SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ESSAY TITLES:

1. GENERAL SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION.

Readers:

R. Bocock and Kenneth Thompson, Religion and Ideology, OU, 1985

Introductions:

Peter Clarke and Peter Byrne, Religion Defined and Explained, Macmillan, 1993.
Rodney Stark, A theory of religion, Lang, 1987

On contemporary religion:

*Steve Bruce, Religion in Modern Britain, OUP, 1995 (Useful intro. on modern UK).

On the classics:

Lewis A. Coser, Masters of Sociological Thought
R.A. Nisbet, The Sociological Tradition, Heineman, 1966 (S18.21)
Daniel L. Pals, Seven Theories of Religion (on Durkheim and Marx), OUP, 1996.
2. TOPICS

i. Secularisation.

a) Is secularisation irreversible?
b) What is meant by a secular society?
c) What have been the core manifestations of the process of secularisation in the West?

Owen Chadwick, *The Secularisation of the European Mind in the 19th Century*.

W. Pickering, *Sociology of Anglicanism* in Sykes and Booty.
David Nicholls, *Church and State in Britain since 1820*, RKP, 1967.


ii. Church and Sect.

a) What are the distinguishing features of churches, sects and denominations?
b) What factors promote or retard sect development?
c) Do you agree that the best way to define a sect is in terms of its response to the world?

iii. Functionalism (Durkheim)

a) What are the strengths and weaknesses of functionalist approaches to the sociology of religion?
b) Have the social functions that sociologists once ascribed to religion now been superseded?
c) What advances, if any, have been made in the sociology of religion since Durkheim?
d) What are the main functions of religion in modern society?

See general reading list. On Durkheim, see esp:


iv. The Protestant Ethic

a) Critically assess Weber’s account of the relationship between Protestantism and Capitalism.
b) What part, if any, did Protestantism play in the emergence of modern capitalism?
c) How, in Weber’s opinion, does an understanding of ascetic Calvinism help one to understand the rise of modern capitalism?


v. Karl Marx

a) What social functions did Marx ascribe to religion?

Marx and Engels, *On Religion; Theses on Feuerbach; The German Ideology; Capital*, Chs. 1 & 3.


a) What factors have led to the growth of New Religious Movements?
b) What is meant by fundamentalism? Why does it seem to have grown in recent years?
c) Why do so many people expect the world to come to an end?

Peter Clarke, *New Paths to Salvation*, Macmillan.


vii. Biblical Studies and Sociology

a) What are the problems of the so-called ‘sociological interpretation of the bible’? (this can be restricted to either the Old or New Testaments).


viii. Theology and Sociology

a) Examine John Milbank’s critique of social theory in *Theology and Social Theory*. To what extent is it a “retreat from serious worldliness”?
b) What is the relationship between theology and sociology?


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