review of current understandings of the theory, history, and empirical evidence for what is widely known as secularization. This has generally been understood as the process by which organized religion is weakened as a political, social, and cultural force in a society. The degree to which religion loses this role appears to vary by place, time, and faith. Often depicted theoretically as an evolutionary process that develops in a response to the Enlightenment/science, economic development, and/or modernization, the real world development of secularization appears to be much more uneven. There are periodic religious revivals that create reversals and it is rare for the conversion to be anything near complete. Committed atheists (as compared to agnostics or “Nones”—those without a religious affiliation) are most often a minority throughout the world—even in places where states have sought to create a completely secular world. Predictions of the demise of religion are common in history. Why have these gone unfulfilled… so far? At the same time clearly religion has often moved from the core of society and the state into the realm of the individual and personal periphery. What can we say about the future of religion today? Is more secularization or religious revival ahead? This course will review the theory, history, and evidence and provide points of view on these questions.

***Faculty***

Mark M. Gray, Ph.D., Research Associate Professor

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***Textbooks (required)***

*Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory*

Steve Bruce (Author)

Hardcover: 224 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press, USA; 1 edition (March 15, 2011)

ISBN-10: 0199584400

*Rethinking Secularism*

Craig Calhoun (Editor), Mark Juergensmeyer (Editor), Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Editor)

Paperback: 328 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press, USA (August 12, 2011)

ISBN-10: 0199796688

*Religion and the State in Russia and China: Suppression, Survival, and Revival*

Christopher Marsh (Author)

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: Continuum (January 15, 2011)

ISBN-10: 1441112472

***Learning Objectives***

1. Describe, compare, and utilize theories of secularization
2. Describe, compare, and utilize theories of the origin and growth of religions
3. Recognize the impact of schisms, liberalizations, and religious switching on religions
4. Explain the role and importance of religious revivals
5. Understand the impact of the Enlightenment and the development of science on religion
6. Understand the process of secularization in the public square
7. Differentiate between the components of personal religious affiliation, belief, and practice
8. Understand the socio-demographic differences between highly religious and highly secularized societies
9. Understand the cultural differences between highly religious and highly secularized societies
10. Evaluate state attempts to impose religion or secularization
11. Using data, provide a general forecast for the U.S. and/or other societies in terms of secularization and religiosity
12. Describe and understand the development of ‘secular religions’

***Grading***

The grade scale in the course is:

* 93% to 100% = A, 90% to 92% = A-
* 87% to 89% = B+, 83% to 86% = B, 80% to 82% = B-
* 77% to 79% = C+, 73% to 76% = C, 70% to 72% = C-
* 67% to 69% = D+, 60% to 66% = D, Below 60% = F

Grades for this course will be determined by your performance on course assignments, a final in-class essay, a presentation, and a final paper. The essay asks you to connect the dots of the course material in a thoughtful and analytical manner. It is worth **20%** of your final grade. Assignments account for another **30%** of your grade. An in-class 5 minute presentation of your final paper topic is worth **10%** of your grade. In the final paper you will address your point of view of secularization. Engage the literature, research, and readings and select a position regarding what you think has, is, and will occur regarding secularization and religion. Your paper should include evidence to support your claim (i.e., historical examples, trends in public opinion, and trends in religious belief and participation). This paper can focus primarily on a specific region and/or period of your choice as a case study. Or it could be broad and look at more global macro changes. The paper should be approximately 2,700 words. Grades will be based on the quality of research and the arguments put forth (not on the position you advocate—you have the complete academic freedom to express your informed point of view). The paper is worth **40%** of your grade.

***Plagiarism & the Georgetown Honor System***

The sources for all information and ideas in your papers must be documented using the style followed by the American Psychological Association (APA). In addition, all quotations must be identified as quotations, using quotation marks and documentation of the source of the quotation. Anything less than these standards is plagiarism and will be treated as such. Plagiarized work will be reported to Georgetown’s Honor Council (see below). If the council finds that the work has been plagiarized, the work will receive an F for a first offense; a second plagiarism will earn an F for the course.

All students are expected to follow Georgetown’s honor code unconditionally. We assume you have read the honor code material located at www.georgetown.edu/honor, and in particular have read the following documents: Honor Council Pamphlet, “What is Plagiarism?”, “Sanctioning Guidelines”, and “Expedited Sanctioning Process.” Papers in this course will be electronically checked for plagiarism. Submitting material in fulfillment of the requirements of this course means that you have abided by the Georgetown honor pledge:

*In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.*

You may not submit any work generated by an AI program as your own. If you include material generated by an AI program, it should be cited like any other reference material. Failure to do so constitutes a violation of academic integrity. Instances of suspected plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty will be dealt with under the Georgetown Honor Code.

Additionally, students should note that the material generated by these programs may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise unreliable. Students should be aware that the misuse of AI may also stifle independent thinking and creativity, as well as limit their capacity to learn independently in this course. Please engage with these resources responsibly, and with integrity.

***Disabilities***

If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations or if you think you may have a disability and want to inquire about accommodations, please contact the Academic Resource Center at 202-687-8354 or arc@georgetown.edu.

***Attendance, snow, and other emergencies***

During inclement weather or other emergencies, check http://preparedness.georgetown.edu or call (202) 687-7669 for information on whether the university is open.

Attendance is very important. If you are going to be missing a class please let the instructor know ahead of time. You are responsible for obtaining course material missed during any absence.

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| **Topic, Focus, Lecture** | **Readings, Data sets, Quizzes** |
| **Aug. 28**: Introduction; Theories on the origins of religious belief and institutional religion; introducing the theory of secularization | Bruce Chs. 1 & 2  In-class examination and discussion of cross-cultural creation and origin stories [these readings provided by the instructor]. |
| **Sept. 11**: The Un-secular: cycles of religious revival and change; Catholicism, Schism, and Reformation | Calhoun Introduction, Ch. 1  “The Pervasive World-View: Religion in Pre-Modern Britain” by Steve Bruce in *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (Dec., 1997), pp. 667-680 [JSTOR] |
| **Sept. 18**: God and disaster: Making sense of bad things; “The Flood,”  In the Wake of the Plague; Disaster, religious belief, and affiliation in the modern world | Calhoun Introduction, Chs. 2-3; Bruce Ch. 4 |
| **Sept. 25**: The Enlightenment I | Bruce Chs. 5-7 |
| **Oct. 2**: The Enlightenment II | Bruce Chs. 8-10 |
| **Oct 16**: The religious call and coming to America; the religious beliefs and affiliation of America’s founders; division of Church and state | Calhoun Chs. 6 & 13 |
| **Oct. 23**: Religious politics in Europe; Popes and absolute monarchs, Rise of Christian Democracy; Conflict with Communism | Marsh Chs. 1-4; Calhoun Ch. 11 |
| **Oct. 30**: Imposing Atheism: Case studies of Russia, China, North Korea, and Cuba | Marsh Chs. 5-7, Conclusion; Calhoun Ch. 12 |
| **Nov. 6**: The North and South Divide: Religion and Economic Development; The effects of “modernization” | World Values Study assignment [SDA Archive]  Calhoun Chs. 4-5 |
| **Nov. 13:** Dueling Documentaries and Online Diary Reflection Assignment | Atheism: A Rough History of Disbelief (2004)  *Or*  Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed (2008) |
| **Nov. 20**: Catholicism and Science; Friends and Foe alike | “Obscurantism to the Rescue” by Richard Dawkins in  *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (Dec., 1997), pp. 397-399 [JSTOR] |
| **Nov. 27**: Secularization at Home: Religious changes in views on marriage, sex, and family; America’s Changing Sundays | GSS/NES assignment [SDA Archive]  Lecture and discussion of findings from Pew’s *Religious Landscape* Study and Robert Putnam and David Campbell’s *American Grace* and other recent “None” studies |
| **Dec. 4**: The End of history or Clash of Civilizations? Religion and secularization post-9/11 | Calhoun Chs. 7-9  “Why Secularism Fails? Secular Nationalism and Religious Revivalism in Israel” by Uri Ram  *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 21, No. 1/4, Secular Imaginaries (Dec., 2008), pp. 57-73 [JSTOR] |
| **Dec 11**: Postmodern challenges; The Rise of secular religions; St. Steve Jobs?; Climate change beyond the science; Religious aspects of Atheism | Calhoun Ch. 10  Data and Discussion: Comparing religious and secular at the micro and macro levels. What happens when religion loses influence? |
| **End of Course** | **Final Papers** due **Dec. 18** (electronic submission suggested) |