

SYLLABUS

RELI 320-01 New Religious Movements

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Course level and type: Intermediate-level undergraduate survey

Hours of Instruction: 3 hours/week x 14 weeks

Enrollment: 25 students

Last Taught: Spring 2001

Pedagogical Reflections: The goal of this course is to introduce undergraduate students -- most of whom are approaching graduation, and most of whom are not pursuing religious studies as their primary concentration - to the basic theoretical and practical problems encountered in the cross-cultural study of new religious movements.

Lectures selectively summarize theoretical perspectives introduced in the Hexham and Poewe textbook, while a wide variety of primary source materials and secondary scholarship is used to "incarnate" abstract concepts from the textbook. Seminar-style discussion dominates most class meetings. The course is organized into three sequential components: (1) introduction to theoretical foundations for the study of new religious movements, (2) cross-cultural case studies (early Christianity, the Shakers, Tenrikyo, Nazareth Baptist Church, Falun Gong), and (3) a concluding case study of the Branch Davidians and the incidents at Waco, Texas, in the spring of 1993, which culminates in a "mock trial" of the parties to the Waco affair, staged in class.

In general, the students found the Hexham and Poewe textbook useful, although I encountered several problems with it. The textbook adopts a history-of-religions, "secular" perspective for the most part, but veers off into theological evaluations in its concluding chapters. Moreover, the text's dependence on its authors' highly particular field researches sometimes makes their conclusions appear idiosyncratic or limited to specific contexts. I will continue to use it, but I may encourage students to view it more critically in the future (particularly its later chapters). The students were enthusiastic throughout the course, but especially so whenever church-state issues arose, and most of all during the "mock trial" exercise near the course's end. In the future, I may provide more time for the students to prepare for this exercise, but otherwise it was a success. What's more, the Branch Davidians were vindicated!

Course Description

Religion remains a powerful and perennial force in human cultures. Whether we distance ourselves from religious institutions or embrace them, we cannot avoid the influence of religious ideas, practices, images, language, and values in our everyday life, work, and play. While religious traditions constantly change, and new movements arise in every age, the new religious movements (often called “cults”) of the past century or so present a particular challenge to contemporary cultures and societies.

In this course, we will study recurring themes in new religious movements, using five historical case studies drawn from early Christianity, nineteenth-century American utopianism, and contemporary Japan, Africa, and China. A sustained examination of the events surrounding the 1993 Branch Davidian tragedy in Waco, Texas, will serve as an important capstone for the course. Throughout, our goal is to learn to interpret these movements, and their relationship to their wider social and cultural contexts, for ourselves.

Classroom lectures, discussions, videos, and occasional short excerpts from primary sources will supplement textbook analyses and overviews. Reading assignments will average 75 pages per week. You should expect to spend 4-5 hours preparing for our 3 hours of class time each week.

Successful completion of this course satisfies the University’s general education requirement in religious studies or philosophy. Previous completion of ENGL 106 with a grade of C or better is a prerequisite for enrollment. Previous completion of RELI 101 is highly recommended.

Course Materials

The following required texts are for sale at the University bookstore:

- Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, *New Religions as Global Cultures*
- J. D. Tabor and E. V. Gallagher, *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America*
- *RELI 320-01 Reader*

ALWAYS BRING THE ASSIGNED TEXTS TO CLASS WITH YOU!

Course Requirements

- **Adherence to the *Student Rights and Responsibilities Statement*** found in the current University catalog, which forbids plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty.
- **Regular attendance and informed participation in class discussions.** No more than five excused absences will be allowed without penalty to your grade. After the fifth absence your final grade will be reduced by 1/3 of a grade for each additional absence, regardless of excuse.
- **Regular in-class pop quizzes** on key terms introduced in lectures and readings. Quizzes cannot be made up at a later date Missed quizzes will result in a quiz average with fewer scores, which may impact your final grade negatively.
- **Three short (5-7 pages) analytical papers**, due on the dates indicated by the course calendar. Paper topics will be circulated at least a week before each paper is due. Grades of late papers will be reduced by 1/3 of a grade for each day late. Papers must be typed in clear standard English prose, double-spaced, and free of mechanical errors.

Grading

Class participation.....	20% of final grade
Pop quizzes.....	20% of final grade
Three analytical papers.....	60% of final grade

If you are a student with a disability, it is your responsibility to inform your instructor and register with the Office of Disability Services at least one week prior to a needed service so that reasonable accommodations can be made.

Course Calendar

Week 1 **Defining Terms: “Cult” and “Religion”**

1/17	Introductory session (no preparation required)
1/19	J. Gordon Melton, “What is a Cult?” (reader)

Week 2 **“Cults” and the Anti-Cult Crusade**

1/22	<i>New Religions as Global Cultures</i> , chs. 1 & 2
1/24	M. M. Maaga, <i>Hearing The Voices of Jonestown</i> , pp. 74-113, 147-164 (reader)
1/26	<u>Video</u> : <i>The Heaven’s Gate Cult</i> (in class)

Week 3 **Cross-Cultural Perspectives on New Religious Movements**

1/29	<i>New Religions as Global Cultures</i> , ch. 3
1/31	M. Weber, “The Prophet” (reader)
2/2	<i>New Religions as Global Cultures</i> , ch. 5 Genesis 1:1-2:24 (reader); “On the Mixing of the Bounteous Spirit and the Destructive Spirit” (reader); John 1:1-18 (reader); “The Creation According to Mani” (reader)

Week 4 **Roots of New Religious Movements, East and West**

2/5	<i>New Religions as Global Cultures</i> , ch. 6
2/7	R. J. Z. Werblowsky, “Transmigration” (reader); J. B. Long, “Reincarnation” (reader)
2/9	P. Boyer, “Antichrist, 666, and the Mark of the Beast” (reader)

Week 5 **From Seeker to Member: Becoming a Belonger**

2/12	<i>New Religions as Global Cultures</i> , ch. 7
2/14	Acts 9:1-22, Galatians 1:11-24 (reader); M. Nakayama, “Remembering My Child” (reader); <i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i> , chs. 10-11 (reader)
2/16	<u>PAPER #1 DUE!</u>

Week 6 **New Religious Movements, the Law, and the State**

2/19	J. A. Saliba, “The New Religious Movements in the Law Courts” (reader)
2/21	T. A. Tweed and S. Prothero, “Mapping Legal Boundaries: Religion and State” (reader)
2/23	V. Lal, “Sikh Kirpans in California Schools” (reader)

Week 7 **CASE STUDY A: THE EARLIEST CHRISTIANS**

- 2/26 R. Stark, "The Class Basis of Early Christianity" (reader); H. Chadwick, "From Jerusalem to Rome" (reader)
Video: *From Jesus To Christ: The Earliest Christians, Part IV* (in class)
- 2/28 *The Acts of Thecla* 7-43 (reader); *The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp* (reader); E. Pagels, "Whose Church is the 'True Church'?" (reader)
- 3/2 **NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK**

MARCH 5, 7, 9: NO CLASSES – SPRING BREAK

Week 8 **CASE STUDY B: THE SHAKERS OF ENGLAND AND AMERICA**

- 3/12 M. Holloway, "Introduction," "Mother Ann and the Universal Friend," and "Shaker Societies" (reader);
- 3/14 S. Setta, "When Christ Is A Woman" (reader)
- 3/16 Video: *The Shakers – Hands to Work, Hearts to God* (in class)

Week 9 **CASE STUDY C: THE "NEW RELIGIONS" OF JAPAN**

- 3/19 H. B. Earhart, "The New Religions" (reader); H. Hardacre, "The World View of the New Religions" (reader)
- 3/21 T. E. Chinnery, "Tenrikyo: Its History, Doctrine, and Organization" (reader)
- 3/23 I. Reader, "Spirits, Satellites, and a User-Friendly Religion" (reader)

Week 10 **CASE STUDY D: NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA**

- 3/26 S. Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, pp. 448-462 (reader); B. W. Jules-Rosette, "Tradition and Continuity in African Religions: The Case of New Religious Movements" (reader)
- 3/28 *Studies of the Nazareth Baptist Church Ibandla Lamanazareth*, excerpts (reader)
- 3/30 **PAPER #2 DUE!**

Week 11 **CASE STUDY E: THE FALUN GONG MOVEMENT OF CHINA**

- 4/2 A. Frank, "Falun Gong: Millenarian Movement, Meditation, or Tent Show?" (reader)
- 4/4 Li Hongzhi proclamations (reader); Amnesty International document (reader); P. Rahn, "The Falun Gong: Beyond the Headlines" (reader)
- 4/6 **NO CLASS – INSTRUCTOR AWAY**

APRIL 9, 11, 13: NO CLASSES – EASTER BREAK

Week 12 ***The Branch Davidians of Waco, Texas (I)***

- 4/16 **NO CLASS – EASTER BREAK** -- Begin reading *Why Waco?*--
- 4/18 Video: *Waco – The Rules of Engagement* (part one – in class)
- 4/20 Video: *Waco – The Rules of Engagement* (part two – in class)

Week 13 ***The Branch Davidians of Waco, Texas (II)***

- 4/23 Video: *Waco – The Rules of Engagement* (part three – in class)
- 4/25 Discussion of *Waco – The Rules of Engagement* and *Why Waco?*
- 4/27 *Why Waco?*, appendix (Koresh manuscript)

Week 14 *New Religious Movements: Prospects and Perspectives*

4/30 *New Religions as Global Cultures*, chs. 8 & 9

5/2 **PAPER #3 DUE!**