



The Sacred Project of American Sociology

Christian Smith

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Counter to popular perceptions, contemporary American sociology is and promotes a profoundly sacred project at heart. Sociology today is in fact animated by sacred impulses, driven by sacred commitments, and serves a sacred project.

Sociology appears on the surface to be a secular, scientific enterprise--its founding fathers were mostly atheists. Its basic operating premises are secular and naturalistic. Sociologists today are disproportionately not religious, compared to all Americans, and often irreligious.

The Sacred Project of American Sociology shows, counter-intuitively, that the secular enterprise that everyday sociology appears to be pursuing is actually not what is really going on at sociology's deepest level. Christian Smith conducts a self-reflexive, tables-turning, cultural and institutional sociology of the profession of American sociology itself, showing that this allegedly secular discipline ironically expresses Emile Durkheim's inescapable sacred, exemplifies its own versions of Marxist false consciousness, and generates a spirited reaction against Max Weber's melancholically observed disenchantment of the world.

American sociology does not escape the analytical net that it casts over the rest of the ordinary world. Sociology itself is a part of that very human, very social, often very sacred and spiritual world. And sociology's ironic mis-recognition of its own sacred project leads to a variety of arguably self-destructive and distorting tendencies. This book re-asserts a vision for what sociology is most important for, in contrast with its current commitments, and calls sociologists back to a more honest, fair, and healthy vision of its purpose.

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