UCLouvain

lpols1329

2026

Sociology of Religion

5.00 credits	30.0 h	Q1

Teacher(s)	Maréchal Brigitte ;Remy Lionel (compensates Maréchal Brigitte) ;
Language :	French
Place of the course	Louvain-la-Neuve
Learning outcomes	**At the end of this learning unit, the student is able to :** 1 The course will aim to introduce students to a concrete analysis of religious or Assimilable (whether they are recognised as such or not) phenomena in forms in which they grow or develop in the contemporary social and cultural context.
Evaluation methods	The oral exam is based on a questionnaire given to students in advance; it aims to help students articulate and summarize the material around key questions.
Teaching methods	The course, which is lecture-based and supported by PowerPoint presentations with commentary shared to students, is supplemented by a reading list (to be read as the course progresses; with articles in English). However, using various documentary materials distributed before certain classes, the teaching approach also aims to be as interactive as possible: it attempts to build on students' prior experience and knowledge and/or reflections from these readings, ideally completed in advance, before presenting a theoretical summary. The case studies considered are resolutely contemporary and drawn from a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds.
Content	Drawing on classical authors (including E. Durkheim, K. Marx, M. Weber, and G. Simmel) as well as contemporary authors (including D. Hervieu-Léger, J. Stoltz, A. Piette, A.-S. Lamine, N. Luca, K. Dobbelaere, J.-M. Donegani, as well as M. McGuire, E. Barker, etc.), we will seek to understand how the sociology of religion can be used to analyze contemporary religious facts and phenomena (in the broad sense, whether based on their highly institutionalized social forms or outside of them) and their evolution in relation to cultural and social changes. After presenting the existential origins of religion and establishing this fundamental distinction between religiosity and religion, it will be important for us to review how religion has been approached differently within the various paradigms that have historically emerged within the discipline. In the meantime, various questions will have been raised, such as the difficulty of identifying markers to attempt a definition of this object, the functions of religion, etc. Indeed, how has religion been thought of until now? Using which concepts? What have these contributions successively implied in the history of ideas, and what can this still mean today: among other things, what are the contributions and limitations of sociological approaches to religion when addressing religious phenomena from the most diverse cultural backgrounds? In order to analyze the social uses of religion in contemporary times—particularly as a symbolic, spiritual, and moral resource/constraint—and their implications, certain dimensions of religion will also be specifically addressed, including practices, even the most ordinary ones, considered in relation to beliefs, as well as organizations, networks, and leadership (including the question of the sources of legitimacy of these authorities and their transformations). All these questions surrounding the ways in which people's religions and religiosity are transformed to a greater or lesser extent, or not at all, cannot be detached from the contexts in which they exist and which they in turn influence. Thus, while taking a middle ground between theory and analysis of concrete, highly varied realities, this course offers students an analytical framework that allows them to consider the preservation, transformation, and diversification of the religious in light of major contemporary changes. These changes are marked in particular by contradictory dynamics: individualization and even subjectivization, but also processes of secularization and glocalization, which are likely to lead to both an erosion and a reaffirmation of beliefs and practices, and to growing pluralism and relativism. All these questions surrounding the ways in which religions and religious beliefs are undergoing more or less significant transformations, or not at all, And while the indifference that seems to be emerging in Europe is being challenged by religious reaffirmations, the increased salience of certain global issues (including those related to the denunciation of social injustices, patriarchy, and the ecological crisis) is calling into question contemporary religiosity and even religions themselves: among others, technicism and capitalism, which can be seen as materialistic religions advocating endless growth, but also ecology, which is capable of founding new religious forms. Translated with DeepL.com (free version)
Inline resources	PowerPoint presentations with audio commentary are posted on the Moodle platform, which also contains a reading list and documentary files that are used in the course to encourage students to reflect before the class begins. Some of these materials are specifically designed to stimulate discussion during the class.

Faculty or entity in charge	ESPO

Programmes containing this learning unit (UE)

Program title	Acronym	Credits	Prerequisite	Learning outcomes
Minor in Sciences of Religions (discipline to complement the major)	MINSREL	5		
Master [120] in Sciences of Religions	SREL2M	4		
Minor in Sociology and Anthropology	MINSOCA	5		
Minor in Sciences of Religions (openness) - (only available for reenrolment)	MINRELI	5		
Minor "Decentering History: Subalternities and postcolonial Studies"	MINDHIS	5		
Mineure "Appréhender le religieux depuis les sciences sociales"	MINAREL	5		