

Syllabus for
GTHE 638—Contemporary Religious Cults
3 Credit hours
Summer 2015

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

An examination of the theological and historical roots of the present-day cult movement. Analyzes various cults in contemporary America and focuses upon their unique doctrines, as compared to orthodox Christianity.

Prerequisites: None.

II. COURSE GOALS

The purpose of this course is to enable the student to do the following:

- A. Learn to converse intelligently on cultic groups studied, and how they deviate from orthodox Christianity.
- B. Learn how to engage cultic members in meaningful dialogue.
- C. Learn to discern cultic doctrines as they are being taught.

III. STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THIS COURSE

As a result of successfully completing this course, the student will be able to do the following:

- A. Recognize and respond to areas of agreement with the cultist, while recognizing fully departures from the biblical norm.
- B. Engage the cultist in meaningful exchange.
- C. Express the semantical difficulties inherent in dialogue.
- D. Teach others how to avoid the errors and misconceptions of the cultist.
- E. Establish and share criteria for judging cults through a Christian understanding.
- F. Recognize and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventists, Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'i, Unity, New Age, and others.
- G. Reveal an in-depth knowledge of one movement by the preparation of a paper of at least 2,500 words for presentation in and distribution to the class. This paper requires analysis of the salient historical facts, a history of the most important leaders, a theological evaluation of the major teachings of the cult, and a biblical apologetic, underscoring the major aberrations.
- H. Discuss a current book that deals with comparing Mormonism to orthodox Christianity.

IV. TEXTBOOKS

A. Required Materials

1. Textbooks

Blomberg, Craig L. and Stephen E. Robinson. *How Wide the Divide*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1997. ISBN: 9780830819911

Groothuis, Douglas. *Unmasking the New Age*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1986. ISBN: 9780877845683

Sire, James. *Scripture Twisting: 20 Ways the Cults Misread the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1980. ISBN: 0877846111

Tucker, Ruth A. *Another Gospel*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2004. ISBN: 0310404401

2. Other

Hebert, David K. *The Need for Teaching the Eschatological Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ in the 21st Century, Especially as We See the Day of His Parousia Approaching*. Th.D. diss., University of South Africa, 2009. (Available electronically on Class Pages.)

B. Optional Materials

1. Textbooks

None

2. Other

None

V. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A. University Policies and Procedures

1. Attendance at each class or laboratory is mandatory at Oral Roberts University. Excessive absences can reduce a student's grade or deny credit for the course.
2. Students taking a late exam because of an unauthorized absence are charged a late exam fee.
3. Students and faculty at Oral Roberts University must adhere to all laws addressing the ethical use of others' materials, whether it is in the form of print, electronic, video, multimedia, or computer software. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating involve both lying and stealing and are violations of ORU's Honor Code: "I will not cheat or plagiarize; I will do my own academic work and will not inappropriately collaborate with other students on assignments." Plagiarism is usually defined as copying someone else's ideas, words, or sentence structure and submitting them as one's own. Other forms of academic dishonesty include (but are not limited to) the following:
 - a. Submitting another's work as one's own or colluding with someone else and submitting that work as though it were his or hers;
 - b. Failing to meet group assignment or project requirements while claiming to have done so;
 - c. Failing to cite sources used in a paper;

d. Creating results for experiments, observations, interviews, or projects that were not done;

e. Receiving or giving unauthorized help on assignments.

By submitting an assignment in any form, the student gives permission for the assignment to be checked for plagiarism, either by submitting the work for electronic verification or by other means. Penalties for any of the above infractions may result in disciplinary action including failing the assignment or failing the course or expulsion from the University, as determined by department and University guidelines.

4. Final exams cannot be given before their scheduled times. Students need to check the final exam schedule before planning return flights or other events at the end of the semester.

5. Students are to be in compliance with University, school, and departmental policies regarding Whole Person Assessment requirements. Students should consult the WPA handbooks for requirements regarding general education and the students' majors.

a. The penalty for not submitting electronically or for incorrectly submitting an ePortfolio artifact is a zero for that assignment.

b. By submitting an assignment, the student gives permission for the assignment to be assessed electronically.

B. School of Theology Policies and Procedures

1. **Completion of assignments**

Assignments are due on the dates established in the course calendar, which is published in the syllabus. **Any assignments turned in after the scheduled due date are penalized five percent (5%) of the original value per day including weekends, breaks, and holidays.** All work turned in two weeks after the assignment deadline is received but is granted a grade of zero for that assignment. **No work** is accepted after the final date of regular classes.

2. **Incompletes**

a. An incomplete is given only after the student establishes with the academic committee by written petition that student's work is incomplete for good cause (i.e., lengthy illness, death in the family). **Incompletes are rarely granted.** Only those absences that are incurred within the time period of the extenuating circumstances prompting an incomplete are excused. The student is still accountable for any other absences and is penalized for them according to the attendance policy.

b. A Petition for Incomplete Grade with all supporting documentation must be submitted for approval one week prior to the end of normal classes. **The submitting of a petition does not automatically ensure the granting of an incomplete.** The petition must be approved by the academic committee of the School of Theology and Ministry. Students are expected to continue all course work until an incomplete is granted.

3. **Examinations**

a. Early examinations **are not** allowed. Late examinations without grade penalty are administered only when extenuating circumstances are present (such as a death in the family the week before exams or a sudden and major illness the week of exams that is documented by a physician).

- b. A Petition for Late Examination must be submitted to the academic dean's office. A **\$15 fee**, plus proper documentation, must accompany the petition. The academic committee reviews each petition and grade penalties are assessed. (Late exam fee is not a grade penalty).
- c. Students taking late exams should expect alternate versions of the original exams.
- d. **Not being present for the final examination automatically results in failure of the course.**

4. **Attendance**

The Official Attendance Policy for the School of Theology and Ministry is as follows:

- a. If the class meets three times a week, the missing of **6** class sessions results in a grade reduction of **one letter** grade. Missing **8** class sessions results in a grade reduction of **two letter** grades. Missing **12** class sessions automatically results in a **grade of F**. If a class meets twice a week, the missing of **4** class sessions results in a grade reduction of **one letter** grade. Missing **6** class sessions results in a grade reduction of **two letter** grades. Missing **8** class sessions automatically results in a **grade of F**. If the class meets once a week, then the missing of **3** class sessions results in a grade reduction of **one letter** grade. Missing **4** class sessions results in a grade reduction of **two letter** grades. Missing **5** class sessions automatically results in a **grade of F**.
- b. **The absences allowed prior to a grade reduction are designed to allow for emergencies and illnesses and are not designed for indiscriminate use.**
- c. Administrative excuses are granted only when a student is on official University business and has received approval in advance from the University administration.
- d. Students are expected to be prompt for classes.
- e. Students are expected to remain for the entire class session.
- f. Leaving early without permission constitutes an absence.

5. The Disability Service Center, in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, assures that no qualified individual with a disability will be denied reasonable accommodations based upon the individual's needs. It is the responsibility of the student to contact the Disability Service Center and properly register for these services. For more information, call 918.495.7018 or go to www.studentresources.oru.edu.

C. Course Policy and Procedures

1. Evaluation Procedures

Course work is weighted based upon the following:

| | |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Group Class Participation | 20% |
| Class Presentation | 20% |
| Book Response Paper | 20% |
| Term Paper | 30% |
| Final Exam | <u>10%</u> |
| | 100% |

A=90-100%
B=80-89%
C=70-79%
D=60-69%
F=59% and below

2. WPA Requirements

- a. All students entering the seminary are required to enroll in PRF 059: ePortfolio: Whole Person Assessment, which provides specific training to develop the skills needed to create an ePortfolio.
- b. WPA Requirements for this Course
None.

3. Other Policies and/or Procedures

The following outline is helpful in the formulation of the term paper:

- a. A brief history of the movement. This includes the necessary dates and important information about the leaders. It mentions something of the growth and expansion of the movement until the present time.
- b. An analysis of the original writings on the major doctrines. The student accurately and objectively presents from personal study of the original doctrines and the major doctrinal statements. Evaluations should not appear here.
- c. An analysis of the coherence factor. Before the student goes into biblical analysis, the attempt should be to point out any lapses in coherence or logic from within the structure of the system itself. The student should note any unresolved problems or inconsistencies that weaken the structure of the system.
- d. The final aspect of the paper is the student's analysis of the major aberrations of the cult under study. At this point the student asks such questions as the following:
 - (1) Were there ethical problems of note in the founder's life?
 - (2) What were the historical factors that permitted this movement to rise? Why did it have appeal?
 - (3) What similarities does the student see between this cult and others studied?
 - (4) What words or phrases are the identifying criteria for this particular cult? Are there any words or phrases used in common with Christianity but with different meanings?
- e. The evaluation part of the paper must be at least two pages in length with a strong critical approach.

VI. COURSE CALENDAR

| Day | Topic | Assignment |
|------------|--|---|
| 1 | Intro to Course | Tucker, Ch. 1, 2, App. C; Sire, Ch. 1-4; Hebert sec. 1.2.1, 1.2.10, 3.1- 3.5 |
| 2 | Orthodox Theology | Sire, Ch. 5-7; Hebert, sec. 3.6, 3.7.1 |
| 3 | Freemasonry; Illuminati | Tucker, Ch. 3; Sire Ch. 8-10, App.1-2; Hebert, sec. 3.7.2 (pp. 2-5) |
| 4 | Mormonism | Tucker, Ch. 4; Hebert, sec. 3.7.2 (pp. 5-7) |
| 5 | Seventh-Day Adventists | Tucker, Ch. 6; Hebert, sec. 3.7.2 (pp. 8-9) |
| 6 | Christian Science | Tucker, Ch. 5; Hebert, sec. 3.7.2 (pp. 9-10) Turn in Book Critique |
| 7 | Jehovah's Witnesses | Tucker, Ch. 7, 13; Hebert, sec. 3.7.2 (pp. 11-15) |
| 8 | Baha'i; Unity | Tucker, Ch. 15; Groothius (whole book) |
| 9 | New Age | Tucker, Ch. 8-9; Hebert, sec. 3.4 (pp. 9-12) |
| 10 | Armstrongism; The Way; Scientology; Radical Islam | Hebert, Part 4 |
| 11 | Presentations/Papers | Turn in papers |
| 12 | Presentations/Papers | Turn in papers |
| 13 | Presentations/Papers | Turn in papers |
| 14 | Presentations/Papers | Turn in papers |
| 15 | Group Participation | Final Exam |

**Inventory for Student Learning Outcomes
Graduate School of Theology and Ministry
M. A. Theological/Historical Studies**

GTHE 638—Contemporary Religious Cults

Dr. David Hebert, Instructor

Summer 2015

This course contributes to student learning outcomes for the M. A. Theological/Historical Studies degree as indicated below:

Significant Contribution – Addresses the outcome directly and includes targeted assessment.

Moderate Contribution – Addresses the outcome directly or indirectly and includes some assessment.

Minimal Contribution – Addresses the outcome indirectly and includes little or no assessment.

No Contribution – Does not address the outcome.

| Degree Program Outcomes | Significant Contribution | Moderate Contribution | Minimal Contribution | No Contribution |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Theological Perspective | | | | |
| Articulate the specifics of the Christian belief system within contemporary society. | X | | | |
| Reformation Traditions | | | | |
| Demonstrate knowledge of the history and development of Christian tradition during specific time periods. | | | X | |
| Development of Doctrine | | | | |
| Demonstrate basic knowledge of key theologians and the development of doctrine within the history of Christianity. | | | X | |
| Specialized Research | | | | |
| Research specialized topics in history and theology of the Christian church in a manner that demonstrates historical integration and theological reflection. | X | | | |
| French/German Language | | | | |
| Translate Scripture and historical documents in either French or German on an entry level. | | | | X |
| Pentecostal/Charismatic Foundations | | | | |
| Demonstrate awareness of Pentecostal/Charismatic distinctives and historical development. | | | X | |