

Calvin College  
Congregational and Ministry Studies 151  
Spring Semester 2010

Course Title: Church and Society

Section: A

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## I. Course Description

“Church and Society” introduces students to the study of human social activity by examining the Christian church as a societal institution in the North American context. In particular, the course will introduce students to an innovative, give-and-take approach to both “the church” and “society.” On the one hand, as an introduction to the study of human social activity, we will seek to appreciate the church as a social institution and consider its dynamic relationship with other norms, patterns, structures and institutions in a wider societal context—with a specific focus on issues of race. We will appreciate that the church exhibits many of the same features as other social institutions. On the other hand, we will also be considering how, implicit in the church’s practice, is a distinct and normative vision for social life and human flourishing. Students will thus be introduced to sociology through congregational studies while appreciating the way in which the church—as a social institution—informs the practice of social science.

Central to this approach will be a focus on issues of race in relationship to the church as a social institution in the United States, considering both the failures and possibilities for racial reconciliation and justice—as documented by Christian Smith, Michael Emerson, and Charles Marsh. This focus on race provides an important lens for seeing the church as a social institution that both reflects and impacts a wider society.

The course will also introduce students to the scholarship of engagement through a central, culminating project that will engage the students in the study of a local congregation. Throughout the course we will be building a theoretical and analytical “toolbox” for considering the church as a social institution embedded within a wider societal context. A progressive, culminating project will undertake on-the-ground research of a particular congregation, utilizing the case study approach outlined in Ammerman, *et. al.*, *Studying Congregations*. Early in the semester, students will be placed as participant-observers in a local congregation and will undertake original sociological research of the congregation, with particular attention to two aspects: (1) its nature as a social institution and (2) the vision of society that is implicit in the practices of the congregation. Findings from this research will be presented in a poster session, but will also be shared with congregations with the hopes that such research can serve these congregations by providing an occasion to reflect on congregational practices.

## II. Texts

Warner, R. Stephen. (2005). *A Church of Our Own*. Rutgers University Press.

Cavanaugh, William. (1998) *Torture and Eucharist*. Blackwell.

Emerson, Michael and Christian Smith. (2000). *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Marsh, Charles. (2005). *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today*. New York: Basic Books.

*Church and Society Reader.* This course pack will include articles at the intersection of sociology and ecclesiology (from authors such as Charles Taylor, Christian Scharen, Roger Haight, Christian Smith, James Nieman, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Dooyeweerd, John Milbank, William Cavanaugh, and others), as well as ‘liturgical artifacts’ as one means of studying the social dynamics of worship practices and how Christian worship envisions and impacts societal structures.

### III. Course Outcomes/Objectives

#### A. Core Knowledge

Upon completion of this course, students will have a basic understanding of:

- the basic research methods of sociology, particularly as appropriated and employed in the field of congregational studies;
- basic research methods of sociology, including participation observation and scripted interviews;
- major theoretical paradigms in sociology (e.g., structural-functionalist, conflict, and symbolic-interactionist approaches), as well as key issues on the relationship between sociology and theology (ecclesiology);
- the interaction and influence of culture, group dynamics, and social systems in the organization, practices, and habits of society;
- causes and consequences of social inequities, with a particular appreciation for the church’s role in both contributing to and contesting racial inequities;
- the contributions of sociology for understanding the church as a social institution; and
- the implicit sociological visions that are “carried” in ecclesial practices.

These knowledge outcomes will be assessed through the evaluation of examinations, tests, written assignments, and a culminating project presentation.

#### B. Core Skills

Upon completion of this course, students will demonstrate basic competency in:

- written rhetoric commensurate with professional writing in the social sciences;
- quantitative and empirical reasoning commensurate with social science methodologies;
- qualitative research skills, including interview and participant-observer approaches;
- thinking critically yet charitably about the church as a social institution;
- thinking critically yet charitably about other social institutions from the perspective of Christian ecclesial practice.

These skill outcomes will be assessed through the evaluation of examinations, tests, written assignments, and a culminating project presentation, as well as observation of student performance in class discussions, research situations, and interactions with parishioners.

### IV. Course Outline

Part I. Sociology, Ecclesiology, and Ethnography: Introduction to the Project

Part II. Studying Congregations

- A. Sociological Research Methods
- B. The Church as Organization

1. Theoretical Perspectives: Structural Functionalism and Conflict Theory
  2. An Ecological Systems Perspective
  3. Culture and Identity
  4. Process and the Dynamics of Change
  5. Leadership, Politics, and Power
- C. The Church as a Social Institution
1. The Church and “the World” Revisited
  2. Societal Institutions, Dynamic relations

Part III. Ecclesiology: A Theologically-Informed Sociology

- A. The Church as Organism/Institution (Kuyper)
- B. The Church as Polis (Milbank, Hauerwas)
- C. The Church as Sacramental Body (Calvin, Cavanaugh)

Part IV. Being the Church Takes Practice: Reading Liturgical Practices

- A. Theoretical Perspective: Symbolic Interactionism
- B. Reading Liturgical Practices

Part V. Case Studies of the Church in Society: Race, Class, and Gender

- A. Social Stratification
- B. Divided by Faith: Evangelical Practices and Racialization
- C. The Beloved Community: Ecclesial Origins of the Civil Rights Movement

Part VI. Research Presentations

**V. Weekly Schedule and Assignments**

**Week 1 (Feb 2 & 4):** Ecclesiology and Ethnography: Introduction to the Course

1. T
2. TH

**Week 2 (Feb 9 & 11):** Background: Sociology of Religion

1. T Smith, “On Religion,” *Moral, Believing Animals* (Oxford University Press, 2003), ch. 5.
2. TH Warner, *A Church of Our Own* (Rutgers University Press, 2005), ch. 2.

**Week 3 (Feb 16 & 18):** Methods in Congregational Studies

1. T Chavez, “Worship,” *Congregations in America* (Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 127-165 and 251-256.
2. TH Warner, *A Church of Our Own*, chs. 5 and 11.

**Week 4 (Feb 23 & 25):** The Church as Organization: Ecology, Culture, and Identity

1. T McRoberts, “Introduction,” *Streets of Glory* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 1-15 and 151-155.
2. TH Warner, *A Church of Our Own*, ch. 8 and Eisland and Warner, “Ecology: Seeing the Congregation in Context,” from *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, ed. by Nancy Ammerman et. al. (Abingdon, 1998), pp. 40-77.

**Week 5 (March 2 & 4):** The Church as Organization and Social Institution: Dynamics of Change, Leadership, Politics, and Relationships

1. T Ammerman, "Introductions," *Congregation and Community* (Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 1-62.
2. TH Dougherty and Mulder, "Congregational Responses to Growing Urban Diversity in a White Ethnic Denomination," *Social Problems*, May 2009, pp. 335-356.

**Week 6 (March 9 & 11):** Exam week: Discussion, Review, and Exam

1. T Discussion and Review
2. TH **Midterm Exam**

**Week 7 (March 16 & 18):** Ecclesiology: The Church as Organism/Institution (Kuyper)

1. T Kuyper, "Church and Culture," from *Common Grace in Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. J. Bratt (Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 187-201.
2. TH H. Zwaanstra, "Abraham Kuyper's Conception of the Church," *CTJ* 9 (1974): 149-181.

**Week 8 (March 23 & 25):** No Class (Spring Break)

**Week 9 (March 30 & April 1):** Ecclesiology: The Church as Polis (Hauerwas, Clapp)

1. T R. Clapp, "The Church as Church: Practicing the Politics of Jesus," *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (InterVarsity Press, 1996), pp. 76-93.
2. TH Clapp, "The Church as Worshiping Community: Welcome to the (Real) World," *A Peculiar People*, pp. 94-113.

**Week 10 (April 6 & 8):** The Church as Sacramental Body (Calvin, Cavanaugh)

1. T Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist* (Blackwell, 1998), ch. 2.
2. TH Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, ch. 5.

**Week 11 (April 13 & 15):** Being the Church Takes Practice: Reading Liturgical Practices

1. T Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist*, ch. 6.
2. TH Leithart, "The Way Things Really Ought to Be: Eucharist, Eschatology, and Culture" in *Westminster Theological Journal* 59 (1997):159-76.

**Week 12 (April 20 & 22):** Case Studies of the Church in Society: Race, Class, and Gender

1. T *Divided by Faith*
2. TH *Divided by Faith*

**Week 13 (April 27 & 29):** Case Studies of the Church in Society: Race, Class, and Gender (continued)

1. T **No Class (Academic Advising)**
2. TH *Beloved Community*

**Week 14 (May 4 & 6):** Research Presentations

1. T *Beloved Community*
2. TH [no class in lieu of poster session]

**Week 15 (May 11):** Research Presentations

1. T final discussion and review

**Exam:**

## VI. Course Requirements

*Attendance and Participation.* Regular attendance, reading of texts, completion of homework, and participation in class discussions are the essential foundation for succeeding in this course.

*Exams.* There will be a mid-term and final exam in the course. Study guides will be provided. [2x25%=50%]

*Journal.* Students will be required to respond to a series of questions throughout the semester. [10%]

*Cumulative Research Project: A Congregational Study.* Throughout the course we will be building a theoretical and analytical “toolbox” for considering the church as a social institution embedded within a wider societal context. A progressive, culminating project will undertake on-the-ground research of a particular congregation, utilizing the approach in *Studying Congregations*. Early in the semester, students will be placed as participant-observers in a local congregation and will undertake original sociological research of the congregation, with particular attention to two aspects: (1) its nature as a social institution and (2) the implicit vision of society that is implicit in the practices of the congregation. Full details of this project will be provided. [40%]

The grade scale is as follows:

96-100% -- A  
91-95 – A-  
87-90 – B+  
83-86 – B  
80-82 – B-  
77-79 – C+  
73-76 – C  
70-72 – C-  
67-69 – D+  
63-66 – D  
60-62 – D-  
Below 60 – F

## VII. Instructional Accommodation

It is Calvin’s policy to make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should notify a Coordinator of Services to Students with Disabilities (located in Student Academic Services, HH 455). Students with documented disabilities should notify within the first two weeks of class with respect to necessary accommodations.

## VIII. A Caveat

The schedule and procedure in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.

Additional readings:

Steve Warner, “The Place of the Congregation in Contemporary American Religious Configuration.”

Mark Chavez, “Worship” in *Congregations in America*.

Mark Chavez, et. al. “The National Congregations Study: Background, Methods, and Selected Results.”

Nancy Ammerman, "Congregation and Community: Introductions" in *Congregation and Community*.

Steve Warner, "The De-Europeanization of American Christianity."

Steve Warner, "Elizondo's Pastoral Theology in Action: An Inductive Appreciation."

Tim Nelson, "Sacrifice of Praise: Emotion and Collective Participation in an African American Worship Service."

Omar McRoberts, "Introduction" in *Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood*.