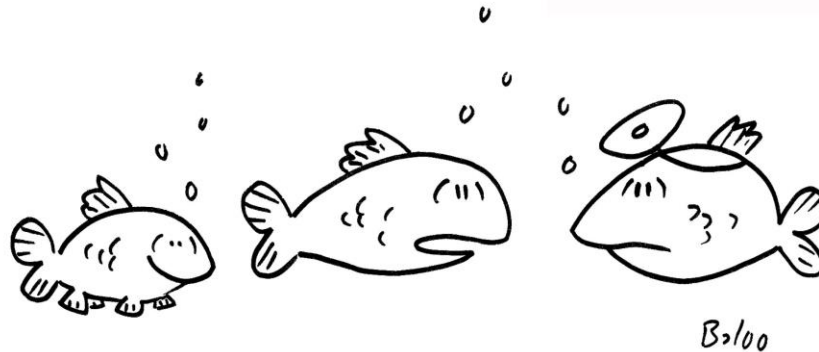


Rel3076: Cults and New Religious Movements
Prof. Erin Prophet

Meeting Time: TBD
Meeting location: TBD



"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, the sociology of small-group behavior, millennialism and apocalypticism, schism, violence, and government response, along with models of conversion—including “brainwashing.” They will trace the dynamics of tension and accommodation as groups change over time and investigate how new religious groups push the boundaries of social norms concerning family, sexuality, work and community. Specific groups to be reviewed include the Shakers, Mormons, Peoples Temple (Jonestown), Rajneeshies, Branch Davidians, and Wicca. Methodological approaches include sociology and 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,

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

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, 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 Available on Canvas (Required):

Ashcraft, W. Michael. “Cultic Studies,” chapter 6 in *A Historical Introduction to the Study of New Religious Movements*. London: Routledge, 2018, pp. 103-133.

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, excerpts.

Francis, Richard. *Ann, the Word: The Story of Ann Lee, Female Messiah, Mother of the Shakers, the Woman Clothed with the Sun*, chapter 2. New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013.

- 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.
- Kripal, Jeffrey. "From Emerson to Esalen: America's Religion of No Religion." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 53:32 pB6-B8, April 15, 2007.
- Lewis, James R. "Seekers and Subcultures." In *Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements* 2: 60–71. 2016.
- 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*, chapter 2. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994.
- Palmer, Susan J. and Frederick Bird. "Therapy, Charisma and Social Control in the Rajneesh Movement." *Sociological Analysis* 53, pp. S71-S85, 1992.
- 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.
- Wessinger, Catherine. 2001. *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate*, Chapter 2, pp. 12-29. New York: Seven Bridges Press.
- Wright, Stuart A. and Susan J. Palmer. *Storming Zion: Government Raids on Religious Communities*. Chapters 1 and 5. 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
- United Nations Human Rights Council. "Forcible deprogramming of members of Shincheonji in the Republic of Korea." May 2019.

Optional Reading:

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

- 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, eds. *Fiction, Invention and Hyper-reality: From Popular Culture to Religion*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Coltri, Marzia A. "Women and NRMs: Location and Identity" pp. 11-28 in *Female Leaders in New Religious Movements*, edited by Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen and Christian Giudice. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- 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
- 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.
- Van Eck Duymaer van Twist, Amanda. *Perfect Children: Growing Up on the Religious Fringe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- 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 (15% of grade). Includes attendance, contribution to class discussions, and completion of 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 and accepted 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. Headphones may not be worn during class time.
2. Examinations: 40% of grade. Three quizzes (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. Assignments: 45% of grade.

- Oral presentation (5%)
- Blog post on movement milieus (5%).
- 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 (25% of grade). Write a paper of approximately 2,000 words, not including references and endnotes. A proposal and outline for this paper make up 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 group review) or a comparison of two groups. The paper must apply one or more of the methodologies discussed in class.

Day	Topic	Reading and Assignments
Week 1 Wed. Aug. 21	Syllabus and Course Contract; Student Learning Goals	
Week 1 Fri. Aug. 23	Ways to Study NRMs	Prophet 2016b, "New Religion" Watch in class: "Jonestown: The Life and Death of Peoples Temple" (exc.)
Week 2 Mon. Aug. 26	What are Religious Families?	Dawson ch 1, "Why Study NRMs?" Watch in class: "American Experience: The Mormons" (exc.)
Week 2 Wed. Aug. 28	Definitions and Methodologies	Dawson ch 2, "What are NRMs?" pp. 14-25 Watch in class: "This Changed Everything" (exc.) Due online: Initial student query
Week 2 Fri. Aug. 30	Definitions and Methodologies (cont.)	Dawson ch. 2, "What are NRMs?" pp. 26-38
Week 3 Mon. Sept. 2	LABOR DAY (no class)	
Week 3 Wed. Sept. 4	Why Do New Religious Movements Emerge?	Dawson ch 3, pp. 39-58; Watch in class: "This Changed Everything (episode 2): Protestant Reformation and Anabaptists" (exc.) Due online: Family Tree assignment
Week 3 Fri. Sept. 6	Origins: The Shakers	Encyclopedia of Religion, "Shakers" Francis ch 2 (25-50); In class: discuss oral presentations
Week 4 Mon. Sept. 9	Origins: The Mormons	Dawson ch. 3, pp. 59-70 Arrington and Bitton, ch 1 (optional); Watch in class: "American Experience: The Mormons" (exc.)
Week 4 Wed. Sept. 11	Who joins and why?	Dawson ch 4;

Day	Topic	Reading and Assignments
Week 4 Fri. Sept. 13	Milieus and Settings: Hindu-Oriented NRMs	(guest speaker)
Week 5 Mon. Sept. 16	Milieus and Settings	Lewis 2016, "Seekers and Subcultures."
Week 5 Wed. Sept. 18	Movement milieus	Encyclopedia of Religion, "Nation of Islam"; Watch in class: "The Time Has Come" 1964-1966 PBS (exc.) Week 5 Quiz
Week 5 Fri. Sept. 20	Charisma	Prophet 2016a; Watch in class: "What Made Pope John Paul II a Great Pope"; "Amma visits New York 2011." Due: Class blog post on milieus and settings
Week 6 Mon. Sept. 23	Charisma: Rajneesh	Palmer and Bird 1992 Watch in class: "Wild, Wild Country" (exc.) In class: Week 5 Quiz
Week 6 Wed. Sept. 25	Charisma: Sun Myung Moon	Barker, "Charismatization." Watch in class: "The Life of Rev. Sun Myung Moon" (exc.)
Week 6 Fri. Sept. 27	Brainwashing	Dawson ch. 5, pp. 95-103; Optional: Introvigne. Watch in class: "The Manchurian Candidate" (exc.) Due: Single-group review (paper and online)
Week 7 Mon. Sept. 30	Conversion/Brainwashing	Dawson ch. 5, pp. 103-119 Watch in class: "Holy Smoke" (exc.)
Week 7 Wed. Oct. 2	Formulations of Brainwashing	Dawson ch. 5, 119-124
Week 7 Fri. Oct. 4	HOME COMING (no class)	
Week 8 Mon. Oct. 7	Deprogramming	Ashcraft ch. 5, 103-117; Watch in class: "Deprogrammed" (exc.)
Week 8 Wed. Oct. 9	Coercive Persuasion and the Law Outside the United States	Richardson 2011; UN Human Rights Council 2019.
Week 8 Fri. Oct. 11	Types of Exit	Prophet "Coercion or Conversion," 2018 (exc.) In class: Discussion
Week 9 Mon. Oct. 14	Midterm Review	Review
Week 9 Wed. Oct. 16	MIDTERM	In class: Midterm
Week 9 Fri. Oct. 18	Sex and Family Dynamics	Dawson ch. 6, 125-132;

Day	Topic	Reading and Assignments
Week 11 Mon. Oct. 21	Women's Roles	Dawson ch. 6, 136-141, Puttick, "Women in NRMs"; Optional: Coltri 2017, "Women and NRMs" Watch in class: "Wild, Wild Country" (exc.)
Week 11 Wed. Oct. 23	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 Fri. Oct. 25	Class cancelled	Work on final papers
Week 12 Mon. Oct. 28	Children	Dawson ch. 6, 132-135; Palmer and Hardman 1999, ch 1: "Alternative Childhoods"; Optional: Van Eck Duymaer van Twist, Intro & ch 1;
Week 12 Wed. Oct. 30	Children's Interests	Homer, "Precarious Balance";
Week 12 Fri. Nov. 1	Children as Actors and Weapons	Yates, "John Victor Stoen"; Watch in class: Interview, Stephan Jones (exc.) In class: Week 12 Quiz
Week 13 Mon. Nov. 4	Violence (Begin case study, Jonestown)	Dawson ch. 7, 142-146 Watch in class: "Jonestown, The American Experience" (exc.) Due online: Final paper outline
Week 13 Wed. Nov. 6	Jonestown, cont.	Dawson ch. 7, 152-168 Watch in class: "Jonestown, The American Experience" (exc.)
Week 13 Fri. Nov. 8	Government Intervention	Wright and Palmer, ch. 1 Watch in class: "Let the Fire Burn" (exc.)
Week 14 Mon. Nov. 11	No class: VETERANS' DAY	
Week 14 Wed. Nov. 13	Government Intervention cont.: Waco Raid	Wright and Palmer, ch. 5, "The Branch Davidians" Watch in class: "Waco: Rules of Engagement" (exc.) In class: Discuss paper outlines
Week 14 Fri. Nov. 15	Millennialism/Apocalypticism	Dawson ch. 7, 146-152, 168-178 Optional: Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v. "Seventh-Day Adventists"; Melton, "What Really Happens" Watch in class: "Tell the World" (exc.)

Day	Topic	Reading and Assignments
Week 15 Mon. Nov. 18	Millennialism: Branch Davidians	Wessinger, "How the Millennium Comes Violently," ch. 2. Watch in class: "Waco: Rules of Engagement" (exc.); Waco Testimonials In class: Week 15 Quiz
Week 15 Wed. Nov. 20	Cultural Significance: Modernism, Postmodernism, Metamodernism	Dawson ch. 8
Week 15 Fri. Nov. 22	Fiction-based NRMs	Reading: Cusack and Kosnáč, Davidsen; Watch in class: "Is Jediism a Real Religion?"
Week 16 Mon. Nov. 25	Tradition and Innovation	Mueller, "Conflicts US Wicca"; Watch in class: "Britain's Wicca Man"
Week 17 Mon. Dec. 2	Tradition and Anti-Tradition Esalen	Kripal, "From Emerson to Esalen"
Week 17 Wed. Dec. 4	Review	Review for final exam Final paper due
	Reading days Dec. 5-6	
Wed. Dec. 11	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 *six* scholarly print items (meaning university press books, academic journal articles, and similar), three from course readings and three from unassigned or optional readings, 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 and five of the assigned readings. You are welcome to include additional academic or non-academic sources, such as media reports, and material produced by the group and its current or former members. Indicate which methodologies you intend to use (historical-critical, sociological, psychological). Include 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) plus references. 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 make up one-third of the total 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 will:
 - a) Clearly describe the group belief system and its relationship to a particular religious tradition (20 percent).

- b) Explain 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) Make an argument about the group's origins, belief systems and/or behavior in light of a particular methodological theory and take 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 *ten* scholarly print items (meaning university press books, academic journal articles, and similar, of which five must be from the course readings and five may be from optional readings or original research). The bibliography should be presented in APA style (10 percent) and should include all sources cited in the paper, including course readings, scholarly print items and any other print, electronic or video materials.

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.

Course evaluations