

**Rel3076: Cults and New Religious Movements**

Prof. Erin Prophet

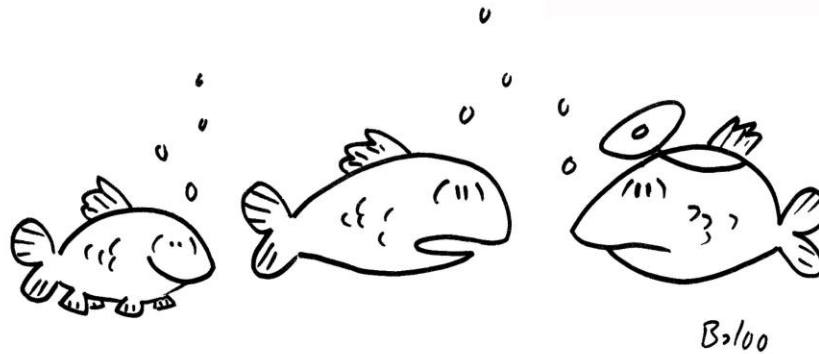
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Meeting Time: MWF, 3:00-3:50 p.m. (Period 8)

Meeting location: Matherly 105

Office: Anderson Hall 130

Office Hours: M, W 4-5 p.m.; Tu 3-4 p.m.



"You've got to help my son, Doctor  
— he's joined a cult that crawls  
up on beaches!"

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*All religions were once new; hence the phenomenon of new religious movements (NRMs) is nothing particularly new....Several factors make it seem likely, however, that the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw much more by way of religious diversity than previous periods in history.*

—George Chryssides, 2012<sup>1</sup>

**Course Description:** This course examines the “cult” and “new religious movement” in the context of modernity. Students will explore common typologies of religious groups, the dynamics of charismatic leadership, the sociology of small-group behavior, millennialism and apocalypticism, schism, violence, and government response, and models of conversion—including “brainwashing.” They will investigate how new religious groups push the boundaries of social norms concerning family, work and community, and trace the dynamics of tension and accommodation as groups change over time. Specific groups to be reviewed include the Shakers, Mormons, Peoples Temple (Jonestown), Rajneeshies, Branch Davidians, and Wicca. Methodological approaches include sociology, anthropology and religious studies. Students will

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<sup>1</sup> *Historical Dictionary of New Religious Movements*, edited by George Chryssides, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012, 1.

perform case studies or engage in comparative work on two or more groups. They will also develop a toolkit for evaluating the phenomenon of new religion through close reading, discussion, and written and oral presentation. Most classes include a short clip of a film, TV show or documentary (5-10 min) that can be further explored by students outside class.

*Course Goals.*

Students will:

- Be familiar with the academic literature surrounding cults and new religions and learn how to think about them from sociological, historical-critical, anthropological, psychological, and religious studies perspectives.
- Be able to explain basic concepts like typologies of religious groups, charisma, conversion, millennialism and apocalypticism, and understand theories of religious violence.
- Know the history of well-known and controversial new religious movements and “cults,” such as Mormonism, Peoples Temple (Jonestown), the Unification Church (“Moonies”), Scientology, Heaven’s Gate, Falun Gong, the Branch Davidians (Waco tragedy), and Wicca.
- Evaluate one or more specific traditions from methodological perspectives introduced in the class through an in-depth writing project.

*Role in Curriculum:* This course serves as an elective for Religion majors and minors. It also provides Social and Behavioral Sciences General Education credits.

*Course Contract:* By accepting this syllabus, you are agreeing to participate in frank discussions of many matters that are commonly avoided in public and considered offensive or disturbing by some. These include—but are by no means restricted to—unusual ritual practices and forms of social organization, alternative approaches to sexuality, gender, and child rearing, and religiously motivated violence, including suicide and mass suicide. If you are not ready to critically discuss such matters, do not take this course.

*Required Text (purchase)*

Dawson, Lorne. *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements*. Ontario, Canada: Oxford University Press, 2006.

*Selections from Additional Texts Assigned and Available on Canvas:*

Anthony, Dick, and Thomas Robbins. “Conversion and ‘Brainwashing’ in New Religious Movements.” In *Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, 1:243–97. 2004.

Arrington, Leonard J., and Davis Bitton. *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1979.

Ashcraft, W. Michael. *A Historical Introduction to the Study of New Religious Movements*. London: Routledge, 2018.

Bainbridge, William Sims and Rodney Stark. “Cult Formation: Three Compatible Models” *Sociological Analysis* 40:285-295, 1979.

- Barker, Eileen. "Charismatization: The Social Production of 'an Ethos Propitious to the Mobilisation of Sentiments.'" In *Secularization, Rationalism and Sectarianism: Essays in Honour of Bryan R. Wilson*, 181–201. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993.
- Cusack, Carole M, and Pavol Kosnáč. *Fiction, Invention and Hyper-reality: From Popular Culture to Religion*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Davidson, Markus Altena. "The Elven Path and the Silver Ship of the Valar: two spiritual groups based on J. R.R. Tolkien's Legendarium," in Cusack, Carole M, and Pavol Kosnáč. *Fiction, Invention and Hyper-reality: From Popular Culture to Religion*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Edelman, Bryan and James T. Richardson. "Falun Gong and the Law: Development of Legal Social Control in China." *Nova Religio* 6:2, 312–31, 2003.
- Fefferman, Dan. "Abductions and Secret Confinement Continue for Decades after Being Stopped in the West." CESNUR: Center for Studies on New Religions 2010.  
[http://www.cesnur.org/2010/to\\_fefferman.htm](http://www.cesnur.org/2010/to_fefferman.htm)
- Francis, Richard. *Ann, the Word: The Story of Ann Lee, Female Messiah, Mother of the Shakers, the Woman Clothed with the Sun*, excerpts. New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013.
- Globus, Robin and Bron Taylor. "Environmental Millennialism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, edited by Catherine Wessinger, 628–64. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Homer, Michael W. "The Precarious Balance Between Freedom of Religion and the Best Interests of the Child." In *Children in New Religions*, 187–209, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999.
- Introvigne, Massimo. "Brainwashing Just Ain't What It Used to Be: From *The Manchurian Candidate* (1959, 1962) to *The Manchurian Candidate* (2004)," CESNUR: Center for Studies on New Religions. 2004. [http://www.cesnur.org/2004/mi\\_mc.htm](http://www.cesnur.org/2004/mi_mc.htm)
- Kripal, Jeffrey. "From Emerson to Esalen: America's Religion of No Religion." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 53:32 pB6-B8.
- Lewis, James R. "Seekers and Subcultures." In *Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements* 2: 60–71. 2016.
- Lewis, James R. "Native American Prophet Religions." In *Legitimizing New Religions*. Rutgers University Press. 2003.
- Melton, J. Gordon. "Spiritualization and Reaffirmation: What Really Happens When Prophecy Fails." In *Expecting Armageddon: Essential Readings in Failed Prophecy*, ed. John R. Stone, 144–157. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Moore, Rebecca. "Narratives of Persecution, Suffering, and Martyrdom: Violence in Peoples Temple and Jonestown." In *Violence in New Religious Movements*, edited by James R. Lewis, 95–111. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Mueller, Michelle. "The Chalice and the Rainbow: Conflicts Between Women's Spirituality and Transgender Rights in US Wicca in the 2010s." In *Female Leaders in New Religious*

- Movements*, edited by Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen and Christian Giudice. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Palmer, Susan Jean. *Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women's Roles in New Religions*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994.
- Palmer, Susan J. *The New Heretics of France*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011.
- Palmer, Susan J. and Charlotte E. Hardman. "Alternative Childhoods." In *Children in New Religions*, 1–8, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999.
- Puttick, Elizabeth. "Women in New Religious Movements." In *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response*, edited by Bryan Wilson and Jamie Cresswell, pp. 143-162, 1999.
- Prophet, Erin. "Charisma and Authority in New Religious Movements." In *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, 2:36–49. 2016a.
- Prophet, Erin. "New Religion." In *Religion: Sources, Perspectives, and Methodologies*, edited by Jeffrey Kripal, 159–76. Macmillan Interdisciplinary Handbooks. Boston: Macmillan Reference, 2016b.
- Prophet, Erin. *Coercion or Conversion: A Case Study in Religion and the Law CUT v. Mull v. Prophet 1986*. Gainesville, FL: Linden Books. 2018.
- Thursby, Gene. 2011 "The Study of Hindu New Religious Movements." *Nova Religio* 15:2 (6-19).
- Van Eck Duymaer van Twist, Amanda. *Perfect Children: Growing Up on the Religious Fringe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Wessinger, Catherine. 2001. *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* New York: Seven Bridges Press. Chapter 2, pp. 12-29.
- Wright, Stuart A. and Susan J. Palmer. *Storming Zion: Government Raids on Religious Communities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Yates, Bonnie. "John Victor Stoen: Son of Jonestown" Alternative Considerations of Jonestown & Peoples Temple, 6-1-2017, [https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page\\_id=30909](https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=30909)
- Young, John, and Ezra Griffith. "A Critical Evaluation of Coercive Persuasion as Used in the Assessment of Cults." *Behavioral Sciences and The Law* 10 (1992): 89–101.

*Requirements:*

1. Course participation and attendance (20% of grade). Includes attendance, participation in group discussion as well as contribution to class discussions and completion of surveys and other in-class assessments. To achieve full credit for participation, students should be consistently prepared, engage in discussion, actively take notes, and offer informed questions and comment.

Attendance guidelines: All students are allowed one unexcused absence. Each unexcused absence after the first will result in a five-point deduction from the overall participation grade. Students with five or more unexcused absences will

automatically fail the course. Absences will be considered excused only if a written (paper or email) request is submitted and accepted at least 24 hours in advance or if written explanations are submitted with valid documentation.

Use of technology: During class, electronic devices may be used only for note-taking or for accessing course readings. Students who use electronic devices for non-course purposes may be asked to put devices away and take notes on paper for one or more periods. Participation grades are tied to appropriate use of technology.

2. Examinations: 40% of grade. Week 5 Quiz (5% of grade). Midterm Examination (15% of grade). The midterm will cover all lectures, readings, and class discussion during weeks 1–7; Final Examination (20% of grade). The final exam will cover all lectures, readings, and class discussion during the entire course, with a heavier emphasis on the period following the midterm.
3. Writing assignments: 40% of grade. Single group review (10%). Write a three-page review of a single new religious movement and apply at least one of the methodologies reviewed in class or reading (600 to 750 words plus bibliography and endnotes). Final paper (30% of grade). Write a 10-page (c. 2,000 words) paper, not including references and endnotes. A proposal and outline for this paper make up 10% of the total grade (1/3 of the paper grade). The paper topic can be either an in-depth historical treatment of a single group (including the same one as for the single issue review) or a comparison of two groups, using more than one methodology. See the end of the syllabus for additional guidelines on written assignments.

Day	Topic	Reading and Assignments
Week 1 Mon. Jan. 7	Syllabus and Course Contract; Student Learning Goals	Watch in class: “American Experience: The Mormons” (exc.)
Week 1 Wed. Jan. 9	Definitional questions	Prophet, “New Religion” Watch in class: “Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple” (exc.) Due: Initial assessment
Week 1 . Jan. 11	Family Trees	Dawson ch 1, “Why Study NRMs?” Watch in class: “The Source Family” (exc.)
Week 2 Mon. Jan 14	Definitions and Methodologies	Dawson ch 2, “What are NRMs?” Watch in class: “This Changed Everything” (exc.)
Week 2 Wed. Jan. 16	Why Do New Religious Movements Emerge?	Dawson ch 3; Watch in class: “The Peyote Road” (exc.) Due online: Family Tree assignment
Week 2 Fri. Jan. 18	Origins: The Shakers	Encyclopedia of Religion, “Shakers.” Francis ch 2 (25-50). In class: discuss oral presentations
Week 3 Mon. Jan. 21	No Class: MLK Day	

Day	Topic	Reading and Assignments
Week 3 Wed. Jan. 23	Origins: The Mormons	Arrington and Bitton, ch 1; Bainbridge and Stark 1979; Watch in class: “American Experience: The Mormons” (exc.)
Week 3 Fri. Jan 25	Who joins and why?	Dawson ch 4; Watch in class: “Inside Scientology” (exc.)
Week 4 Mon. Jan. 28	Movement milieus	Encyclopedia of Religion, “Nation of Islam”; Watch in class: “The Time Has Come” 1964-1966 PBS (exc.)
Week 4 Wed. Jan. 30	Milieus and Settings	Lewis, “Seekers and Subcultures.” Watch in class: Hare Krishnas: Hiders or Seekers (exc.)
Week 4 Fri. Feb. 1	Milieus and Settings (cont.)	Thursby: Hindu-Oriented NRMs (guest speaker)
Week 5 Mon. Feb. 4	Charisma	Prophet 2016a; Watch in class: “What Made Pope John Paul II a Great Pope”; “Amma visits New York 2011.” In class: Week 5 Quiz
Week 5 Wed. Feb. 6	Charisma: Rajneesh	Palmer Watch in class: “Wild, Wild Country” (exc.)
Week 5 Fri. Feb. 8	Charisma: Sun Myung Moon	Barker: “Charismatization.” Watch in class: “The Life of Rev. Sun Myung Moon” (exc.)
Week 6 Mon. Feb. 11	Conversion/Brainwashing	Dawson ch. 5; Introvigne. Watch in class: “The Manchurian Candidate” (exc.) Due: Single-group review (paper and online)
Week 6 Wed. Feb. 13	Conversion	Anthony and Robbins; Young and Griffith. Watch in class: “Holy Smoke” (exc.)
Week 6 Fri. Feb. 15	Conversion (cont.)	Young and Griffith
Week 7 Mon. Feb. 18	Deprogramming	Ashcraft, ch. 5; Watch in class: Deprogrammed (exc.)
Week 7 Wed. Feb. 20	Coercive Persuasion and the Law Outside the United States	Edelman and Richardson; Fefferman. Watch in class: “The Persecution of Falun Gong”
Week 7 Fri. Feb. 22	Types of Exit	Prophet 2018 (exc.) Watch in class: Erin Prophet at ICSA (exc.) In class: Discussion
Week 8 Mon. Feb. 25	Midterm Review	Review
Week 8 Wed. Feb. 27	MIDTERM	In class: Midterm

Day	Topic	Reading and Assignments
Week 8 Fri. Mar. 1	Tradition and Innovation	Mueller, "Conflicts US Wicca"; Watch in class: "Britain's Wicca Man" Due online: Proposal for final research paper
Mar. 4-8	SPRING BREAK (no class)	
Week 9 Mon. Mar. 11	Class cancelled	
Week 9 Wed. Mar. 13	Tradition and Innovation (cont.)	Lewis: Native American Prophet Religions
Week 9 Fri. Mar. 15	Tradition and Anti-Tradition Esalen	Kripal, "From Emerson to Esalen" 2007. Review midterm
Week 10 Mon. Mar. 18	Sex and Family Dynamics	Dawson ch 6; Watch in class: "Mormon History of Polygamy"
Week 10 Wed. Mar. 20	Women's Roles	Puttick; Optional: Coltri, "Women and NRMs" Watch in class: "Wild, Wild Country" (exc.)
Week 10 Fri. Mar. 22	Female Leadership	Palmer, 1994 ch. 3, "Lovers and Leaders" Watch in class: "Wild, Wild Country" exc. Due online: Proposal for final research paper
Week 11 Mon. Mar. 25	Children	Palmer and Hardman, ch 1: "Alternative Childhoods"; Van Eck Duymaer van Twist, Intro & ch 1; Watch in class: "Mormon Lost Boys" (exc.)
Week 11 Wed. Mar. 27	Children's Interests	Homer, "Precarious Balance"; Watch in class: "Why Waldorf?" exc.
Week 11 Fri. Mar. 29	Children as Actors and Weapons	Yates, "John Victor Stoen"; Watch in class: Interview, Stephan Jones (exc.)
Week 12 Mon. Apr. 1	Violence (Begin case study, Jonestown)	Dawson ch. 7 Watch in class: "Jonestown, The American Experience" (exc.) Due online: Final paper outline
Week 12 Wed. Apr. 3	Jonestown, cont.	Moore, "Violence in Peoples Temple and Jonestown" Watch in class: "Jonestown, The American Experience" (exc.)
Week 12 Fri. Apr. 5	Government Intervention	Wright and Palmer, ch. 1 Watch in class: "Let the Fire Burn" (exc.)
Week 13 Mon. Apr. 8	Government Intervention: Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints	Wright and Palmer, ch. 5, Waco Watch in class: "Waco: Rules of Engagement" (exc.) In class: Discuss paper outlines

Day	Topic	Reading and Assignments
Week 13 Wed. Apr. 10	Government Intervention: Scientology in Europe	Palmer 2011, ch. 2; Watch in class: “Going Clear” (exc.)
Week 13 Fri. Apr. 12	Millennialism/Apocalypticism	Melton, “What Really Happens”; Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v. “Seventh- Day Adventists” Watch in class: “Tell the World” (exc.)
Week 14 Mon. Apr. 15	Millennialism: Branch Davidians	Wessinger 2000, “How the Millennium Comes Violently” Watch in class: “Waco: Rules of Engagement” (exc.); Waco Testimonials
Week 14 Wed. Apr. 17	Cultural Significance	Dawson, ch. 8 Revisions to final paper outline due.
Week 14 Fri. Apr. 19	Cultural Significance (cont.)	Watch in class: I AM (exc.); discuss (guest speaker, Religion and Metamodernism)
Week 15 Mon. Apr. 22	Fiction-based NRMs	Reading: Cusack and Kosnáč, Davidsen; Watch in class: “Is Jediism a Real Religion?”
Week 15 Wed. Apr. 24	Review	Review for final exam. Final paper due
	Reading days Apr. 25-26	
Wed. May 1	FINAL EXAM	12:30-2:30 p.m.

*Disability Policy:* Any student with a documented disability seeking academic adjustments or accommodations (including those involving the use of technology) is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All such discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Students with disabilities will need to also contact Disability Support Services.

*Syllabus Agreement:* Course instructor reserves the right to change any of the reading assignments or the ordering of the lectures. The grading principles and requirements, however, will not change.

*Grading Policies:*

- Grades are consistent with UF policy:  
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>
  - A 94 to 100
  - A- <94 to 90
  - B+ <90 to 87
  - B <87 to 84
  - B- <84 to 80
  - C+ <80 to 77
  - C <77 to 74
  - C- <74 to 70



- D+ <70 to 67
- D <67 to 64
- D- <64 to 61
- F <61 to 0
- Grades are not rounded up. For example, a 92.85% is an A-, not an A; There is no A+ grade.

*Paper Requirements:*

Single-group review: Write a three-page review of a single new religious movement and apply at least one of the methodologies reviewed in class or reading (600 to 750 words plus bibliography and endnotes). Grading principles for the single-group review are as follows:

- Clearly describes the group belief system and its relationship to a particular religious tradition (25 points).
- Explains how and in what ways the group changed over time (20 points).
- Explains group behavior in light of a particular methodology (25 points).
- Format: Printed double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, with standard one-inch margins all around (10 points).
- In-text author-date citations (10 points).
- Bibliography containing at least *four* scholarly print items (meaning university press books, academic journal articles, and similar) with no missing information (10 points).

*Grading Principles for Final Paper:*

The final paper grade consists of three parts:

- 1) Paper proposal: The research proposal must include a tentative title, abstract (100 to 200-word summary of the group and intended approach), and a tentative list (formatted in appropriate APA Reference style) of at least five academic sources not assigned as part of the course reading. You are welcome to include additional sources, including where you will get your facts and data about the group. Indicate which methodologies you intend to use, including names of the theories that you intend to apply or critique, for example, Dawson's criteria for the instability of charismatic authority. (50 points)
- 2) Paper outline: Submit a detailed outline of at least two pages (double-spaced). Include a section for the group(s) origins and beliefs, historical development, a summary of what, if anything, other scholars have written about the group, and your own intended methodological arguments (and conclusions if available). The outline should incorporate the reference list from the paper proposal with all modifications requested by the instructor incorporated (50 points)
- 3) Final paper. Write a paper of which the text makes up 2,500 words, and any references and citations are in addition to 2,500 words. The proposal and outline for this paper make up 10% of the total grade (1/3 of the paper grade). The paper topic can be either an in-depth historical treatment of a single group (including the same one as for the single issue review) or a comparison of two groups, using more than one methodology. The paper:

- a) Clearly describes the group belief system and its relationship to a particular religious tradition (20 percent).
- b) Explains how and in what ways the group changed over time (15 percent).
- c) Introduces (with citations and quotations) one or more methodological approaches to explaining the group's origins or behavior (20 percent).
- d) Makes an argument about the group's origins, belief systems and/or behavior in light of a particular methodological theory and takes a stand either agreeing with, enhancing or opposing the theory (20 percent). The methodological portion (items c and d), including any citations and discussion, must make up at least 3 pages (750 words) of the total length, whether consecutive or interspersed with the historical material.
- e) Format: Printed double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, with standard one-inch margins all around (5 percent).
- f) In-text parenthetical citations following APA style. Use footnotes only for explanatory material; otherwise, use author-date references. (10 percent)
- g) *Bibliography* containing at least **five** scholarly print items (meaning university press books, academic journal articles, and similar) and should be presented in APA style (10 points). The bibliography should include all sources cited in the paper, including course readings, scholarly print items and any popular or materials created by the group.

Final papers are due in printed copy and electronically on Canvas on the last day of class, at class time. Late papers will be penalized and may not be accepted.