

GRADUATE QUALIFYING EXAMINATION

SELF SELECTED SPECIALIZATION: SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

27 August 2007

This examination has three sections. You must answer one question from each section, for a total of three separate essays.

Your complete exam must be no longer than 15 double-spaced pages (i.e., 5 pages per question), excluding the references. You should follow a journal format (e.g., *American Sociological Review*) for references and citations. You have 24 hours from the time you receive your exam to return it to Claudette Parker as an email attachment.

No discussion of any Qualifying Examination with any other person is permitted until after 28 August 2007, when all examinations have been completed.

SECTION I. RESPOND TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING

1. In the sociology of religion, as in many other areas of sociology, Durkheim and Weber are founding thinkers.

(a) Compare and contrast their approaches to the sociological study of religion, their views about the relationship between religion and society, and the limits of or problems with each perspective.

(b) What important sociological research on religion has been conducted from within each of these perspectives? Give at least one concrete example for each perspective.

2. At least since Weber, the relationship between religion and social change has been a central concern in the sociological study of religion. Much, though not all, of the theorizing and research on this subject has been conducted under the rubric of “secularization.”

(a) Describe the development and current state of debate on this subject. How is “secularization” variously defined? What arguments and evidence support the conclusion that secularization is true, either as a descriptive fact or as a theory? What arguments and evidence support the conclusion that secularization is false, either as a descriptive fact or as a theory? Be specific.

(b) What, in your view, is the most promising direction for research on religion and social change? You may answer this with respect to secularization or with respect to research on religion and social change that is not directly about secularization.

NB: A solid response to this question will be focused approximately 90% on (a) and approximately 10% on (b).

SECTION II. RESPOND TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING

1. As in other areas of sociology, measurement issues often arise in the sociological study of religion. Describe a measurement issue that has been or continues to be important in the sociological study of religion. Be sure to discuss why the measurement issue that you identify is important for theoretical and empirical claims or debates in the field. Say how you would handle the issue if you were doing research for which it is relevant, and defend your choice.

2. Much sociological study of religion is devoted to the basic question: How does an individual's religiosity "affect" his or her attitudes or behavior in nonreligious contexts?

(a) Virtually all of the literature addressing versions of this question has been shaped by Stark and Glock's conceptualization of the multidimensionality of individual religiosity. Describe that conceptualization.

(b) Describe and assess the literature addressing this basic question with respect to a specific dependent variable or set of related dependent variables (for example, health behavior/attitudes, political behavior/attitudes, educational attainment). Be sure that your answer clearly describes the state of knowledge about religious effects on this dependent variable, and be sure to say what you consider to be the most significant unanswered questions in this field that future research should address.

3. The sociology of religion is much concerned with variation in religion's social organization. Describe major efforts to conceptualize and explain this variation. Be sure to discuss how sociological thinking about this variation has developed over time.

SECTION III. RESPOND TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING

1. A *New York Times Magazine* reporter is writing a feature story on religion in America. She asks you to help her decide what to write about. Specific questions that she asks you include: What are the key features about American religion that the general public should know about? What are the key trends over time? What does sociological research tell us about American religion that we wouldn't know in the absence of this research? Are there any empirical or

theoretical controversies about American religion that are significant enough to share with the general public?

What do you tell her? Be sure that your answer includes at least *ten* distinct, research-based, substantive points. Unlike in a magazine article, cite the research that supports each of your points.

2. You have been asked to design an introductory course in the sociology of religion.

(a) Describe five units that you would include in this course. For each unit, describe (i) that unit's organizing theme or question, (ii) at least 2 readings you would assign on that theme or question, and (iii) what each of those readings contributes to the theme or question.

(b) Also, say how you would sequence these five units, and give a rationale for your sequencing. This rationale can be embedded in your essay ("Unit 2 follows naturally from Unit 1 because . . ."), or it can be presented separately at the end of your answer. Either way, the sequencing rationale should take up no more than one page of text.