**Course Description:**
This course adopts a sociological/anthropological approach to understanding new religious movements (NRMs). Our focus will be descriptive and analytical. Students will be introduced to some of the most significant new religions, and will study their spiritual beliefs and practices, their charismatic authorities, gender roles, and social organization. The short histories of these “baby religions” will be presented within a global context of cultural change, legal systems, religious freedom, pluralism and climates of tolerance. We will review some of the classic sociological theories and models relevant to understanding the “cult/sect/church” phenomenon, and will be introduced to theoretical developments in the field of new religious studies (NRS) since the 1960s. Students will also receive some training in the standard qualitative research methods (interview techniques, participant observation) and will be made aware of the ethical issues that arise in field work with controversial social movements. Students will be expected to apply these techniques and approaches in their work assignments.

Important questions/issues we will addressed include the following:

- Why and how do people join new religions?
- Is there a difference between a “new” religion and an “old” religion?
- How does one distinguish between a “genuine” conversion and “brainwashing”?
- What is charismatic authority?
- What is the role of the media in shaping popular opinion regarding NRMs?
- What happens when prophecy fails?
- Why do some NRMs erupt in violence?
- Are women in NRMs oppressed or empowered?

Guest speakers from various groups will be invited to present their own spiritual worldviews and experiences. The lectures will be illustrated with slide presentations, documentary films and news clips, and will be organized so as to invite in-class questions and debates.

**Required Reading:** Weekly readings will be assigned from:

**Recommended Reading:**
Palmer, Susan J. *Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers* (Syracuse Univ. Press, 1994)
Wessinger, Catherine. *Millennialism, Persecution and Violence.* (Seven Bridges Pr., 2000)

*The Required Reading books are available at the Webster bookstore, and most of those on the Recommended Reading list are on reserve in the Webster library. Books and articles on reserve in the library will also be assigned, as well as sources on the Internet. Some of these readings are essential, others supplementary. Students will be expected to focus on the theoretical work, but not necessarily all the descriptive papers on NRMs. Lorne Dawson’s text contains the important theoretical articles. *Storming Zion* and World Religion and Spirituality Project with descriptive profiles of groups and different topics useful for the debates and assignments. The Instructor will explain the relevance of the readings, and prioritize them each week.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS/GRADUES**

10% - Media report – Based on a class lecture and readings, write a study of how the media treats/portrays one particular new religion.

10% - Two in-class workshops
   1. Research methods workshop (in-class attendance mandatory)
   2. Women in NRMs discussion (Based on a class lecture & readings, prepare a point form outline on the sexual ethics and roles of women in one of the following group: Children of God/The Family, the Rajneesh Movement, the Unification Church, the Raelians. (5% bring point-form outline to the discussion, in-class attendance mandatory).

30% - Two tests (Format: Midterm test, multiple choice (15%); Final test, essay questions (15%)

20% - Two debates (Based on a written argument, 500-600 words (oral & written arguments, each 5%)

30% - Original research paper (2500-3000 words)

* Attendance will be taken every class, so be sure to sign the class list when it is passed around by the TA.

*All requirements must be fulfilled in order to receive a passing grade for the course. No extensions of deadlines will be authorized without a medical justification for non-participation and without direct negotiations with the instructor.

**WEEKLY TOPICS AND READINGS – CODES:**

**TEXT** = Lorne Dawson’s *Cults and New Religious Movements.*

**SZ** (Storming Zion, Wright & Palmer’s volume)

**LR** = Library on Reserve

**INT** = Internet source

**WRSP** = World Religions & Spirituality Project (www.wrldrels.org/). “Profiles” = descriptions of specific NRMs.

**Expectations:** Students will be expected to attend the classes, and to be prepared for the in-class informal discussions as well as for the formal debates. It is important to be present for the Charisma study, Research Methods Workshop and the two Debates. Attendance will be taken. Students arriving late or leaving early will be expected to be quiet and discreet. Students must turn off their cell phones. To receive or make calls during class is considered rude and inappropriate behaviour.

**Guidelines on Written Assignments:** No papers will be accepted by email, unless invited. All papers must be double-spaced, have a cover page, pagination, and a bibliography in the correct format. All the theories and data quoted in the main text **MUST** be accompanied by citations **IN THE TEXT** (i.e. not all smushed together at the end of the paper in the bibliography). In other words, as I read the paper I want to know **exactly where you found each idea, each item of information.**
Class Schedule & Assigned Readings

Week One (Sept. 7) – Topic 1: Definitions of Cult/Church/Sect.
Characteristics of a “cult” (NRM). Colin Campbell’s notion of the “Cultic Milieu”.
Read: Palmer, Susan J. “Caught Up in the Cult Wars: Confessions of a Canadian Researcher.”
Available on Longreads: (https://blog.longreads.com/2013/09)

Topic 2: Charisma and Types of NRMs: Max Weber’s classic model of Charisma; Recent theoretical developments in the field of NRS (new religious studies).
*Students should bring computers to class next week for exercise in identifying types of CWGs.

Week Two (Sept. 14) – Media Treatment of NRMs.

Topic Two: Sources of Information on NRMs, a Critical Approach to Research.
Eileen Barkers’ typology of CWGs (“cult-watching” groups, a.k.a. “anticult” groups).
Read LR: Eileen Barker, “Charting the Information Field: Cult-Watching Groups and the Construction of Images of new Religions” in Teaching New Religions (David Bromley (ed.)

Week Three (Sept. 21) – TYPOLOGIES OF NRMs.
Read TEXT, A:3: Roy Wallis, “Three types of new religious movements”. CHARISMA (cont.)
Topic 2: Knutby Filadelphia - Guest speaker Asa Waldau.

Week Four (Sept. 28) – The International Raelian Movement.
*Media Report due in class.

Week Five (Oct. 5) – Communal Utopias. Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s Six Commitment Mechanisms.
Read: LR Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s “Commitment and Community” (Book Chapter).
Topic 2: The Twelve Tribes. Read: The Twelve Tribes | We are the commonwealth of Israel (www.twelvetribes.com/); Storming Zion, Chapter 3; INT: WRSP Profile: “The Twelve Tribes”.

Six (Oct.12) – The Children of God/The Family International
Read: Storming Zion, Chapter 4; INT: WRSP Profile: “The Family International”.
Topic 2: Apocalyptic Religion/The Bible Prophecy Tradition. Film “Signs of the Times”.
Watch Youtube: “The End Of The World Cult” (Documentary).
*Prepare for in-class small groups discussion next week.
Week Seven (Oct.19) – Alternative Marriages/Gender Roles in NRMs
Case Studies: The Osho/Rajneesh Commune. Film: *The Way of the Heart*.
Women in NRMs discussion (5%). (Prepare a point form outline on the sexual ethics and roles of
women in one of the following group: Children of God/The Family, the Osho/Rajneesh Movement, the
Unification Church, the International Raelian Movement. Bring point-form outline.
WRSP Profile: “Osho/Rajneesh Commune”; and “The Children of God/The Family”.
Watch on Youtube: *The Love Prophet*.
Read: INT: Susan Raine, “Flirty Fishing in the Children of God: The Sexual Body as a Site of
Proselytization and Salvation” (available online)

Week Eight (Oct. 26) –The Branch Davidians and David Koresh
Watch: *The Rules of Engagement* (documentary film)
Recommended Authors: Stuart Wright, James Tabor, Catherine Wessinger, Dick Reavis (LR).
Read: Wright in TEXT; *Storming Zion*, chapter 5. See Internet and news reports around the dates of the
siege (1993 Feb.-May); the Washington D.C. hearings (August 1995); and the wrongful death suit (Sept-
October 2001). Read WRSP Profile “Branch Davidians” by Catherine Wessinger.

Week Nine (Nov. 2) – DEBATENOE. “Who is responsible for the deaths at Waco?”
*Hand in 500-word argument at end of class.
Topic Two: Scientology (Guest Speaker from the Church of Scientology)
Read: WRSP Profile “Church of Scientology” by Hugh Urban; *Storming Zion*, Chapter 8.

Week Ten (Nov. 9) – How to Research a NRM: Qualitative Research Methods
Negotiating access, ethical issues, interview techniques, participant- observation field research.
*Prepare for next week’s workshop by writing 10 Interview Questions or A Statement of Faith
(depending on your role) for the in-class Role-Playing Exercise (see instruction sheet). Bring this to
class to be handed in after the workshop.

Week Eleven (Nov. 16) – Role-Playing Exercise.
*Hand in assignments (Question sheet or Faith Statement the end of class).
Topic 2: The Anti-cult Movement/ Models of Brainwashing/Thought Reform/Mind Control.
Lofland & Stark’s “Seven Stages of Conversion” (handout).
Read: TEXT V: 9, 10, 11 (Singer, Richardson, Robbins. SZ, chapters 1&2. LR: J. Gordon Melton,
Darrell Bryant, Flo Conway & Seigleman, Raymond Prince.
*Research Papers to be handed in by the end of the class.

Week Twelve (Nov. 23) –Violence and New Religions
Case studies: Aum Shinrikyo, Heaven’s Gate, the Solar Temple and Jonestown. Factors contributing to
violence in NRMs. Catherine Wessinger’s typology of violent groups.
Read: TEXT: VI 12, 13 (Hall; Mayer); Read Sayle, “Nerve Gas and the Four Noble Truths”
(connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/9604173431/nerve-gas-four-noble-truths);
WRSP profiles: “Aum Shinrikyo” and “Heaven’s Gate”.

Week Thirteen (Nov. 30) – DEBATE TWO - “Conversion to a NRM: Choice or
Brainwashing?” *Hand in 500-word argument.
*The Final Test (15%) will be held in the exam period, between December 7 and 21.

*NOTE: This schedule may be subject to revisions, depending on the availability of guest speakers, the unpredictable volatility of new religious movements (which continue to move), and the specific needs and creative input of individual students.

A Student’s Guide for this Course

NO INCOMPLETE GRADES OR DEADLINE EXTENSIONS ARE POSSIBLE except on medical or other compassionate grounds, and you must provide the instructor with appropriate supporting documentation.

Written requirements may be submitted in either English or French, and typing (double-spaced) is mandatory. Handwritten work will not be accepted, nor will, even for reasons of paper costs and potential viral difficulties, assignments submitted electronically. There will be no exceptions to this, so please take good note. For the purpose of measuring your submission, a single “page” is generally considered to be approximately 250 words. Should you need help with your writing, you may wish to avail yourself of the excellent services of the Writing Centre (Hall Building, room 662). Your ability to write clearly and correctly, including grammatically, will be factored into your grade, as these are important life skills for any student and eventual university graduate to possess. The more critical, original and creative your work, the better this will impact on your grade for any assignment. Late assignments will be penalized at the Instructor’s discretion.

**Attendance:** Even though grades are not formally assigned for class participation, it is to your advantage to avoid missing material not covered in the readings. Since dialogue is an important part of the learning process, your attendance and participation is essential to good grades. *Attendance will be taken every class, so be sure to sign the class list when it is passed around by the TA.

**Participation:** Your questions, comments, and contributions will add a great deal to our discussion. Therefore, I invite your input and encourage you to be open, honest and non-judgmental with regard to the material.

**Code of Conduct:** Please take the time to review: [http://secretariat.concordia.ca/policies/](http://secretariat.concordia.ca/policies/) (See “Academic Code of Conduct”).

**Plagiarism:** All written submissions in this course should be your own thoughts and ideas. If there is any indication that your work is not original research or writings, the document in question will be treated as a case of plagiarism and submitted for disciplinary procedures. See details in the document referred to in the above section (Code of Conduct).

**Policy on religious holidays**

In accordance with university’s policy, students who wish to observe religious holidays must inform the teachers in writing within the first two weeks of each semester of their intent to observe the holidays so that alternative arrangements convenient to both the student and the teacher can be made at the earliest opportunity. Jewish students should approach the instructor to plan how to accommodate the two October Jewish festivals if they happen to conflict with class time this term.

**Readings:** Success is greatly influenced by one’s effort and engagement in the material. Reading the assigned chapters and supplementary readings (when necessary), will help you grasp the essential concepts in the material covered.

**The Internet:** The Internet is a wonderful educational tool as well as an opportunity to explore many different ideas and presentations. However, not all web resources are accurate or can be trusted with regard to the information that is posted. Students are advised to use the internet cautiously and not as a main source to acquire study material. Unless the web site has been recommended, your course text and supplementary readings are your best resources for study.

**Absence:** Class attendance is very important. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the notes, as well continue to follow the schedule of readings. In the case where you be unable to attend an exam, you must have a medical note and advise the instructor of your situation (by e-mail or telephone).

**Expectations:** Students will be expected to attend the classes, and to be prepared for the in-class informal discussions as well as for the formal debates Attendance will be taken by the TA. Students arriving late or leaving early will be expected to be quiet and discreet. Students must turn off their cell phones in class. To receive or make calls, or to text messages during class is considered rude, counter-productive and inappropriate behaviour.
Guidelines for written assignments: No papers will be accepted by email, unless invited. All papers must be double-spaced, have a cover page, pagination, and a bibliography in the correct format. All the theories and data quoted in the main text MUST be accompanied by citations IN THE TEXT (i.e. not all mingled together at the end of the paper in the bibliography). In other words, the Reader wants to know exactly where the student found each idea, each item of information, and how he/she has applied them. Direct quotes must include the page number(s), and the author, title, city, publisher and date of publication must be included for all references. The student may choose APA or other styles, and use footnotes or endnotes.