

Late Tuesday evening, June 27, 2017, Peter L. Berger passed away at his home in Brookline. He was 88 years old and was preceded in death in May 2015 by his wife Brigitte Berger. He is survived by his two sons; Thomas is a distinguished Professor of International Relations at Boston University, where Brigitte was Professor Emerita of Sociology, and Peter was Professor Emeritus of Religion, Sociology, and Theology. While his death was somewhat unexpected, it followed a recent illness and hospitalization. A memorial service is anticipated in the early fall.

I first encountered Peter Berger "on the page." The pages of *The Social Construction of Reality*, to be exact. It introduced me – and the entire discipline -- to phenomenological ways of thinking about society, and it has shaped me – and our field -- ever since. Equally important, his theoretical masterpiece, *The Sacred Canopy*, has been my touchstone for forty years. It has stayed on my grad seminar syllabi, even after he himself admitted that the secularization process he theorized in the second half of the book ended up not being as universally inevitable as he expected. It is nevertheless a masterpiece because it weaves together the best thinking from a century of social theory (the footnotes are amazing!) and shows how religion is and must be part of the picture.

As I was in the midst of writing my dissertation, one of my committee members left Yale, and Kai Erikson suggested that he would ask Peter to be a reader. That's when the Peter Berger on the page became an imposing and challenging real-life presence. He wrote a gracious and supportive review of my analysis of a Fundamentalist congregation, and I got my degree.

A decade later, an unannounced phone call from Peter ushered in the beginnings of the collegiality I have cherished since. It was an invitation to undertake a research project that would be headquartered at the Institute on Culture Religion and World Affairs. Being headquartered there meant the beginning of dozens of conversations in the seminar room of 10 Lenox Street, with Peter inevitably at the head of the table. He sometimes referred to that room as his "living room," and I do think he truly lived there. A stunning array of intellectual talent has assembled around that table, and dozens of books have been birthed, nurtured, and celebrated there. I am grateful to have been in that company in that place with Peter.

Another decade passed, and my own journey brought me to Boston University, where Peter was among the people who most warmly welcomed me. 10 Lenox Street again became the home for a research project for me, as Peter midwived a grant proposal through the Templeton Foundation to support the project that became *Sacred Stories*. Through these years as University colleagues, we served on dissertation committees together and thought together about how to strengthen sociology of religion at BU. Since he retired in 2010, I've missed seeing him on a regular basis.

Anyone who knew Peter not only knew his amazing intellect, but also his addiction to humor. He always had a new joke to share and frequently punctuated his theoretical excursions with a vivid story. But even more than humor, Peter was shaped by faith, the kind of faith that is built on skepticism, not certainty. Over the years he wrote almost as much about theological questions as about sociological ones, but his theological work was always deeply informed by his humanistic sociological sensibility. It's a rare combination, but one I have valued and learned from.

Peter Berger carved out a unique place in the world. A very big unique place. I am grateful that I had the chance to be part of the space he touched.

Nancy Ammerman  
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Boston