

# SOCI 310 <sup>1</sup>

## Religion in Society

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### Course Description:

During the last century, many social historians believed that developed, Western societies would become increasingly secular, thinking that religious beliefs and values would continue to retreat from the center of public life. However, various developments over the last several decades such as the re-emergence and increasing influence of Christian fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, the proliferation of New Religious Movements or non-institutional forms of religious life—sometimes called cults, and the specter of religious terrorism have led others to question the idea that Western democracies would inevitably secularize. Many today call our times post-secular.

This course will seek to understand the philosophical, socio-political, and psychological roots of the contemporary religious belief underlying our post-secular times. It will seek to understand why people in today's 'secular societies' continue to turn to religion for direction in their lives. What do they think religious faith offers them that they believe they cannot find elsewhere?

### Course Outcomes/Objectives:

This will not be a course on the tenets or history of any of the major world religions. The goal of the course is to introduce students to classical and contemporary social theories of religion and secularization, while also creating an appreciation for the complex social dynamics between religious and secular life in today's Western societies. We will discuss issues surrounding the definition of religion, some of the key elements of religious experience, and some of the important sources for understanding the tension between secularism and religious life.

### Topics May Include:

Secularism and Post-Secularism  
Social Theories of Religion: Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Freud, Nietzsche  
Death of God Theology  
Cults (Heaven's Gate, Branch Dividians)  
Liberation Theologies  
Post-Secular Thought (Gianni Vattimo, Richard Kearney)  
New Atheism  
Religious Extremism (Fundamentalism and Terrorism)

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<sup>1</sup> This online outline is only intended to give an overall sense of the course. Detailed course outlines will be made available for all registered students on the first day of class. Only those outlines are to be considered official.

Evangelicalism

**Required Resources May Include:**

This course *may* include the following textbook (L. Dawson and J. Thiessen. 2014. *The Sociology of Religion: A Canadian Perspective*. Don Mills: Oxford) with supplemental resources provided via CourseSpaces.

**Course Delivery:**

This course will be delivered online and *asynchronously*. Each week, annotated lecture material (slides with audio/video material attached) will be uploaded to CourseSpaces.