

**Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University**  
**Religion and Cultural Analysis**  
**Instructor: Jerome Baggett**

**Course Description:** The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the much-discussed (but less often understood) concept of culture and its implications for the study of contemporary religion. After attending to more theoretical concerns, we will investigate the manner in which a nuanced construal of culture is essential for better understanding such things as secularization, ideological subcultures, religious change, and the salience of religiosity in forging ethnic and racial identities. By attending to these (and other) topics, students should acquire the theoretical and methodological tools necessary for becoming more sophisticated observers of religion as it is actually lived out in the United States and elsewhere.

**Course Goals:**

- To enable students to better appreciate the complexity of culture as well as the ways in which people appropriate, adapt and deploy the cultural meanings to which they have access amid their everyday lives.
- To acquaint students with nuanced sociological studies of religion that utilize theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing culture and, in doing so, demonstrate the analytical prowess (and, in some cases, shortcomings) inherent in approaching religion from this perspective.
- To introduce students to important sociological research methods that will enable them to craft their own investigations of lived religion.
- To provide students with opportunities to use cultural theory to both reflect upon the ways in which people are religious as well as to clearly frame a modest research project on some topic of their choosing.
- To contribute to students' understanding of the great diversity of not only religion per se, but also of the diverse ways that people are actually religious, the diverse reasons for being religious, the diverse consequences of their being religious, and so forth.
- Students will recognize the interplay between faith and culture in addressing theological and / or pastoral issues that emerge in diverse cultural contexts. [NB: This is Goal III for each of programs offered at the Jesuit School of Theology.]

## Required Texts:

Jerome P. Baggett, *Sense of the Faithful: How American Catholics Live Their Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Carolyn Chen, *Getting Saved in America: Taiwanese Immigration and Religious Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

Elaine Howard Ecklund, *Science vs. Religion: What Scientists Really Think* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Christian Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

Marsha G. Witten, *All is Forgiven: The Secular Message in American Protestantism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

\*There will also be a modest number of articles / book chapters that will be available to students electronically via the GTU's Moodle site; they are listed in the course schedule (in the order I recommend you reading them) and identified as such with an asterisk.

**Course Structure:** For each week, I intend to present material on Mondays while Thursdays will be principally devoted to student-led class discussion.

## Course Requirements:

1. Classroom preparation, attendance and participation. Rather than this being construed as my class, I'm asking that you contribute to making this *our* class by keeping abreast of the readings and sharing your insights on a regular basis (15%).

2. Facilitation of one class discussion. This basically involves five things: a. sign up for a week for which the topic or readings are particularly interesting to you; b. coordinate your work with the other student(s) also signed up for that week; c. write a 1-2-page critical reflection on some aspect of that week's readings of interest to you; d. come up with no more than 3-4 discussion questions for your entire group; and e. read your paper to the class on Thursday of that week and, with the other student(s) signed up for that day, facilitate the group discussion of your questions (15%).
3. Two 2-4-page critical reflection papers. This course is divided into three sections; students are asked to write a paper for any two of these and submit them on the days of those sections' final class sessions. Each paper should be comprised of the following three parts:
  - a. The Analytical Concept: In this part you are to explain an analytical concept (e.g., ideology, unsettled lives, living narratives, symbolic dilemma, discourse rules, rationalization, etc.) that was introduced in any of the assigned readings for the appropriate section in the course schedule. You should also address the issue of why you think this is an important and/or useful concept for investigating religion in contemporary society.
  - b. The Author(s)'s Use of the Analytical Concept: Here you should evaluate the extent to which the author(s)'s use of the analytical concept was insightful and what, if anything, they could have done to have made it more so.
  - c. Your Use of the Analytical Concept: In this final part and, importantly, based on your evaluation of it in part b., you are to apply the analytical concept you selected vis-à-vis your own analysis of some aspect of contemporary religion. In other words, you are actually being asked to *use* the concept you have chosen to look more deeply at some religious phenomenon, event, group, ritual, doctrine, experience, leadership position, practice – you name it. What you investigate may be something you are already aware of (or have already experienced) or it can be something for which you do some modest exploration (30%).
4. A 7-12-page cultural analysis paper. To enable you to delve deeper into your studies of culture and religion and to give you a taste for undertaking sociological research, you are to pose a question pertaining to religion in contemporary culture and provide an answer by employing either content analysis, survey, experimental or in-depth interview method. Note that you will be reading exemplars of each of these methods as we proceed through the syllabus and, at the appropriate time, you will receive some training in these methods. Also note that these assignments are not full-blown research projects; rather, they are designed to expose you to these modes of data gathering such that you may become more critical “consumers” and

competent “producers” of sociological information. Your papers should be comprised of the following three sections:

- a. Question / Method: very briefly give the question addressed in your paper and the specific manner in which you attempted to answer it. Note: If applicable, please include your survey or interview schedule as an appendix.
- b. Findings / Data: present your findings in a clear and engaging fashion.
- c. Reflection / Discussion: critically assess your findings, the effectiveness of your method for addressing your question and, most importantly, discuss what this exercise has taught you about the nexus of religion and culture.

NB: Among other things, this project is intended to get you out of the classroom and into the everyday world where religious convictions, identities, dilemmas, etc. are actually lived out. *And don't forget to be creative!* If you're interested in content analysis, you might explore Christian rock music, markings on gravestones, pop spirituality literature, hymnody, religious websites, religious themes in horror movies, televangelists' broadcasts, and so on. If you want to try your hand at interviewing, perhaps you could interview inter-religious couples on child-rearing practices, gay and straight Catholics on images of God, various generations of Jews concerning the State of Israel, pro-choice and pro-life activists on moral discernment, Anglo and Asian Buddhists on their understandings of their faith tradition, etc. If you'd like to devise a survey, you could query people about various dimensions (belief, practice, knowledge, etc.) of religion, about their understanding of the relationship between religion and politics, and so forth. If you're into devising an experiment, then, of course, the possibilities here are endless. In any case, the sky is the limit. The important thing is for you to be creative and to use – not just mull over – the analytical tools you learn in this class. In short, here on top of the GTU's “holy hill” we are surrounded by the world's religions and by a vast array of religious manifestations just waiting to be explored . . . by you. Note that this paper is due on (or, if you'd like) before Friday, December 19<sup>th</sup> at 5pm (40%).

**Pass / Fail Option:** Students who are interested in taking this course but, for whatever reason, may not want to write a cultural analysis paper, may do the first three course requirements conscientiously and be evaluated through the pass / fail schema.

### **Course Schedule:**

#### **I. Introducing Culture: Why, When and How it Matters**

Week 1 (Sept. 4): Introduction to the Course and to One Another

Week 2 (Sept. 8 & 11): Thinking about Culture

\*Clifford Geertz, “The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man” in  
*The*

*Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), especially pp. 43-54.  
\*Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" in *The Interpretation of Cultures*  
(New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 87-125.  
\*William H. Sewell, Jr. "The Concept(s) of Culture" in Victoria E. Bonnell and  
Lynn Hunt, eds., *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and  
Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 35-61.

Week 3 (Sept. 15 & 18): Culture as "Tool Kit"  
Swidler, *Talk of Love*, Introduction, chapters 1-5, Methodological Appendix.

Week 4 (Sept. 22 & 25): Culture as "Tool Kit" (cont.)  
Swidler, *Talk of Love*, chapters 6-8, Conclusion.  
\*Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, "Color Blind: Evangelicals Speak on the  
'Race Problem'" in *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in  
America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 69-91.

Week 5 (Sept. 29 & Oct. 2): The Individual Agent as "Cultured"  
Smith, *Moral, Believing Animals*, chapters 1-5.

## II. Tool Kits, Narratives and Identities in Action

Week 6 (Oct. 6 & 9): A "Cultured" Look at American Catholicism  
Baggett, *Sense of the Faithful*, Preface, chapters 1-4, Appendix B.  
\*Thomas F. O'Dea, "Five Dilemmas of the Institutionalization of Religion," *Journal  
for the Scientific Study of Religion* 1 (October 1961): 30-41.

Week 7 (Oct. 13 & 16): Community, Civil Society and the Limits of Reflexivity  
Baggett, *Sense of the Faithful*, chapters 5-7.  
\*Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal  
of Democracy*, 6 (January 1995): 65-78.

Week 8: Reading Week

Week 9 (Oct. 27 & 30): Becoming Religious – Race, Religion and Immigration  
Chen, *Getting Saved in America*, Introduction, chapters 1-3.

Week 10 (November 3 & 6): Becoming Religious – Gender and Practice  
Chen, *Getting Saved in America*, chapters 4-5, Conclusion.

### III. Other Methods of “Seeing” Culture

Week 11 (Nov. 10 & 13): Survey

Ecklund, *Science vs. Religion*, chapters 1-5, 8-9, Appendices A, B and C.

Week 12 (Nov. 17 & 20): Experiments

\*John M. Darley and C. Daniel Batson, “From Jerusalem to Jericho’: A Study of Situation and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior,” *Journal of Personality and*

*Social Psychology*, vol. 27, no. 1 (1973): 100-8.

\*A. N. Doob and A. E. Gross, “Status of Frustrator as an Inhibitor of Horn-Honking

Responses,” *The Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 76 (1968): 213-18.

\*Lawrence W. Sherman and Richard A. Berk, “The Specific Deterrent Effects of Arrest for Domestic Assault,” *American Sociological Review*, 49 (1984): 261-72.

Week 13 (Nov. 24): Participant Observation

\*Bill J. Leonard, “The Bible and Serpent-Handling” in Peter W. Williams, ed., *Perspectives on American Religion and Culture* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 228-40.

\*Before class on Monday, please view the documentary *Holy Ghost People* (1967),

which is available via YouTube at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nx8yXNGcE1Q>.

Week 14 (Dec. 1 & 4): Content Analysis

Witten, *All Is Forgiven*, chapters 1-3, 5 and 7, Appendix Two.

Week 15 (Dec. 8 & 11): Historical Analysis

Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, chapters 1-3, 4 (part A) and 5.

#### Instructions for Accessing Moodle

- Go to <http://moodle.gtu.edu/>
- Go to the “Search” box and enter 4161
- The prompt will ask you for a pass code, enter the following code number – 999
- Once the code is entered, you should be added to the course
- Once you have access to Moodle course page, you will be able to:
  - Access and download the syllabus
  - Access and download any articles
    - Many articles will be opened as an Adobe pdf document. For best results in reading and printing the Adobe pdf document, it is advised that you save it to your computer for either printing or reading (this will enable you also to turn the document for easier reading)

- If you have any questions, you can email Jerome Baggett's research assistant, Shelly Slemp Doley ([shelly.slemp@gmail.com](mailto:shelly.slemp@gmail.com)).

**Inclusive Language Policy:** The academic community of the Jesuit School of Theology recognizes that the language and images used in daily communication both form and reflect the way persons perceive, regard, and treat one another. The school affirms the usage of unbiased and inclusive language in written, oral, and visual communication.