

Cults and New Religious Movements

Prof. Erin Prophet

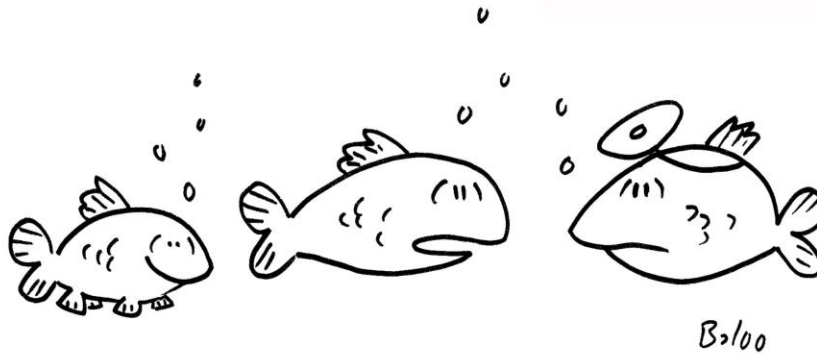
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Meeting Time: MWF, 12:45-1:40 p.m. (Period 6)

Meeting location: Anderson Hall 32

Office: Anderson Hall 107F

Office Hours: 2-4 p.m. M and W



"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 20th century saw much more by way of religious diversity than previous periods in history.

—George Chryssides, 2012¹

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, models of conversion including “brainwashing,” the sociology of small-group behavior, scripture formation and authority, millennialism and apocalypticism, schism, violence, and government response. 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

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

religious studies. Students will 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 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 anthropological, sociological, phenomenological, and psycho-social 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 Humanities General Education credit, and fulfills the state of Florida writing credit for 2000 or more words.

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, 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, no. 4 (1979): 283–95.
- 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.
- Coltri, Marzia A. "Women and NRMs: Location and Identity." In *Female Leaders in New Religious Movements*, edited by Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen and Christian Giudice. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- 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
- 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.
- 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
- Kripal, Jeffrey. "From Emerson to Esalen: America's Religion of No Religion." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 53:32 pB6-B8.
- Maaga, Mary McCormick. *Hearing the Voices of Jonestown*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998.
- 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.
- 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.
- Lewis, James R. "Seekers and Subcultures." In *Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements* 2: 60–71. 2016.
- 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.
- 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*. www.eprophet.info 2018.
- Richardson, James. "Definitions of Cult: From Sociological-Technical to Popular-Negative." *Review of Religious Research* 34, no. 4 (1993): 348–56.
- Rothstein, Mikael. "Hagiography and Text in The Aetherius Society: Aspects of the Social Construction of a Religious Leader." In *New Religions in a Postmodern World*, edited by Mikael Rothstein and Reender Kranenborg, 165–193. Aarhus University Press, 2003.
- Urban, Hugh B. "Zorba the Buddha: Capitalism, Charisma and the Cult of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh" *Religion* 26: 161–182, 1996.
- Van Eck Duymaer van Twist, Amanda. *Perfect Children: Growing Up on the Religious Fringe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- 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
- 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 (15% of grade). Includes participation in group discussion as well as contribution to class discussions and completion of surveys and other in-class assessments.

2. Midterm Examination (20% of grade). The midterm will cover all lectures, readings, and class discussion during weeks 1–6.
3. Final Examination (25% of grade). The final exam will cover all lectures, readings, and class discussion during the entire course, with a heavier emphasis on weeks 7–12.
4. Single group review (10% of grade). 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).
5. Final paper (30% of grade). Write a 10-page (c. 2,000 words) paper, 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.

Use of technology: Course participation may require the use of phones or clickers for class polling and pop quizzes. Other than course participation, electronic devices may only be used for note-taking during class.

Day	Topic	Reading and Assignments
Wed. 8/22	Syllabus and Course Contract; Student Learning Goals	Dawson, ch. 1; Watch in class: “American Experience: The Mormons” (exc.) In class: student goals
Fri. 8/24	Definitional questions	Prophet, “New Religion”; Watch in class: “Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple,” (exc.)
Mon. 8/27	Definition (cont.)	Dawson ch 2; Richardson 348–56. Watch in class: “The Peyote Road” (exc.) In class: minute essays.
Wed. 8/29	Origins: The Shakers	Dawson ch 3, 39–70 Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v. “Shakers.” Francis ch 2 (25-50). In class: discuss oral presentations.
Fri. 8/31	Origins: The Mormons	Arrington and Bitton, ch 1; Bainbridge and Stark; Watch in class: “American Experience: The Mormons” (exc.)
Wed. 9/5	Origins: Aetherius Society	Rothstein; Watch in class: Heavens Gate Interviews. In class: oral presentations
Fri. 9/7	Who joins and why?	Dawson ch 4; Watch in class: “The Source Family” (exc.)
Mon. 9/10	Milieus and Settings	Lewis, “Seekers and Subcultures.” Watch in class: Hare Krishnas: Hiders or Seekers (exc). In class: minute essays

Day	Topic	Reading and Assignments
Wed. 9/12	Movement milieus	Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v. "Nation of Islam" Watch in class: "Malcolm X: Make it Plain" (exc.) In class: oral presentations
Wed. 9/14	Charisma	Prophet 2016a; Watch in class: "What Made Pope John Paul II a Great Pope"; "Amma visits New York 2011."
Mon. 9/17	Charisma: Rajneesh	Urban. Watch in class: "Wild, Wild Country" (exc.)
Wed. 9/19	Charisma: Sun Myung Moon	Barker: "Charismatization." Watch in class: "The Life of Rev. Sun Myung Moon" (exc.) Due: Single-tradition summary In class: oral presentations
Fri. 9/21	Conversion/Brainwashing	Dawson ch. 5; Introvigne. Watch in class: "The Manchurian Candidate" (exc.)
Mon. 9/24	Conversion	Anthony and Robbins; Young and Griffith. Watch in class: "Holy Smoke" (exc.)
Wed. 9/26	Deprogramming	Ashcraft, ch. 5; Watch in class: Deprogrammed (exc.)
Fri. 9/28	Types of Exit	Prophet, 2018, (exc.) Watch in class: Erin Prophet at ICSA (exc.) In class: oral presentations
Mon. 10/1	Coercive Persuasion and the Law Outside the United States	Edelman and Richardson; Fefferman. Watch in class: "The Persecution of Falun Gong"
Wed. 10/3	Sex and Family Dynamics	Dawson ch 6; Watch in class: "Mormon History of Polygamy"
Fri. 10/12	Women's Roles	Coltri, "Women and NRMs" Watch in class: "Wild, Wild Country" (exc.)
Mon. 10/15	Female Leadership	Palmer, 1994 ch. 3, "Lovers and Leaders" Watch in class: "Wild, Wild Country" exc.
Wed. 10/17	Children	Palmer and Hardman, ch 1: "Alternative Childhoods"; Van Eck Duymaer van Twist; Watch in class: "Mormon Lost Boys" (exc.)
Fri. 10/19	Children's Interests	Homer, "Precarious Balance"; Watch in class: "Why Waldorf?" exc.
Mon. 10/22	Children as Actors and Weapons	Yates, "John Victor Stoen"; Watch in class: Interview, Stephan Jones (exc.) Due: Proposal and outline for final research paper.

Day	Topic	Reading and Assignments
Wed. 10/24	MIDTERM	In class: Midterm
Fri. 10/26	Violence	Dawson ch. 7 Watch in class: "Jonestown, The American Experience," (exc.)
Mon. 10/29	Jonestown	Moore, "Violence in Peoples Temple and Jonestown" Watch in class: "Jonestown, The American Experience," (exc.)
Wed. 10/31	Jonestown, cont.	Maaga ch. 6, "From Jones the Person"; In class: review and discuss final paper proposals.
Fri. 11/2	No class: Homecoming	
Mon. 11/5	Government Intervention	Wright and Palmer, ch. 1 Watch in class: "Let the Fire Burn" (exc.)
Wed. 11/7	Government Intervention: Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints	Wright and Palmer, ch. 7, FLDS Watch in class: "20/20 FLDS A House Divided" (exc.)
Fri. 11/9	Government Intervention: Scientology in Europe	Palmer 2011, ch. 2; Watch in class: "Going Clear" (exc.)
Mon. 11/12	No class: Veterans Day	
Wed. 11/14	Millennialism/Apocalypticism	Melton, "What Really Happens"; Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v. "Seventh-Day Adventists" Watch in class: "Tell the World" (exc.)
Fri. 11/16	Millennialism: Branch Davidians	Wessinger, ch. 2; "Branch Davidians" Watch in class: "Waco: Rules of Engagement" (exc.); Waco Testimonials
Mon. 11/19	Environmental Millennialism	Globus and Taylor; Revisions to final paper outline due.
Wed. 11/21	Scripture and Authority: Black Elk Speaks	Reading TBA
Fri. 11/23	No class: Thanksgiving	
Mon. 11/26	Innovation and Tradition: Wicca	Mueller, "Conflicts US Wicca"; Watch in class: "Britain's Wicca Man"
Wed. 11/28	Esalen and the Religion of No Religion	Kripal, "From Emerson to Esalen" 2007.
Fri. 11/30	Cultural Innovation	Dawson ch. 8 Watch in class: I AM
Mon. 12/3	Fiction-based NRMs	Reading: Cusack and Kosnáč, Davidsen; Watch in class: "Is Jediism a Real Religion?"
Wed. 12/5	Review	Review for final exam.
Mon.		Final paper due
Fri. 12/6	Reading days 12/6-12/7	
Mon. 12/10	Final Exam	

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: I reserve 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: I use the following principles of grading, to which there are no exceptions.

1. The grading scale is the standard one, for example, 80-82 B-; 83-86 B; 87-89 B+.
2. There is no extra-credit.
3. There is no A+ grade.
4. Grades are not rounded up. For example, a 92.85% is an A-, not an A.

Paper Requirements:

The single group overview must be 600 to 750 words, not including bibliography and notes. The final paper prospectus should be two or three paragraphs, no more than a page, describing the final paper. The final paper outline should be no more than two pages summarizing the projected content of the paper. The final paper should be approximately 2,000 words, not including bibliography and notes.

Grading Principles for Papers:

- 1) Clearly describes the group belief system and its relationship to a particular religious tradition (20 points).
- 2) Explains how and in what ways the group changed over time (20 points).
- 3) Explains group behavior in light of a particular methodology (20 points).
- 4) Format: Printed double-spaced, in 12-point font, with standard one-inch margins all around (10 points).
- 5) *Endnotes* following APA style (10 points).
- 6) *Bibliography* containing at least **four** scholarly print items (meaning university press books, academic journal articles, and similar) and should be presented in APA style (10 points).

Papers are due on the last day of class, at class time. Late papers will be penalized and may not be accepted.