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MS 673 Contemporary Cults and New Religious Movements

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ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Spring 2008

MS673X1 (SP08) Contemporary Cults and New Religious Movements (3 credit hours)
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

A study of cults and new religious movements in contemporary America and the Two-Thirds World, tracing their emergence from historical and religious perspectives, with interpretation of their theological significance.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

Larry Nichols, George Mather, Alvin Schmidt.

Encyclopedic Dictionary of Cults, Sects, and World Religion. Revised Edition.
Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006.

John A. Saliba.

Understanding New Religious Movements. 2nd edition.
New York: AltaMira Press, 2003.

Terry C. Muck.

How To Study Religion.
Wilmore, Kentucky: Wood Hill Books, 2005.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Class participation/discussion questions (10%)
2. Four written exercises (10% each)
3. Read the texts and assigned articles
4. Two exams (25% each)

COURSE MODULES

Module 01 Religions of the Second Book (Feb. 11 – Feb. 22)

Video #1: "Introduction"; Video #2: "People of the Second Book"

Readings: Nichols, 53-57, 153-168, 187-201; Saliba, chaps.1-2, Muck, chaps.1-2
Rodney Stark, "How New Religions Succeed"

Exercise 1: Three View Visit, due March 7

Module 02 Civil Religions, Implicit Religions (Feb. 25 – Mar. 7)

Video #3: "Civil Religions"

Readings: Nichols, 114-120, 129-135; Saliba, chap.3; Muck, chaps.3-4
Robert Bellah, "Religious Evolution"

Exercise 2: Biblical New Religious Movement, due March 21

Module 03 Cults (Mar. 10 – Mar. 21)

Video #4: "Cults"

Readings: Nichols, 103-107, 301-307; Saliba, chap.4; Muck, chaps.5-6
Lewis Rambo, "Models and Methods of Religious Conversion"

Exam 1: March 21

Module 04 Export Religions (Mar. 24 – Apr. 4)

Video #5: "Export Religions"

Readings: Nichols, 202-204, 218-220, 279-280, 295-299; Saliba, chap.5; Muck, chap.7

Exercise 3: Compare/Contrast, due April 4

Module 05 Anti-Christian Religions (Apr. 7 – Apr. 18)

Video #6: “Anti-Christian Religions”

Readings: Nichols, 250-260, 335-342; Saliba, chap.6; Muck, chap 8 (Castells excerpt)
Manuel Castells, “The Construction of Identity”

Exercise 4: Religion Evaluation, due April 18

Module 06 Pluralisms and Syncretisms (Apr. 21 – May 2)

Video #7: “Pluralisms and Syncretisms”

Readings: Saliba, chap.7; Muck, chap.9
John Saliba, “The New Religions and Mental Health”

Exam 2: May 2

MODULE AGENDA

For each module there will be discussion questions posted for your response. You will post a response to each question and then also respond to at least two other responses by your classmates. Since the modules are two weeks long you will have two weeks to complete your readings, viewings and assignments.

EXPECTATIONS

What you can expect of me:

1. Prompt replies to questions and postings.
2. Interaction, participation, and direction in the ongoing discussions that will occur over the course of the semester.
3. Prompt feedback and assessment on assignments.

What I expect of you:

1. Participation in online discussion.
2. On time completion of assignments.
3. Your honest questions when you don't understand the material or the instructions.
4. Your patience as we work together in this medium.

GUIDELINES

1. Assignments: All assignments are due by the stated due dates. Late assignments will be penalized one letter grade per day late. For example, a B paper turned in one day late becomes a C, etc.
2. Postings: should be limited to between 50 and 75 words.
3. Discussion: A crucial element of this course is the dialogue that we enter into with each other. All discussions are to be in the vein of encouragement, gentleness, patience, persistence, and hope. This does not mean that we will not challenge, confront, or question each other. It does mean that these things will be undertaken for the purpose of growth and stimulation to think and understand the subject at hand more deeply and more intimately.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR WORK

Please submit your responses to the appropriate assignment links. When you name them be sure to use your last name in the title of your response.

EXERCISES

Exercise #1 - A Three View Visit. Write three, one page (typewritten, double spaced) descriptions of a religious service you have attended recently. The service should be a non-Christian contemporary cult or new religious movement: consider a group like Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormon). One of the descriptions should be from the insider's stance, one from a reporter's stance, and one from a specialist's stance (for the latter, choose the viewpoint of the psychologist, the sociologist, or the philosopher). See Muck, *How To Study Religion*, Chapter 2. Due March 7.

Exercise #2 - Describe a Biblical Cult or New Religious Movement . Find a cultic group or new religious movement in the Bible that seems to qualify it as such by your definition. Answer the following questions: What is a cult or new religious movement? Why does this biblical group qualify? How do the people of God relate to this group in the Bible? Four to five typewritten, double spaced pages. Due March 21.

Exercise #3 - Compare and Contrast. Do a religious studies comparison along the lines described in Muck, *How To Study Religion*, Chap. 7. Select the two elements to be compared from two of the religions we have studied this semester. Four to five typewritten, double spaced pages. Due April 4.

Exercise #4 - Evaluation. Choose one of the new religious movements we have studied this semester. After briefly summarizing its history, beliefs, and practices, evaluate it according to three standards: (1) truth; (2) value; (3) effectiveness. For the definitions of these terms consult Muck, *How to Study Religion*, chapter 8. Four to five double-spaced typewritten pages. Due April 18.

EXAMINATIONS

There will be two examinations. The first is on March 21. It will cover the content of the first half of the course, through Module 3. The exam will consist of two or three integrative essay questions in which you will be asked to know and interact with the history, beliefs, and practices of religions of the second book, civil religions, and cults.

The second is on May 2nd. It will cover the material of Modules 4, 5, and 6 only. The exam will consist of two or three integrative essay questions in which you will be asked to know and interact with the history, beliefs, and practices of export religions, anti-Christian religions, and pluralisms.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Students will have objective knowledge of the ten religions studied, with enough mastery to write a short, cogent summary of the history, beliefs, and practices of each.
2. Students will be able to do field research into a religion's worship practice and behavior.
3. Students will be able to interview people about their religious beliefs.
4. Students will be able to compare and contrast discrete elements of religious belief systems other than their own.

WEBSITES OF INTEREST

www.beliefnet.com

www.cia.gov

www.ethnologue.com

www.adherents.com

www.thearda.com

JOURNALS

History of Religion
Religion
NUMEN
Missiology: An International Review

ONLINE COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

The Virtual Classroom is built upon the open-source Moodle platform. By logging into <http://virtual.asburyseminary.edu> you will have access to this course and be able to collaborate with participant-colleagues and me throughout the course. The following are functions with which you should familiarize yourself:

Course Information Center, in the center of your screen, contains many features to be used throughout the semester, including:

Course Related:

Contains items related specifically to the course
Course News and Announcements: Contains news items for the course like due dates
Syllabus: a copy of the syllabus is provided
To Professor: Private communication between student and faculty
Course Questions: Repository of questions posted by the students related to course

Community Related:

Contains items related to community building and social connection
Prayer Forum: We understand that real life happens while you are taking this class. Please use this forum to support, pray, and care for each other.
Open Forum: Use this forum to discuss anything from sports, to doctrine, to jokes to personal information.

SUPPORT

For general questions and administrative assistance regarding the ExL program contact Dale Hale at ExL_Office@asburyseminary.edu or phone 859-858-2393

For technical support, library research support, library loans, and ExL media contact Information Commons at Info_Commons@asburyseminary.edu or phone 859-858-2233 toll-free 866-454-2733

ACCESSING INFORMATION COMMONS (Library) MATERIALS:

1. General Questions:

The Information Commons is a "one-stop shop" for all student research, circulation and technical needs. The Information Commons hours are posted here:

<http://www.asburyseminary.edu/icommons/hours.shtml>.

2. Materials Requests:

To search the library catalog for available materials, click here:

<http://www.asburyseminary.edu/icommons/index.shtml>

ExL Students may request books, photocopies or emailed attachments of journal articles/portions of reference books from Asbury Seminary's Library. Please allow 3-10 business days for all requests to be filled. Contact the Information Commons for costs and instructions on how to make requests.

ExL students are encouraged to make use of local library resources. Students who live within a 50 mile radius of either the Florida or the Kentucky campus should come to campus to obtain their materials.

3. Research Questions:

ExL students are encouraged to contact the Information Commons for research assistance including help choosing a paper topic, determining the best sources to use for a paper, finding book reviews, or research questions about using the online databases or any other library materials.

4. Online Databases:

To access the online library resources including the library catalog and full-text journal databases, go to <http://www.asburyseminary.edu/icommons/index.shtml> and enter your 10-digit student ID# number in the login box. Your student ID# is provided on the biographical information section of the student registration webpage. Add a 2 and enough 0's to the front to make a 10-digit number (20000XXXXX where XXXXX = your student id).

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DUE DATES

February 22	Module 1 Discussion Questions
March 7	Module 2 Discussion Questions Exercise #1
March 21	Module 3 Discussion Questions Exercise #2 Examination One
April 4	Module 4 Discussion Questions Exercise #3
April 18	Module 5 Discussion Questions Exercise #4
May 2	Module 6 Discussion Questions Examination Two