



Nazarene Theological Seminary

1700 E Meyer Blvd • Kansas City, MO 64131 • 816/268-5400

CHS 640: AMERICAN CULTS AND SECTS Online -- Summer, 2011

Essential Information

Please refer to the following resources for information essential for the successful completion of courses and degree programs at Nazarene Theological Seminary. Links to these resources are available in the Essential Information section at <http://support.nts.edu>.

- NTS Mission Statement & Purpose Degree Objectives
- Tips for online learning success
- NTS library services
- NTS textbook information
- Online technical requirements and Moodle support information
- NTS Student Handbook including statements on quality of work, plagiarism, and academic probation
- *Handbook for Inclusive Language*

Instructor Information

Professor: Harold E Raser

Email: heraser@nts.edu

Office: (816) 268-5489

Office Hours: by appointment

Catalog Description

A study of the numerous perimeter or alternative religious movements in American religious history. Along with their beliefs and practices, attention is given to the historical and sociological factors that have contributed to the flourishing of such groups in America. Includes a survey of contemporary "cult" movements.

Course Narrative & Rationale

"Religions on the perimeter," "alternative altars," "fringe religions," and "New Religious Movements" (NRM's) (as well as "cults" and "sects") are some of the descriptions that have been applied to the numerous movements in American history that have deviated significantly from the Christian "mainstream" embraced by most religious Americans. Such groups are an important part of the story of religious life in the United States.

This course is designed to survey some of the more important alternative, perimeter, or new religious groups (especially those with Christian roots and close connections to Christian tradition) which have appeared with regularity in America from the seventeenth century up to the present time. The origins, development, and principal beliefs and practices of these groups are examined, along with the various factors that contribute to the formation and appeal of such groups in different historical contexts. Also, some attention is given to a variety of theological, legal, and pastoral issues raised by the presence of such groups in American society.

Degree Objectives

This course directly addresses concerns articulated in the goals and objectives of all NTS degree programs, which call for students to develop an understanding of the history and heritage of the Christian faith as well as familiarity with the context in which ministry takes place today. Among these are:

M.Div

3. "The development of wisdom and discernment through engagement with the intellectual challenge of the literature of the Christian faith, by, *the critical scholarly study of the history and theology of Christianity*, and of the literature and practice of Christian spirituality, ethics and ministry."
6. "The *investigation of human society, thought and culture* in order to articulate *clear and coherent views of the context of the mission of the Church, and to develop an understanding of the Church as the community of faith with a passion for the gospel engaging in mission to different cultures.*"

B. MACE

1. "Appropriate and enhance the student's ecclesial understanding of the Word of God, *the heritage of the faith, the doctrines of the church*, and the fellowship of believers, sufficient to enable him or her to deepen a personal commitment to God and the Church and to *inform a passionate, vital, and redemptive ministry.*"

C. MAICS

4. "Graduates will articulate, communicate, and contextualize the essential affirmations of the Christian faith in a cross-cultural setting."

D. MATS

(General Academic Track)

1. "Students will develop a comprehensive *knowledge of the major theological disciplines* and their interrelationships."
2. "Students will demonstrate the ability to *use the theological disciplines to reflect on and engage the world* as informed, thinking, Christian persons."

(Research Track)

1. "Students will *gain specialized knowledge in designated theological disciplines* as a basis for further graduate studies."

Course Outcomes

Conscientious investment of oneself in the learning activities of the course should enable students to:

1. Acquire familiarity with important "cults," "sects," and "New Religious Movements" in the United States (*demonstrated* through posts, critical reflection essays, reviews, and examinations)
2. Gain knowledge of the broad history of such movements in America (*demonstrated* primarily through posts, critical reflection essays, reviews, and examinations)
3. Develop understanding of such groups as something more than simply odd, weird, deviant, or aberrant – rather, as religious systems that provide a coherent and meaningful way for their adherents to order and live their lives (*demonstrated* through posts, critical reflection essays, reviews, and examinations)
4. Understand the important factors (both historical and contemporary) that encourage the formation of "alternative" religions, and reasons why some people are attracted to and join these kinds of groups (*demonstrated* through posts, critical reflection essays, and examinations)
5. Gain awareness of important theological, legal, and pastoral issues related to the presence and influence of "cult" type religious groups in American society (*demonstrated* through posts, critical reflection essays – especially on *UNDERSTANDING NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS* by John A. Saliba – reviews, and examinations)
6. Develop a growing ability to relate as a Christian (minister) to contemporary alternative religious movements and their adherents in an informed, sensitive, and redemptive manner (*demonstrated* initially through posts, critical reflection essays, reviews, and examinations – but only demonstrated fully over time in future ministry)

Required Texts & Course Materials

1. ***MYSTICS AND MESSIAH: CULTS AND NEW RELIGIONS IN AMERICAN HISTORY***, Philip Jenkins.
2. ***UNDERSTANDING NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS*** (2nd edition), John A. Saliba.
3. ***NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND THE THEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION IN AMERICA***, Mary Farrell Bednarowski.
4. ***THE MORMONS***, Thomas F. O’Dea (**out-of-print, but used copies can be purchased from a variety of booksellers online**)

Course Assignments and Requirements

1. **Class Participation** (Outcomes 1-6) – **consistent, thoughtful participation in class discussion and small group work is absolutely essential in an online class.** To assist in this process, a Moodle discussion component will be a central feature of the course. Students are required to post responses to discussion questions related to the assigned reading,

weekly lectures, videos or other assigned supplementary resources, as instructed each week in that particular unit of the course.

Online postings and responses are required at least three days each week. This means that each student must make her/his assigned posts over the span of at least three separate login times during the week. You may not simply make your assigned posts by logging in one time, making your assigned posts and then your assigned responses, all within the period of an hour or so, and then be done with the Forum for that week. You are required to **spread out your assigned comments** over at least three separate login occasions on three separate days.

Good ("quality") posted responses to discussion questions and other assignments should normally be at least 100 words in length, and it is preferable that these not exceed 150 words. Responses to the comments, observations, suggestions, or posted reviews of fellow classmates should normally be at least 50 words in length, and preferably will not exceed 100 words. Generally speaking, no one will be penalized for making long posts unless this becomes a problem; although as a courtesy to classmates (since everyone is expected to read all of the posts) it is helpful to be as concise and clear as possible. A good post ("quality post" will make substantive contributions to the Forum dialogue. An assignment posted in the Discussion Forum may be considered a "quality post" at the discretion of the instructor.

It is expected that all postings will be written with good grammar and correct spelling, and all should be proofread before they are submitted. Please avoid using abbreviations and codes that are sometimes used in other types of online communication ("emoticons" are OK on occasion). Also, it is expected that all posts will be considerate, and respectful toward others.

All online postings should be posted as instructed by the deadline – normally 11:55 p.m. US Central Daylight Time – in order to receive full credit. Late postings will be reduced by 15% for every day (or portion thereof) they are late. Occasional late postings may be accepted by the instructor, but only for the most compelling circumstances and if informed in advance. Due to the progressive nature of online learning (each week building in sequence) required postings must be completed during the week they are assigned in order for any credit to be given. No postings will be graded after the week for which they were assigned.

It is expected that each student will read all of the posts made by all other students in the course. In a traditional classroom, students learn valuable information about the subject both from the professor's lectures and presentations as well as from classroom dialogue between students and the instructor and between fellow students. The Forum on Moodle is the online counterpart to this valuable classroom interaction. It is often the case that valuable clarifications and insights come up during this online dialogue. Although each student is only required to post a certain number of threads

and replies, as outlined in each week's assignment, it is still expected that each one will read all the posts and comments in each week's Forum (often this will mean checking at the end of the week or the beginning of the following week to check on posts one's classmates made after your last online login).

NOTE: *It is understood that there will be times when "life gets in the way" or when a ministry crisis arises. These situations will be taken into consideration when they are communicated honestly and promptly to the professor. Generally one such situation per student is allowed during the semester if requested. However, a pattern of personal "crises" is unacceptable.*

2. Read ***Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History*** by Philip Jenkins and write a critical reflection essay approximately 1,000 to 1,250 words in length (see below). **The critical reflection essay is due no later than May 28.**

3. Read ***Understanding New Religious Movements*** by John A. Saliba, pp. 1-67, and post at least two good posts relating specifically to the content of these two chapters – as directed in the Weekly Lesson.

4. Read ***the Mormons*** by Thomas F. O'Dea and write a critical reflection essay approximately 1,000 to 1,250 words in length (see below). **The critical reflection essay is due no later than June 18.**

5. Read ***New Religious Movements and the Theological Imagination in America*** by Mary Farrell Bednarowski and write a critical reflection essay approximately 1,000 to 1,250 words in length (see below). **The critical reflection essay is due no later than July 16.**

6. Read ***Understanding New Religious Movements*** by John A. Saliba, pp. 75-276 and write a critical reflection essay approximately 1,000 to 1,250 words in length (see below). **The critical reflection essay is due no later than July 30.**

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CRITICAL REFLECTION ESSAYS (Outcomes 1-6)

Each of the critical reflection essays referred to above ought to be approximately 1,000 to 1,250 words in length. The essays should include a brief summary of the content of the reading, but their main purpose is not summarization. Their main purpose is to interact critically with the content of the assigned book. Expected content of the essays would include: noting the author's thesis (or theses) concerning the material presented; highlighting the most important ideas, developments, or persons discussed in the book and some indication why you consider these the most important; discussion of the *implications* of the information presented by the assigned material for understanding the subject of "cults," "sects," and new religious movements in America; discussion of your own *personal* reactions to the

material presented in the assigned reading – questions it raises for you, and ways in which the material challenges, confirms, confuses – or generally affects – your personal understanding of, and attitude towards “cults” and “sects” in America.

7. Watch online at least 2 hours of the video, “The Mormons” (total time of all episodes is 4 hours). This can be viewed free online at <http://www.pbs.org/mormons/view>. Then post a brief review on the Discussion Forum (approximately 500 words or less) for other students to read and comment upon, noting the portions of the video you watched and your critical reflections on what you saw and heard (as related to information presented in Weekly Lessons, other assigned reading, etc.). **The review of the video should be posted no later than July 2.** (Outcomes 1-6)

8. Visit at least two places of worship and/or gathering for religious movements that would fall under some category of interest to this class (a list of possible visitation sites will be supplied at the beginning of the class). Each visit should be described and analyzed in a brief review (approximately 500 words or less) that will be posted on the Discussion Forum for other students (as well as the instructor) to read and comment upon. The review should include identification of the group visited, the nature of the meeting/gathering visited, the number and sorts of persons present (mainly young, old, families, etc., primary ethnic or racial group[s] represented, apparent socioeconomic status, etc.), a brief summary of the highlights of the meeting, and some evaluation or assessment of the experience and the group in light of information and ideas you have been learning in the course. **The first visit review should be posted no later than June 6. The second review should be posted no later than July 9.** (Outcomes 1-6)

9. Successfully complete two exams. **The first exam will be available online during Week 7 of the course and the second will be available online during week 13 of the course.** Both exams will be primarily essay in form. More specific instructions will be given during the early weeks of class. (Outcomes 1-6)

Distribution of Student Learning Hours

	Hours
Online Participation in forums, groups, etc.	39
Reading	50
Writing	34
Other Assignments and Learning Activities	8
Exams & Quizzes	9
TOTAL	140

Method for Submitting Assignments

The course is organized by weekly units. **All materials and assignments needed for each week’s instruction are made available online in that**

week's component of the course. This includes lectures, assignments, written reports, online postings, and examinations. There are appropriate sites and links provided within the units for each week of the course for you to submit written assignments, post online comments, etc.

Form and Style Expectations

There is no mandatory "style sheet" for this class. Students are, however, expected to *consistently* follow one of the standard forms for theses and term papers. The most current Turabian style manual is always an excellent choice.

Inclusive Language

NTS is committed to the equality of women and men. Recognizing that people have often used the English language in ways that imply the exclusion or inferiority of women, NTS urges students, faculty, and staff to avoid sexist language in public discourse, in classroom discussions, and in their writings. All written work presented to meet course requirements must use gender inclusive language.

Policy Regarding Late Work & Missed Exams

All assigned written work is **due no later than 11:55 p.m. of the day that it is due.** Late written assignments (other than regular assigned weekly postings) are reduced ½ letter grade for every three days (or portion thereof) overdue. ***Missed exams may not be made up at another time unless arrangements are made in advance with the professor, and for an exceptionally urgent reason.***

Course Grading

For all written work, the following criteria are employed and evaluation and grading: 1) **"A" quality work** – is superior in every way – writing is clear, essentially without error in syntax, grammar, spelling, word usage, etc. – content evidences very careful reflection, insight, and original thought; 2) **"B" quality work** – is above average – writing is generally clear, with few errors in syntax, grammar, spelling, word usage, etc. – content evidences careful preparation and meets the minimum expectations of the assignment; 3) **"C" quality work** – average – writing is adequate, but may have errors – content is adequate – meets the minimum expectations of the assignment, but lacks insight and originality; 4) **"D" quality work** -- below average – writing is poor, marred with excessive errors – content evidences lack of insight or lack of understanding of the assigned material; 5) **"F" quality work** – failure to do satisfactory work – work evidences haste, lack of careful preparation, lack of basic understanding of the assigned material.

FINAL GRADES IN THE COURSE WILL BE BASED ON THE FOLLOWING WEIGHTING OF ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Consistent, informed online **participation** in the class (see specific expectations above and in the weekly units of the course) **counts 30% of**

the final grade. Online participation will be evaluated and graded at three specific points in the course, and students will receive feedback on their participation at these times. **Participation assessment will be made at the end of week 4, and the end of week 9, and at the end of the course. If a student does not meet class participation standards in an online environment for four or more weeks, the professor may automatically fail the student.**

2. **The four critical reflection essays** together **count 32%** of the final grade.

3. The **two exams** together **count 26%** of the final grade.

4. The **visitation reviews and the review of the video, "The Mormons"** together **count 12%** of the final grade.

NOTE: In accordance with the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, NTS is committed to providing students with disabilities the opportunity to participate and benefit from its programs and activities. Accordingly NTS will make reasonable modifications to its programs and activities to accommodate otherwise qualified students with disabilities, unless such modifications would impose an undue burden on the operation of the particular program or activity or would fundamentally alter the nature or purpose of the program or activity. Students needing accommodations should contact the Office of the Registrar. They also should contact the instructor no later than the end of the first class session to discuss learning needs and adaptive strategies that have been beneficial for the student in the past.

Class Attendance

Attendance at classes is essential for realizing the maximum benefit of your education. Since the professor in each course is best acquainted with the importance of consistent attendance, he or she will determine the rules for attendance.

If a student does not meet class participation standards in an online environment for four or more weeks, the professor may automatically fail the student.

Course Calendar

Date	Week	Assignment
May 9	1	Introduction
May 16	2	Foundational Issues I: A. Cults, Sects, and New Religious Movements in History; B. The American Historical Setting for Sect and Cult Formation
May 23	3	Foundational Issues: C. Defining and Identifying "Cult," "Sect," and "New Religious Movement"
May 30	4	"Hermetic," Sectarian, and Communitarian Religion in American History
June 6	5	The Mormons I
June 13	6	The Mormons II

June20	7	EXAM #1 AVAILABLE for completion – No new course content this week
June27	8	The “Millerite” and Adventist Movements
July 4	9	Seventh-day Adventism and Related Movements
July 11	10	Jehovah’s Witnesses
July 18	11	New Thought and Its Various Expressions
July 25	12	Contemporary Cults and New Religious Movements: Sociological, Psychological, Legal, and Pastoral Considerations
Aug 1	13	Review, Wrap-up, and Exam #2 available for completion