CH HT 612 Contemporary Cults

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I. **Course Description:**
A study of the historical and theological origins and development of cultic phenomena in contemporary American religion.

II. **Learning Goals:**
After successfully completing this course, students should be able to . . .
A. Generate a working definition(s) of pseudo- and non-Christian cults and engage critically other definitions.
B. Discern the major theological errors of cults (and some aberrant groups) and engage critically their beliefs and practices from the standpoint of biblical faith / classical Christian orthodoxy.
C. Show familiarity with the history and basic beliefs of several cultic groups.
D. Demonstrate awareness of the sociological atmosphere of various cults.
E. Utilize all the above to . . .
   1. Know God more deeply by better understanding certain essential doctrines of Christianity.
   2. Develop strategies for presenting the biblical Christ and his gospel to adherents of these groups.
   3. Be able to equip the body of Christ for the same.

III. **Required texts:**


*In addition to the above (approx. 1,100 pages), students are required to research primary source cultic literature toward the submission of a research paper.*

**Recommended Texts**

IV. Requirements:
A. Read the required texts and primary source material from one cultic group. Primary source reading should be geared toward writing your research paper. No reading report is required, but your mid-term examination, final examination and research paper grades will be lower if you fail to interact with the reading and class lectures. Thus, in this sense good attendance is required.

B. Make one visit to a cult meeting or service, and write a reflection / observation paper on your visit (2-3 pages, 1-inch margins around paper, and double-spaced with 12-point Times New Roman font). Your paper must include certain ethnographic information, including mentioning what was taught and how it was taught. These papers are due anytime during the semester, but no later than at the time of the start of the final examination. There is a ten-point penalty for each day late (even papers handed in on the day of the final, but after the final itself, will be considered one day late). You will also be penalized for an excessive amount of grammatical errors and an excess of typos. (20% of grade)

C. A research paper (10-12 pages, 1-inch margins all around, and double-spaced with 12-point Times New Roman font) on one area of doctrine of a cult. Interaction with the required reading and with the cult’s primary source material is expected, along with biblical responses. No bibliography is required. Students are required to discuss their paper topic with the instructor before starting research.

Proper footnoting (please use footnotes, not endnotes) and style as found in Slade’s Form and Style (11th ed.), chapter 7 (“Chicago Manual of Style”), is required. Also, consult Form and Style, pp. 34-38. Note that titles of books, journals, etc. may be italicized rather than underlined if you desire. Also note that you will suffer loss of grade points due to an excessive amount of grammatical errors, grossly incorrect style, and an excess of typos.

Papers are due on Monday, May 7, no later than 4:00 p.m., outside the Beeson Center faculty secretary’s office on the second floor (place in box outside the door). Any paper passed in after that time will be considered one day late, and after 4:00 p.m. on May 8, two days late, etc. There is a ten-point-per-day loss of grade. (50% of grade)

Additional note: You are welcome to use my library for research, by appointment only. No books may be taken home.

D. A mid-term (75 min.) examination and a final examination (2 hrs.). Both examinations are essay and identification. For essays you are expected to interact with the reading and class lectures. The final pertains to material from the whole semester. You may use a Bible for the mid-term and the final, providing there are no notes from class in it. (Average of two exams — 30% of grade)

V. Class Schedule
Week 1

Week 2


Week 3


6. *February 22.* Jehovah’s Witnesses: Beliefs and Christian response. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 49-91; Stark and Bainbridge, chapters 1,2,6,8,9. Discussion questions for Stark and Bainbridge will be distributed in order to facilitate discussion for week 5, class #9.

Week 4

7. *February 27.* Mormonism: Discussion of history. Beliefs and Christian response. **Reading for next class:** Stark and Bainbridge, chapters 10,12,13.

8. *March 1.* Mormonism: Beliefs and Christian response. **Reading for next class:** Stark and Bainbridge, chapters 14,18,19,21.

Week 5

9. *March 6.* Mormonism: Video showing of *Together Forever* (primary source) followed by discussion. Discussion of Stark and Bainbridge. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 319-55.


Week 6

11. *March 13.* Yoga and Christians. Scientology. **Reading for next class:** Tucker, 389-98 (as you read the various *Cultic Statements of Belief*, keep in mind the definitions behind the terms used).


Week 7


**Week 8**
15. **March 27.** Freemasonry: (A) Discussion on the subject of whether or not Freemasonry is a religion. (B) The teachings of Freemasonry and Christian response. *Reading for next class:* Tsoukalas, 177-228.

**Week 9**
17. **April 3.** The Baha’i Faith. *Reading for next class:* Tucker, 149-76.

**Week 10:** **Reading Week** (April 9-13).

**Week 11**
20. **April 19.** The Word-Faith Movement.

**Week 12**
22. **April 26.** The Unification Church.

**Week 13**
23. **May 1.** The Nation of Islam (Black Muslims).
24. **May 3.** United Pentecostal Church. Unitarianism.

**Week 14**
26. **May 10.** The Way International. Where do we go from here?: Class discussion on (A) preventive preaching and teaching, (B) how to keep ourselves continually informed, (C) Christian counseling, the cults and the occult, and (D) creating opportunities for cult evangelism.

*This syllabus is subject to change.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**
Consult the extensive bibliography for this course in the *Lecture Power Points* folder through email, marked “CH (HT) 612- Contemp cults.” A hardcopy is also provided in the Library on the reserve shelf for this course.