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MW 770 Contemporary Cults

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MW770: CONTEMPORARY CULTS / NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

ATS Spring 2004, Fridays: 9:00 – 11:45 a.m. (9:00-10:15; 10:30-11:45) SH408
Steven Tsoukalas
Office Hours: Thursdays, 1:15-2:15 p.m., SH317A (open door, no sign-up)
Fridays: lunch time with students in the dining hall
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I. Course Description:
A study of the beliefs, histories, and sub-cultural dynamics of several pseudo- and non-Christian religions in America with a view to developing a missiological approach to adherents.

II. Learning Goals:
After successfully completing this course, students should be able to . . .
A. Generate a working definition(s) of pseudo- and non-Christian religions that is biblically based and as a result engage critically other definitions.
B. Biblically discern the major theological errors of pseudo- and non-Christian religions (and some aberrant groups) and critically engage, from the Bible and classical Christian orthodoxy, their beliefs and practices.
C. Show familiarity with the histories of several of these religious groups.
D. Demonstrate awareness of sub-cultural dynamics of certain religious groups.
E. Utilize all the above to form a theologically grounded missiology and a missiologically focused theology of pseudo- and non-Christian religions, thereby aiding strategies for presenting the gospel to their adherents.

III. Required Texts:

**Recommended Texts**

**IV. Requirements:**

A. *Reading of required texts*. Submission of reading report is required at the end of the semester (see back of syllabus). Turn this in with your final paper. You will be graded on the percentage of pages read out of the total required for class. There is a ten-point penalty for each day late. **15% of grade.**

B. *Six interaction papers*. During the semester, six interaction papers will be due (3-4 pages, 1-inch margins all around text, double-spaced with 12-point Times New Roman font), concerning which you will interact, where pertinent, with class lectures and/or class discussion and/or required readings and/or videos shown in class. All six assignments are attached to the back of this syllabus (see “Interaction Papers Questions and Due Dates”).

These assignments aim at developing biblically/theologically grounded missiological approaches. They will be due *at the start* of certain Friday class sessions throughout the semester (see Class Schedule and “Interaction Papers Questions and Due Dates”). No early submissions, please. If you pass in papers after the deadline, on the front of the paper put the date and time that you passed them in. Late papers are to be slipped under the door of BC336 (Dr. Sandra Richter’s office). There is a ten-point penalty for each day late (even papers handed in on the day of the class session, but after the start of the session itself, will be considered one day late). You will also be penalized for an excessive amount of grammatical errors and an excess of typos. No formal use of notes or bibliography is required, but place author(s), title and book page(s) in parentheses. **30% of grade.**

C. *Cult meeting visit*. Make one visit to a cult meeting or service and write a reflection/observation paper on your visit (2-3 pages, 1-inch margins all around text, double-spaced with 12-point Times New Roman font). No team papers, though team visits are encouraged (try to limit group to 2 or 3 people). Your paper must include certain ethnographic information (see “Ethnographic Information” at the back of this syllabus). You will be penalized for an excessive amount of grammatical errors and an excess of typos. These papers are due anytime during the semester. **Deadline: May 14, at the beginning of that Friday session.** Any papers passed in after the deadline will result in a 10-point loss of grade per day (even papers handed in on the day of the class period, but after the start of the class itself, will be considered one day late). If you pass in this paper after the deadline, on the front of the paper put the date and time that you passed it in. Late papers are to be slipped under the door of BC336 (Dr. Sandra Richter’s office). **15% of grade.**
D. Research paper (10-12 pages, double-spaced with 12-point Times New Roman font). Students are required to discuss their paper topic with the instructor (not “on the run,” not by email, not during lunch, but by phone or during office hours) before starting research, and topic must be approved by instructor. Students may choose from two categories: (A) one area of doctrine of a cult, or (B) “Effective Evangelism with (list group).” For A, interaction with the cult’s primary source material and secondary literature is expected, along with biblical response. For B, the paper must utilize both missiological and theological elements (though here the theological elements required are less intensive than for option A).

Proper noting of sources and other form and style elements are required according to ESJ School standards (obtain from the ESJ School). There will be loss of grade points due to an excessive amount of grammatical errors, incorrect style, and an excess of typos.

Papers are due on Friday, May 21, no later than 5:00 p.m., outside BC336, Dr. Sandra Richter’s office (place in box outside the door). Any paper passed in after that time will be considered one day late, and after 5:00 p.m. on May 22, two days late, etc. There is a ten-point-per-day loss of grade. If you pass in this paper after the deadline, on the front of the paper put the date and time that you passed it in. 40% of grade.

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

E. Attendance. Students may miss one Friday session of classes (each Friday session is two classes). Any absence after this will result in a 10-point loss from final grade for each absence.

V. Class Schedule*
February 13 (Session 1)
1. Course introduction. Introduction to the Cults (theological).
2. Introduction to the Cults (theological continued; general sub-cultural dynamics). Discussion: A biblical theological/missiological understanding of pseudo-and non-Christian religions. The person and work of Christ. Reading for next class: Sire, 7-39; Hexham, 1-11, 60-72; Tucker, 11-30; Stark & Bainbridge, 1-37 (see class #23, May 14, and read all S & B reading assignments with that class in mind). Due next class: Interaction paper #1.

February 20 (Session 2)
3. (Interaction paper #1 due) The person and work of Christ.

[Beginning with the February 27 session, photocopies of the overheads used in Friday class sessions may be found in the library in folders (placed in box) on the reserve shelf for this course. They will be on the shelf no later than 3:00 p.m. on the Tuesday before the corresponding Friday’s session. On the Tuesday after, they will be removed and replaced with photocopies for the next Friday class session, again no later than 3:00 p.m.]
February 27 (Session 3)

March 5 (Session 4)

March 12 (Session 5)

March 19 (Session 6)

March 26 (Session 7)
14. Introduction to the Occult. Introduction to Modern-day Witchcraft (Wicca). 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); Hexham, 131-66. Tsoukalas, ix-xii, 1-123. Due next class: Interaction paper #5.

March 29 — April 2
Reading Week. No class

April 9
Good Friday. No Class.

April 16 (Session 8)
15. (Interaction paper #5 due) Showing of the video Witchcraft: Yesterday and Today, by Raymond Buckland (primary source), teaching the history, beliefs and practices of Wicca. Discussion: A missiologically-minded witness to Wiccans and other occultists.
April 23 (Session 9)
17. Freemasonry: The teachings of Freemasonry and Christian response. Discussion:
   Talking with Masons who claim to be Christians. What are churches to do?
18. The Baha’i Faith. United Pentecostal Church. Reading for next class: Tucker, 149-
   76, 177-90; Hexham, 46-55, 57-59; Stark & Bainbridge, 475-505.

April 30 (Session 10)
19. Q & A and comments on Unity. Christian Science: Social/religious dynamics, beliefs
   and practices, Christian response.
20. Discussion: A missiologically-minded witness to Christian Scientists. The Word-
   Faith Movement. Reading for next class: Stark & Bainbridge, 189-233; Tucker, 231-
   43.

May 7 (Session 11)
22. The Nation of Islam (Black Muslims): Social/religious dynamics, beliefs. Discussion:
   A missiologically-minded witness to adherents of the Nation of Islam. Reading for
   next class: Tucker, 191-216, 245-66; Hexham, 111-30. Due next class: Interaction
   paper #6.

May 14 (Session 12)
23. (Interaction paper #6 due) Q & A and comments on the Worldwide Church of God
   and splinter groups, and on the Unification Church. Class discussion of Stark and
   Bainbridge book.
   S & B Discussion Questions / Topics:
   A. What do you think about the S&B definition of a cult (and sect)? What
      do you think their worldview is? How do their worldview and their
      discipline affect their definition of a cult?
   B. S&B talk about “secularization.” In their view, what does
      secularization cause? How does this figure in their conclusion that where
      conventional churches are strongest, cults are weakest, and vice versa?
   C. Summarize and interact with S’s & B’s view of “compensators.”
      (Keep in mind S’s & B’s worldview and discipline.)
   D. What can we glean from S&B in relation to how we might (A) avoid
      pitfalls in ministry and (B) improve our ministries?
24. Questions and comments on Hexham and Poewe book. Discussion: What is your
   definition of a cult? What is your general method for a positive witness to cultists? Will
   this course affect your future preaching / teaching ministry? How? Will this course affect
   your evangelism of all people (not only cultists)? How? Open Q & A and comments.

*Class schedule is subject to change and/or modification.
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.

ETHNOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
Include the following in your cult visit reflection/observation paper

*Ethnography* means “description of a culture / peoples group.” Your reflection / observation papers should include the following ethnographic information:

1. Name of group observed
2. Location / date / time
3. Approximate number of persons attending
4. Approximate age group breakdown (children, teens, 20-30 year-olds, 30-40 year-olds, etc.)
5. Who led the meeting? Was there any visible and official leadership?
6. What was taught? How was it taught?
7. To what degree did the congregation participate in the meeting? How?
8. How did participation serve to bond the people to each other and to the organization?
9. What kind of barriers to Christian evangelism might be erected as a result of any or all of these (6,7,8)?
10. List two or three dynamics that you observed in the meeting that you might utilize for evangelism?
11. State your overall feelings concerning the meeting.

*Note:* Each of the 11 elements above is worth 9 points (for #2, 3 points for each sub-element; for #s 5, 6, 7, 4.5 points for each sub-element). Including all 11 elements, with little or no grammatical errors and little or no typos, is a relatively easy way to earn 100% for this portion of your overall grade.

INTERACTION PAPERS QUESTIONS AND DUE DATES

1. Tell me what you think about Hexham’s and Poewe’s sections on “Christian Apologetics,” “The Sociological Evidence,” and “Christian Literature and the Cults” (pp. 2-6). Interact with the assigned reading thus far of Sire (pp. 7-39), Tucker (pp. 11-30), and Stark & Bainbridge (pp. 1-37) in order to defend your assessment. **Due February 20.**

2. In the videotape *Jehovah’s Witnesses: The Organization Behind the Name*, list three dynamics/phenomena that are characteristic of Jehovah’s Witnesses that could be used for your evangelism of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Why? How? **Due February 27.**

3. While hosting a few Mormon missionaries in your home, you engage them in Christian witness by citing examples of how some of their beliefs are not biblical. In response, and at the end of your time together, one of them gives you a brief testimony: “I feel in my heart that the *Book of Mormon* is true, that Joseph Smith is a
prophet of God, and that the Mormon Church is true, in the name of Jesus Christ.” Respond (write this to me, not to the Mormon missionaries) to this “burning in the bosom”-based testimony. **Due March 19.**

4. In the videotape *Our Heavenly Father’s Plan*, list three dynamics/phenomena that are characteristic of Mormons that could be used for your evangelism of Mormons. Why? How? **Due March 26.**

5. Of what use is apologetics in ministry to members of New Religious Movements? Is apologetics concerned *only* with data and refutation of data? Is apologetics *only* for the benefit of others? How might you utilize apologetics in your witness? In answering the latter, do you agree with Hexham’s and Poewe’s observation that engaging in apologetics “leads us to concentrate on intellectual questions . . . and suggests that human experiences, conflicts, emotional turmoil, and even social and cultural upheavals are unimportant”? **Due April 16.**

6. Concerning Hexham and Poewe, chapter 8 (“Social Aspects of the Cultic Process: Tensions and Reactions”), (A) in three or four sentences, give a brief summary of the essence of the chapter, (B) share insights gained and some disagreements (if any), and (C) concerning these insights, share some applications you might make in your ministry to adherents of pseudo- and non-Christian religions. **Due May 14.**

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**Reading Report**

I have read ______ pages out of the total 1,110 pages required for class.

_Signed,_

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*Attach this report to your final paper.*