Course Description

This course focuses on modern religious groups in America, so-called “cults” or new religious movements (NRMs), located on the periphery of “mainstream” religion. We will examine the origins, beliefs, attraction, and interactions of the NRMs from a variety of disciplinary perspectives (historical, sociological, and psychological) as well as from a variety of thematic perspectives (potential for violence, “brainwashing,” involvement of women, and charismatic leadership). Our goal is to increase our understanding of certain aspects of contemporary religious activity and the general societal response to them, and hence, of religion in general. Our task is not to commend or condemn particular religious groups, but rather to attempt to reach some understanding of them, first on their terms, then on ours in the appropriate disciplinary contexts.

Required Texts

Douglas E. Cowan and David G. Bromley, Cults and New Religions, 2nd ed. (Blackwell Publ., 2015)
Other readings are posted on Blackboard

Course Procedures

1. Course structure. This course combines lecture, discussion, and the viewing of films and documentaries. Lecture outlines are available on the course website (go to www.courses.miami.edu; scroll to “Course Documents,” then to “Lecture Outlines”). Generally, the first half of our class meeting will be given to discussion of the previously viewed film and lecture; the second half is given to viewing and short discussion. I encourage you to ask relevant questions at any time during lectures. Discussion will focus on the films and the assigned reading.

2. Grading consists of (a) contribution to class discussion (10%), (b) a take-home examination over lectures, readings, and films (30%), and (c) 2 papers, (7-8 pages each) (30% each).
3. **Instructor's expectations.** Students are expected to (a) attend all the class sessions of the course and participate fully in class discussions (I will not tolerate students leaving the classroom at unscheduled breaks); (b) turn off all electronic devices (unless you are taking notes on a laptop computer); and (c) abide by the University’s Honor Code (read paper on plagiarizing on Blackboard!). Academic integrity is foundational for research and intellectual discourse within the University community. Thus, any suspicion of cheating or plagiarism will result in a formal petition by the instructor to the University’s Honor Council.

Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

**THINKING ABOUT NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS**

1. **Tuesday, January 2**

   - Introducing Cults and New Religious Movements
   - Reading Assignment
     - Text: Cowan and Bromley, chap. 1
   - Documentary: “Cults: Dangerous Devotion”

2. **Wednesday, January 3**

   - Film: “Split Image”
   - Reading Assignment
   - BB Lecture Outline: “Non-Conventional Religions and NRMs”

**NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION**

3. **Friday, January 5**

   - Documentary: “Knocking”
   - Reading Assignments
     - Blackboard: (1) Chryssides, “Jehovah’s Witnesses”; (2) Holden, “Finding a Home”
   - BB Lecture Outline: “Jehovah’s Witnesses”

4. **Saturday, January 6**

   - Documentary: “Frisbee: The Life and Death of a Hippie Preacher”
   - Reading Assignment
     - Blackboard: Richard Kyle, “Aberrational Groups in the Jesus Movement”
   - BB Outline: “The Jesus Movement”
INTERNATIONAL CHURCHES OF CHRIST

• Reading Assignments
• BB: Outline on ICOC

5. Monday, January 8

THE PEOPLES TEMPLE & JONESTOWN

• Documentary: “Jonestown”
• Reading Assignments
• BB: Outline on Jonestown Documentary

NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS OUTSIDE THE CHRISTIAN ORBIT

6. Tuesday, January 9

SCIENTOLOGY

• Documentary: “Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief”
• Reading Assignment
  Text: Cowan and Bromley, chapter 2
• BB: Outline: “Scientology”

7. Wednesday, January 10

THE NEW AGE AND IMPORTS FROM ASIA

• Lecture: “East Comes West”
• Documentary: “West Meets East”
• Reading Assignment
  [http://search.proquest.com/docview/1698030855/fulltext/1F0E97905B4E12PQ/8?accountid=14585](http://search.proquest.com/docview/1698030855/fulltext/1F0E97905B4E12PQ/8?accountid=14585)

TRANSCENDENTAL MEDITATION

• Documentary: “Maharishi Mahesh Yogi: Sage for a New Generation”
• Reading Assignment
  Text: Cowan and Bromley, chapter 3
• BB: Outline: “Transcendental Meditation”
7. Thursday, January 11

CHANNELING & RAMTHA
• Documentary: “The Quintessential School of the Mind”
• Reading Assignment
  Text: Cowan and Bromley, chapter 4

HEAVEN’S GATE (1997)
• Documentary: “ABC Nightline: Inside Heaven’s Gate”
• Reading Assignments
  Text: Cowan and Bromley, chapter 8; Blackboard: “Religious Studies and Heaven’s Gate”
• BB: Outline: “Heaven’s Gate”

9. Friday, January 12

THE BRANCH DAVIDIANS (1993)
• Documentary: “Waco: Rules of Engagement”
• Reading Assignment
  Text: Cowan and Bromley, chapter 7
• BB: Outline: “Branch Davidians”

10. Saturday, January 13

Wrap-up: NRMs and THEIR LEADERS
• Reading Assignment
  Text: Cowan and Bromley, chapter 10

IMPORTANT DUE DATES

Monday, January 22: Take-Home Exam

Monday, February 5: Paper # 1

Monday, February 19: Paper # 2