

SOCIOLOGY 262/RELIGIOUS STUDIES 221

CULTS AND NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

Fall 2001
PAS 2083, Th. 7-10 p.m.

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The course is designed to serve two ends: first, to provide an introduction to some of the types of cults or new religious movements (NRMs) active in North America, examining their origins and their basic beliefs and practices; second, to provide an introduction to some of the results of the social scientific study of new religious movements. The course will give some attention to a wide array of groups (e.g., UFO Groups, Neo-Paganism, Transcendental Meditation, Eckankar, Rajneesh Foundation, New Age and other groups), but it concentrates on four of the most prominent groups: Theosophy, Scientology, The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (i.e., Hare Krishna), and The Unification Church (i.e., Moonies) in North America. Some consideration may also be given to the topic of Satanism (if time is available). These religions will be studied in terms of (1) their concepts of the divine/transcendent, (2) their views of human nature, (3) their understandings of death and the afterlife, and (4) their conception of how we should live "the good life." The course will examine such social scientific concerns as: (1) the reasons for the recent growth in the size and number of new religious movements, (2) who joins such religions and why, (3) the charge that converts are "brainwashed," (4) violence and the cults, and (5) what do these groups indicate about the future of religion and of North American culture. Several films and videos will be used.

Texts:

Lorne L. Dawson, *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements*. Toronto and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Lorne L. Dawson, ed., *Cults in Context: Readings in the Sociology of Religion*. Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 1996..

Some supplemental readings on the beliefs of the four NRMs will be placed on reserve at the library, along with copies of the overheads used in the lectures.

Requirements:

There are two possible marking schemes for this course. Students may either (1) write two examinations (the mid-term and the final) or (2) write two examinations (the mid-term and the final) and a brief essay. Students must decide between these options after the first test. A sign up sheet will be distributed for the second option.

Option (1):

Mid-term Test	40% (Oct. 25)
Final Test	60% (scheduled)

Option (2):

Mid-term Test	30% (Oct. 25)
Final Test	50% (scheduled)
Essay	20% (due Nov. 23)

Instructions for the Assignments:

Tests: Given the size of the class, the tests will consist of approximately 50-70 multiple choice questions (computer marked).

Essay: Write a brief essay of about 1,200 words responding to **one** of the following questions. The essay must typed, double spaced, and with 1" margins, and proper references. Be sure that your answer demonstrates a knowledge of the relevant course readings.

1. New religious movements are the unique result of changes to North American society since the 1960s. Do you agree or disagree?
2. Do the people who join new religious movements do so freely, or is there room for doubt?
3. Satanism may well be thought to be a "social problem" in Canada and the United States, but probably not in the way the members of the anti-cult movement believe. What might someone mean in making this claim?

Note on avoidance of academic offenses:

All students registered in the courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes an academic offense, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for their academic actions. When the commission of an offense is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline). For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students are directed to consult the summary of Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline) which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (p.1:11). If you need help in learning how to avoid offenses such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean.

Schedule of Topics and Readings:

1. The Nature and Study of Cults (Sept. 13)

From *Comprehending Cults* read the Introduction and Chap. 1, pp. 29-40.

From *Cults in Context* read Chap. 2.

2. The Historical and Sociological Context of Cults (Sept. 20)

From *Comprehending Cults* read Chap. 2.
From *Cults in Context* read Chaps. 4

3. Theosophy (Sept. 27)

Supplemental reading: the material on Theosophy on reserve in the library.

4. Who Joins NRMs and Why? (Oct. 4)

From *Comprehending Cults* read Chap. 3, pp. 72-94.
From *Cults in Context* read Chaps 8 & 9.

5. Scientology (Oct. 11)

Supplemental reading: the material on Scientology on reserve in the library

6. Film (Oct. 18)

"Waco: The Rules of Engagement" (I will be away at a conference. This controversial film was nominated for an Academy Award. It has had a strong influence on assessments of what happened in Waco, as evidenced by the several government investigations and civil trials that were initiated after its release. The film will take the whole two hour class.)

MID-TERM TEST (FIRST HALF OF CLASS TIME) (Oct. 25)

A video will be shown in the second half of the class

7. Guest Lecture (Nov. 1)

8. Violence and the Cults (Nov. 8)

From *Comprehending Cults* read Chap. 5
From *Cults in Context* read Chaps. 17

9. Hare Krishna (Nov. 15)

Supplemental reading: the material on ISKCON on reserve in the library.

9. The Coercive Conversion Controversy (Nov. 22)

From *Comprehending Cults* read Chap. 4.
From *Cults in Context* read Chaps. 10 and 12.

10. Unification Church (Nov. 29)

Supplemental reading: the material on the Unification Church on reserve in the library