

## Introduction to the Sociology of Religion, part 2 (Christiano et al., chapter 2)

### Some Theoretical Frameworks

**Functionalism** was the dominant perspective in American sociology and the sociology of religion in the 1950s and 1960s. Functionalism likens society to an organism with interconnected parts. Religion was viewed as contributing to society by providing social solidarity. However, it did not seem to function that way in modern society. Two responses: (1) pessimism about the state of society; (2) search for the “real religion” of society.

**Conflict theory** became important in American sociology in the 1970s but not so much in the sociology of religion.

Secularization theory (see chapter 3) and the rise of new religious movements (NRMs) led to the demise of functionalism and the rise of a “**new paradigm.**”

“The core proposition of this theoretical orientation is that religious choice making (or religious action) does not differ significantly as a process from other forms of choice making.”

The model of the actor used by many in the new paradigm is (unfortunately) rational-choice theory.

This approach has been used to explain the success of strict churches (by reducing free-riding) and increasing religiosity of the (religious) elderly (because they have religious capital invested).

Another tradition, *sociologie religieuse*, is an applied approach often used by religious institutions with quantifiable data (baptism, marriages, attendance).