

Sociology 130
SOCIOLOGY OF ALTERNATIVE RELIGIONS
Spring, 2012

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Office hours (SS 325)

Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday – 10-11 & 2-3
Thursday & Friday – 10-11
Or by appointment

Preceptors (SS 326)

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Brianna Lescher – breeness@hotmail.com. Hours: 11-12, Monday & Wednesday

The preceptors are undergraduate assistants who received an A in this course the last time the class was taught. Besides attending class every day, they will conduct review sessions before each exam and will be available to meet with you individually, either before the test or afterwards to go over questions you missed. The preceptors are in charge of scoring the exams and recording grades so please direct any questions about grades to them. They will hold office hours before and after each midterm and before the final. If you can't make their office hours, you can make an appointment to meet at another time.

Overview of the course

In every society the religious landscape is dominated by one or more long-standing religious traditions, such as Christianity in Western societies and Islam in the Middle East. Similarly, ethnic groups within a society typically have their own religious traditions. This course is about religions that break those traditions. These religions reject old formulas, embrace unusual new beliefs, and experiment with radical lifestyles, all of which provokes reactions ranging from mild amusement to fear and outrage, systematic persecution, and even government repression. They are a worldwide phenomenon found in virtually all societies, and hundreds (even thousands, depending on how wide the net is cast) exist in the United States alone. Sociologists often refer to these groups as new religious movements because most are literally quite new. Most disintegrate within two or three generations, only to be replaced by still others, but a few launch new traditions of their own.

In this course we will look at new religious movements from a sociological perspective, using three levels of analysis. At the societal level, we will examine historical trends in the popularity of unconventional religions, as well as the social and cultural conditions that enhance their appeal. At the group level, we will investigate the origins of religious movements, analyze common themes in their belief systems, and trace how they evolve over time. At the individual level, we will focus on why people join, how conversion occurs, and why some members become deeply devoted while others become disillusioned and leave. By the end of this course you should be able to:

- use social science concepts to describe 1) societal conditions influencing the appeal of alternative religions, 2) the beliefs and social organization of these groups, and 3) the

- experiences of individual members.
- understand how new religions originate and change over time.
- use social science concepts and theories to understand contemporary controversial new religions and their impact on individuals.
- understand and evaluate research on new religions

Reading

Books – available in UC Bookstore

Aquarian, Isis. 2007. *The Source: The Untold Story of Father Yod, Ya Ho Wa 13 and The Source Family*. Process.

King, Francis. 2004. *Megatherion: The Magickal World of Aleister Crowley*. Creation Books.

Stein, Stephen J. 2003. *Communities of Dissent: A History of Alternative Religions in America*. Oxford.

Electronic reserve (eres)

There are 29 readings are on eres, 16 of which are required.. The required readings include most of a short illustrated book by Sarah Moran, which covers the best known new religious movements in late 20th century North America. A table of contents appears at the end of the syllabus. To access eres, go to <http://eres.lib.umt.edu>. Once you get to the library page, click on Course Reserves and then scroll down to Soci130 and click. Type Balch for password, then click Accept.

When you open the folder for the readings, the articles are listed by number. These numbers correspond to the article numbers shown in the *table of contents at the end of this syllabus*. **Important note:** When you get to a particular article, the number on the first page may not be correct. Don't worry about it. If you have the right author, you have the right article.

The course outline below shows which readings are most relevant to each class meeting. For some topics there are several readings, whereas other have none. It is important to read this material because most of it will not be covered in class, and anywhere from 30 to 50 percent of the exam questions will come from the reading.

Exams and grading

There will be two midterms and a *comprehensive* final worth 30%, 30%, and 40%. All exams will consist of multiple-choice questions. You won't need a Scantron—we will provide answer sheets. Failure to follow exam instructions will result in a point deduction.

Exams will be graded on a percentage basis: 90% and above = A, 80% = B, etc. Different versions of each exam may be distributed in alternating order to prevent cheating (same questions, different order). Cheating in any form will result in an F on the exam and possibly failing the course. I do not use the plus-minus system.

I will give you a study guide a week before each exam. It will be posted below this syllabus on the Sociology website. If you have done the reading by the time you get it, it will be easy to find the

relevant points, but if you save the reading until you've got the study guide in hand, you're likely to be in trouble. The preceptors will conduct a review session shortly before each exam. Don't expect the preceptors to tell you what will or will not be on the exam, or to provide capsule summaries of lectures you missed. The purpose of this session is clarify concepts, theories, and factual information, and to discuss similarities and differences between groups described in the lectures and readings.

Exam scores (percent correct) will be posted on the Sociology web page. To insure anonymity, scores will be identified by a five-letter code name of your choosing. I will not return the exam questions, but I strongly encourage you to see one of the preceptors to go over your exams. You may review the key, but it cannot be copied or leave the Sociology Department. Since the final will be comprehensive, reviewing the keys will be a good way to prepare.

Exceptions to normal procedures

Make-up exams will be allowed if you have a compelling reason why you can't take the exam at the scheduled time. I may ask for written documentation. If you wish to reschedule, you must make arrangements with me *before* the exam date. If you don't make prior arrangements, you may still take the exam, but you will be docked five percentage points.

To receive an *Incomplete*, by University policy you must have a D or better after the midterms *and* experience circumstances that make it impossible to complete the course. Bad grades or potential loss of financial aid are not acceptable reasons for receiving an Incomplete.

If you have a *disability* that requires special accommodations, please let me know what your needs are ASAP.

If you do not return *borrowed materials* (e.g., books, videos, articles) by the last day of class, you will receive an Incomplete, which will turn into an F if the items are not returned or replaced.

Extra credit

You can earn extra credit by attending one or more night-time extra-credit presentations or videos. Each is worth one percentage point to be added to the weighted average of your exam scores. To receive credit you must *arrive on time* and submit a one page synopsis of the video before leaving. Unless otherwise announced, sessions will begin at 6:10 p.m. sharp. Late arrivals may stay but will not receive credit. Dates, times, and locations will be posted as soon as they are known.

Field trips

There may be one or two optional field trips this semester. These would be weekend trips, leaving Friday afternoon and returning late Sunday night. To make sure that only the most interested people go on these trips, participants will not receive extra credit and will have to pay their own expenses. Trip information will be announced in class and posted on the Sociology website where you found this syllabus.

Taking notes

Unless you are blessed with perfect recall, you will not do well in this course without taking good notes. Good notes are thorough notes. In particular, you should take notes on all examples. The exams

will test your ability to relate abstract concepts and theories to groups covered in class, as well as hypothetical groups and situations.

You are responsible for taking your own notes. You may borrow notes from one of the preceptors if you meet these conditions: 1) You must have a compelling reason for not being able to get notes from another student. 2) You must get my approval first. 3) You are limited to three class periods.

Course outline

All topics and exam dates are subject to change. You are responsible for keeping abreast of changes, which will be announced in class. Required readings for each class period are noted in parentheses. Numbers correspond to eres numbers in the table of contents below this outline. *Readings designated by asterisk (*) are optional.*

Introduction to the study of alternative religions

- Jan. 23 Course overview (#1 Moran – skim it now for overview; specific chapters will be required later)
25 Churches, sects, and new religions (Stein, *Communities of Dissent*, chaps. 1,2,6,7; eres #2 Palmer; #3 Stark; #4* Siegler)
27 New religious movements in American history (Stein, 1,2,6,7)

Basic concepts -- Case study of Human Individual Metamorphosis (no reading for this section)

- Jan. 30 Walking out the door of your life
Feb. 1 The message – concepts for understanding belief systems
3 Inside the cocoon – organizational totalism
6 Messages from the next level – ideological totalism

The millennial theme – Doomsday or Heaven on Earth?

- Feb. 8 Millennialism in American history – from the Millerites to 2012 (Stein, ch. 4)
10 Explaining outbreaks of millennial enthusiasm (Stein, 4)

The 1960s and the “new religious consciousness”

- Feb. 13 The 1960s – baby boomers in turbulent times (eres #5, Ellwood & Partin; eres #6* Stevens)
15 The great American cult scare – new religions in the 1970s (Aquarian, *The Source*; Moran #1, pp. 34-37 on Unification Church, 42-43 on TM, 44-47 on Krishnas, and 84-85 on Children of God; eres 7* on Rainbow Family)
17 Bringing the vision down – origins and beliefs of the Love Israel Family
20 Presidents Day – no class
22 The Love Family as a totalistic society
24 When Jesus Christ meets God – charisma and culture borrowing (Aquarian, *The Source*; eres #8* Watts)

March 27 – **FIRST EXAM** (Stein 1-4 & 6,7; *The Source* [entire book]; Moran selections in eres #1 plus eres 2, 3, 5)

Theoretical issues --How new religions begin

- Feb. 29 Messiahs, prophets, and revelations from God
Mar. 2 The Two Witnesses of Rev. 11 – revelation as reality construction

- 5 The entrepreneurial and subculture-evolution and entrepreneurial models – Scientology and Synanon (eres #9 Bainbridge & Stark; #10* Reitman)

Theoretical issues --Recruitment and conversion

- Mar. 7 Joining totalistic religions (eres #11 Bromley & Shupe; Hassan #12)
- 9 The conversion process – from verbal to total converts

Theoretical issues – Commitment and the brainwashing controversy

- Mar. 12 Active and passive models of commitment (Bromley & Shupe #11; Hassan #12; Singer #13*)
- 14 When prophecy fails – coping with cognitive dissonance

Into the Eighties – The New Age Movement

- Mar. 16 The New Age movement (Stein Ch. 5; eres #14 Pike; eres #15 Todd; eres #1 Moran, pp.48-57 & 62-63 on UFO cults)
- 19 The alternative reality: Metaphysical themes in the New Age movement (Stein, ch. 5; King [entire book]; eres #14 by Pike, #15 by Todd; eres #1 Moran pp. 96-99 on Satanism; eres#16 Jenkins on Satanism)
- 21 Church Universal and Triumphant: the New Age in Montana (*Profile: Elizabeth Clare Prophet #17)
- 23 Channeling – Ramtha’s School of Enlightenment (eres: Melton #18; Crutcher #19*)
- 26 Cult controversies – studying RSE (Melton 18)
- 28 Self-initiation: Decoding the mysteries of Revelation
- 30 Charisma and commitment in Self-Initiation

March 30 – Spring break!

- April 9 Discuss Twelve Tribes field trips (eres #20* Bozeman & Palmer)

April 11 – SECOND EXAM (Stein, ch. 5; King [entire book]; eres Moran selections #1, plus eres 9 & 11-18)

What becomes of new, religions? – Common outcomes

- April 13 From white hot to lukewarm – Accommodation and the decline of community
- 16 Corruption and community collapse – Rajneesh et al. (eres #1 Moran pp. 38-41)
- 18 Coping prophecy failure, schism, and the crisis of succession – Church Universal and Triumphant

Rare outcomes – Extreme behavior

- April 20 Deviance amplification – Jonestown and Waco (eres: Mathews #21; Wessinger #22; Moran #1 pp. 66-83, 88-95; Wessinger 23*)
- 23 Mass suicide and extreme commitment – Heaven’s Gate
- 25 Building commitment in Heaven’s Gate
- 27 Why HG ended in suicide

The rarest outcome – Success

- April 30 The early Mormon Church – polygamy, persecution, and violence (eres: #25 Woodward, #26 Anderson)
- May 2 From the margin to the mainstream (Woodward #26)

- 4 The price of accommodation – fundamentalist sects and polygamy (Moran #1 pp. 92-93; Altman & Ginat #27*; Buchanan #28*; Batchelor, Watson & Wilde #29*)

FINAL EXAM – Friday, May 11, 10:10 a.m.-12:10 (Moran selections #1; Mathews #21, Wessinger #22; Woodward #25; Anderson #26, plus material from previous study guides)

ERES TABLE OF CONTENTS

The order of the readings corresponds roughly with the order of class lectures. The numbers below match the numbers in the list of readings that appears when you go into eres. Don't be concerned if the number on the first page of the article doesn't match the number on this list; just be sure you have the right author and title. The first reading consists of the larger part of an illustrated pop book covering the most controversial late-20th century groups. The portions of this book that are required for each exam are noted on the syllabus.

Recommended but optional readings are indicated by an asterisk ().*

1. Moran, Sarah. 1999. Excerpts from The Secret World of Cults. Quadrillion. (Most notorious new religious movements of late 20th century)
2. Palmer, Susan. 2001. "Caught Up in the Cult Wars: Confessions of a Canadian Researcher." Pp. 99-122 in Misunderstanding Cults: Searching for Objectivity in a Controversial Field, edited by B. Zablocki and T. Robbins. University of Toronto. (The personal side of studying cults)
3. Stark, Rodney. 2007. "Religion." Chapter 14 in Sociology (10th ed.). Thomson Wadsworth. (A sociological perspective on religion that emphasizes the importance of cult movements)
- 4.* Siegler, Elijah, 2007. "New Religions in East Asia," "New Religions of Africa and the African Diaspora," and "Islamic New Religions." Chapters 5-7 in New Religious Movements. Pearson Prentice Hall. (Cults are a worldwide phenomenon)
5. Ellwood, Robert and Henry Partin. 1988. "The Sixties and After." Pp. 66-71 in Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America (2nd ed.). Prentice-Hall. (The 1960s and the popularity of alternative spiritualities)
- *6. Stevens, Jay. 1987. "The Counterculture" & "It Came From Inner Space." Chapters 22 & 25 in Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream. Harper & Row. (Sixties craziness—insights into the appeal of new religions within the hippie counterculture)
- *7. Sides, Hampton. 1991. "Welcome Home, Brother." Pp. 63-97 in Stomping Grounds: A Pilgrim's Progress Through Eight American Subcultures. William Morrow. (Typical Rainbow Family gathering—the counterculture lives on)
- *8. Watts, Alan. 1971. "The Trickster Guru." Alan Watts Journal. January. (Tips for aspiring gurus)
9. Bainbridge, William Sims and Rodney Stark. 1980. "Scientology: To be Perfectly Clear." Sociological Analysis, v. 41, pp. 128-136. (How a faddish client cult developed into a major cult movement)

- *10. Reitman, Janet. 2006. "Inside Scientology." Rolling Stone, March 9. (Why Scientology is so controversial. I also recommend her 2011 book, Inside Scientology)
- 11. Bromley, David and Anson Shupe. 1981. "Joining the New Religions: Brainwashing or Conversion?" Pp. 92-127 in Strange Gods: The Great American Cult Scare. Beacon Press.
- 12. Hassan, Steven. 1990. "Understanding Mind Control" and "Cult Psychology." Chapters 4 & 5 in Combating Cult Mind Control. Park Street Press.
- *13. Singer, Margaret Thaler. 1979. "Coming Out of the Cults." Psychology Today, January, pp. 72-82. (Defection from totalistic groups)
- 14. Pike, Sarah. 2004. "Introduction to the Religious Worlds of Neopagans and New Agers." Pp. 13-38 in New Age and Neopagan Religion in America. Columbia University Press.
- 15. Todd, Douglas. 2004. "The Last Paradise on Earth." Vancouver Sun. August 21. Section C,1-3. (New Age religion in the Pacific Northwest)
- 16. Jenkins, Philip. 2004. "Satanism and Ritual Abuse." Chapter 10 in The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements, edited by James R. Lewis. Oxford University Press.
- 17. Melton, J. Gordon. 1996. "An Initial Encounter with Ramtha." Gnosis Magazine. Fall, pp.13-18. (Sympathetic view emphasizing the Gnostic elements in Ramtha's teachings)
- *18. Crutcher, John. 1995. "Ramtha: The Enlightened One?" Common Ground. Part 1, July, 1995; Part 2, August, 1995. (Digging up dirt on Ramtha)
- 19. "Profile: Elizabeth Clare Prophet/Teachings of the Ascended Masters." 1989. Summit University Press. (Church Universal and Triumphant's basic beliefs)
- *20. Bozeman, John M. and Susan J. Palmer. 1997. "The Northeast Community Church of Island Pond, Vermont: Raising Up a People for Yahshua's Return." Journal of contemporary Religion. v.12, pp.181-190. (Twelve Tribes)
- 21. Mathews, Tom, et al. 1978. "The Cult of Death," Newsweek, December 4, pp. 38-66. (Jonestown mass suicide)
- 22. Wessinger, Catherine. 2000. "How the Millennium Comes Violently" Chapter 2 in How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate. Seven Bridges. (A theory of religious violence)
- *23. Wessinger, Catherine. 2000. "1978-Jonestown." Chapter 3 in How the Millennium Comes Violently. (History of Jim Jones' Peoples Temple and detailed analysis of the events leading up to the mass suicide)
- *24. Watson, Tex, with Chaplain Ray. 1973. Chapters 1 & 1-14 in Will You Die for Me? Fleming H. Revell Co. (How Charles Manson exercised control over his followers)
- 25. Woodward, Kenneth. 2001. "A Mormon Moment." Newsweek. September 10. (Contemporary Mormonism on the eve of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah)

26. Anderson, Scott. 1993. Chapter 2 in The 4 O'Clock Murders. Dell. (Short history of the Mormon Church that focuses on the roots of Mormon violence. The book is the story of Ervil LeBaron's bloody Church of the Lamb of God, a fundamentalist Mormon sect)
- *27. Altman, Irwin and Joseph Ginat. 1996. "The people and their communities." Pp. 61-85 in Polygamous Families in Contemporary Society. Cambridge. (The two largest fundamentalist Mormon sects, the Fundamentalist Church of Latter-day Saints [FLDS] and the Apostolic United Brethren [AUB]).
- *28. Buchanan, Susy. 2005. "Tempest in Texas." Intelligence Report, Southern Poverty Law Center, Spring 2005, pp. 31-41. (Events leading to the 2008 raid on the FLDS community near Eldorado, Texas)
- *29. Batchelor, Mary, Marianne Watson, and Anne Wilde. 2000. Excerpts from Voices in Harmony: Contemporary Women Celebrate Plural Marriage. Salt Lake City: Principle Voices. (Testimonies by women living in polygamous relationships, compiled by advocates of plural marriage)