

THEO6301 Cult Theology
NEW ORLEANS BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
DIVISION OF THEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL STUDIES
DEFEND CONFERENCE / JANUARY 8-12, 2018



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*“There is no other gospel, but there are some who trouble you
and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” Galatians 1:7*

The Mission of the Seminary

The mission of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary is to equip leaders to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandments through the local church and its ministries.

Course Description

This course primarily involves the study of major cults in the United States. Attention will be given to the theological and operational characteristics of new religions and cults. The course will focus on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons), the Watchtower Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses), and New Age movements. Attention will be given to the theological and operational characteristics of new religions and cults.

The student will demonstrate: (1) an understanding of the history, leadership, doctrines, ethics, and organization of the cults studied through academic study and field observation; (2) an awareness of the significance of these cults for their own members, for Christians, and for the history of religion; (3) an ability to enable and equip class members to relate more effectively to members of the cults, for discussion and evangelistic witness; and (4) to recognize the new cults which will surely come into expression in the future.

Core Values Addressed

The course will address the core value of *Doctrinal Integrity* and *Mission Focus* directly and *Spiritual Vitality* indirectly. Reflection on the apologetic issues is intimately related to reflection on the nature of God, Scripture, Christian faith, evangelism, and the doctrine of Creation. Christian apologetics is ultimately a matter of sanctifying Christ as Lord (1 Peter 3:15). Studying Cult Theology is a particularly effective way of learning orthodox theology as it provides a backdrop

against which orthodox Christianity can be seen much more clearly and its development and biblical basis understood more deeply.

Class Policies

1. Required Texts.

Watchman Fellowship Profile Notebook. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, Latest Edition. Because the Watchman Fellowship Profile Notebook is **constantly growing** as new profiles are written, students are encouraged to purchase the Watchman Fellowship Profile Notebook from the Watchman Fellowship, Inc. office in Arlington, TX (www.watchman.org) in order to be sure that they have the correct edition. The Profile Notebook used in class will include extra features that are not part of the normal Profile Notebook.

2. Optional Review Monographs.

Beckwith, Francis J. Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen, eds., *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

Blomberg, Craig L. and Stephen E. Robinson. *How Wide the Divide?: A Mormon & an Evangelical in Conversation*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997.

Bowman, Robert M., Jr. *Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses: Why They Read the Bible the Way They Do*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992.

Hanegraaf, Wouter J. *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*. Albany: SUNY, 1998.

McKeever, Bill and Eric Johnson, *Mormonism 101: Examining the Religion of the Latter-day Saints*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.

Newport, John P. *The New Age Movement and the Biblical Worldview: Conflict and Dialogue*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

Reed, David. *Answering Jehovah's Witnesses Subject by Subject*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996.

Rhodes, Ron. *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Jehovah's Witnesses*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009.

3. Book Reviews (30%)

Reviews Due Feb. 16

Students must write two (2) critical book reviews of from the pre-approved list of **optional review monographs**. The review should include (1) a bibliography entry, (2) a brief

biographical data about the author(s) (e.g., his or her position, degrees, research interests, and books), (3) an assessment of the main purpose and/or thesis of the book, (4) a concise summary of the book's contents, (5) a thorough critical analysis of the book, and (6) a conclusion with a recommendation or dismissal. The reviews should be between **2000-4000 words** and should conform to **Turabian** or SBL style guides. Because book reviews are primarily about one source, use **parenthetical citations** for the primary text and footnotes only for external sources.

A few questions to consider while reading these monographs: What is the main purpose or thesis of this book? To whom is this book written? Did the author(s) fulfill his or her purpose? What are some of the author's working assumptions (e.g., his or her denominational background, field of research, or view of Scripture)? Does the author provide strong biblical, philosophical, and historical support for his or her positions? Are there any points of contact between this book/writer and other texts read during the course of the semester? How might the content of this book affect ministry in the local church or ministry within your particular calling? Are there any ideas that changed your particular way of thinking on the subject matter at hand? Would you recommend this book to someone else?

- **A papers (93-100)** clearly state the book's thesis, successfully and succinctly outline its argument in its own terms, demonstrate advanced critical engagement with the argument and content of the book, make clear and well structured arguments, and exhibit a proficient grasp of grammar, spelling, and style.
- **B papers (85-92)** clearly state the book's thesis, show an attempt to understand the book on its own terms and critically reflect on the issues at hand, make arguments, and show sufficiency in grammar, spelling, and style.
- **C papers (77-84)** state the book's thesis, present the content of the book, raise preliminary critical questions for further evaluation, limit evaluation to approval or disapproval of the author's arguments, and make repeated mistakes in grammar, spelling, and style.
- **D (70-76) and F (0-69) papers** lack evidence of grasping the book's thesis and content, limit evaluation to preformed judgments without serious consideration of the book's ideas, contain major grammatical, spelling, and stylistic errors, and demonstrate little or no attempt to proofread.

4. Field Project (20%)

Due February 23

Each student is required to (1) attend a public worship service of a cult; or (2) interview either the local leader/minister of one of the cults to be studied or with an active, loyal, participating member of the cult; or (3) to have a witnessing encounter with a cult member. (A witnessing encounter is defined as a dialogue which leads to the student sharing the Gospel with the cultist, not simply a dialogue on theological differences or a debate as to which position is correct.) **The student is required to prepare and submit a written report and analysis of the visit/interview or witnessing encounter.** The report-analysis should be both a narrative of what occurred during the service/interview and an analysis of the beliefs and practices in comparison with one's readings and the class lectures on that cult. The report portion of the interview need not be a verbatim record but should identify and interpret all the substantive questions and answers set forth during the interview in comparison with one's readings and the class lectures on that cult. The analysis portion should address what sort of language problems, group behavioral

characteristics, or theological differences are observable during the visit/interview. **The field projects are due (or postmarked) 5 weeks after the final day of class.**

5. Cult Overview (30%)
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Due March.

Students will prepare a doctrinal overview comparing the beliefs of a particular cult to orthodox Christianity. Students *can* (but are not required) address the doctrines of a cult in the format of a traditional systematic theology—covering revelation, God, Christ, salvation, the Church, and eschatology. Students will then critique those beliefs biblically, with a mind to rebutting the cult position, and formulate an approach to witnessing to adherents of the chosen cult. The doctrinal overview should be between 15-22 double-spaced pages.

6. Lecture Summaries (20%)

Due March 31

Students are required to listen to every cult theology-related course in the *Defend the Faith* conference either in person or on the audio recordings provided by the ICA. Students will then write six (6) one-page, double-spaced summaries of six lectures related to cult theology.

Course Evaluation

Grades will be determined on the basis of the NOBTS grading scale—an A for 93-100, B for 85-92, C for 77-84, D for 70-76, and F for 69 or below. Borderline grades will normally be determined by the numerical grade received (I round up from .5), unless the student's promptness and faithfulness in class attendance, positive attitude and contribution in class discussions, and preparedness and attentiveness in class warrants special consideration. These factors only apply when the student is fractionally close to the next highest grade.

Final Average

The final grade will be determined accordingly:

Book Reviews (x2)	30%
Cult Field Project	20%
Cult Overview	30%
<u>Lecture Summaries</u>	<u>20%</u>
Final Grade	100%

Class Policies

1. Attendance and Class Participation

As noted above, attendance and class participation are necessary for meeting the requirements of this class. Students are expected to be attentive and prepared for each class session. Students who are engaged in private conversations or doing work for other classes may be asked to leave the

class; repeat violations may result in removal from the course. Rude or disruptive behavior is also not permitted.

2. Laptop Guidelines

Laptops are permitted in class as long as they are used for taking notes or accessing Blackboard materials related to this particular course. *Students using laptops are requested to sit in the front of the classroom for accountability purposes.* Gaming, e-mail, social networking, and web browsing of any kind are strictly prohibited. Failure to heed this policy *will* result in dismissal from the class session; repeat violations may result in removal from the course. *Any student using Facebook during a class meeting may be asked to leave the class, repeat offenders for the remainder of the semester.*

3. Late Work

Because life and ministry happens, late work will be accepted—but not without penalty. For every day an assignment is late, five points will be taken off. *No assignment over two weeks late will be accepted.* Failure to submit every assignment will result in failure of the course.

4. Plagiarism

The instructor calls attention to the policy on plagiarism found in the NOBTS Graduate Catalog and Student Handbook. Remember the words of the proverb: *“Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out”* (Prov. 10:19).

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mormonism

Abanes, Richard. *One Nation Under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church*. New York: Basic Books, 2003. This book is a popular and comprehensive history of Mormonism by an evangelical journalist, though it is largely drawn from secondary sources.

Beckwith, Francis, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen, eds. *The New Mormon Challenge*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. This volume, edited and written by evangelical biblical scholars, philosophers, and theologians, represents a non-traditional apologetic response to Mormonism. These scholars are not “experts” in Mormonism or Mormon history, but they use their own expertise to defend traditional Christian claims over and against Mormon responses and bring fresh new evaluations of traditional Mormon arguments.

Blomberg, Craig L. and Stephen E. Robinson. *How Wide the Divide?: A Mormon & an Evangelical in Conversation*. Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997. In this controversial 1997 book, evangelical New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg and Mormon scholar Stephen E. Robinson dialogue on points of distinction and points in common between Mormonism and evangelicalism.

Branch, Rick. “Pre-Visions, Visions and Revisions: The Historical Context of Joseph Smith's First Vision.” A Paper Presented at The Christian Institute for Mormon Studies, June 9, 1994.

_____. “The Influence of Utopian Societies on Joseph Smith, Jr.: A Preliminary Report.” Arlington, TX.: Watchman Fellowship, 1992. A good paper that presents a further picture of the social climate out of which Mormonism grew.

Brodie, Fawn. *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945. A classic book on the founder of Mormonism by a Mormon. Brodie was excommunicated after writing it.

Crosby, Jay. *Well . . . Are Mormons Christians?: Answering LDS Scholar Stephen E. Robinson*. Marlow, OK.: Utah Missions, Inc. An evangelical response to a book by a Mormon professor that argues that Mormonism is Christian.

Davis, Tal and Gary H. Leazer. *Light on the Latter-day Saints: Interfaith Witness Associate's Manual*. Atlanta: Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1991. A very worthwhile collection of data concerning LDS theology.

Geer, Thelma. *Mormonism, Mama, and Me*. Chicago: Moody, 1986. A classic by an ex-Mormon.

Hutchinson, Janis. *The Mormon Missionaries: An Inside Look at Their Real Message and Methods*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995. An excellent book by a former Mormon that details the Mormon missionary presentation and how LDS evangelism (proselytization) works.

- Larson, Charles M.** *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri. Revised Edition.* Grand Rapids: Institute for Religious Research, 1992. A thorough rejection of Mormon claims for the authenticity of the Book of Abraham.
- Marquardt, Michael H. and Wesley P. Walters. *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record.* Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994.
- Millet, Robert L.** *A Different Jesus? The Christ of Latter-day Saints.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. In this book Mormon scholar Robert Millet examines evangelical responses to LDS Christology.
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- McKeever, Bill.** *Answering Mormons' Questions: Biblical Explanations to Mormon Misinterpretations.* A good and practical book that offers legitimate responses to trick questions that Mormons commonly use in dialogue with Christians.
- McKeever, Bill and Eric Johnson.** *Mormonism 101: Examining the Religion of the Latter-day Saints.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000. Up to date treatment of Mormonism, topic-by-topic and doctrine-by-doctrine.
- _____. *Questions to Ask Your Mormon Friend: Challenging the Claims of Latter-day Saints in a Constructive Manner.* Minneapolis: Bethany, 1994. A very good and useful book for dialoguing with Mormons.
- Ostling, Richard N. and Joan K. Ostling.** *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise.* San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999. Widely regarded as a monumental book on the nature of Mormonism and Mormon growth.
- Quinn, D. Michael.** *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View.* Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987. A very scholarly treatment by an excommunicated Mormon professor (former chair of the history department at BYU, Ph.D. from Yale) on the social climate out of which Mormonism grew.
- Reed, David A. and John R. Farkas.** *Mormons Answered Verse by Verse.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992.
- Rhodes, Ron and Marian Bodine.** *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Mormons.* Eugene: Harvest House, 1995. A book that does what the title implies.
- Roberts, B. H. *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity.* Utah: Zion Book Store, 1903. A book by a Mormon on the LDS doctrine of God.
- Robinson, Stephen E.** *Are Mormons Christian?* Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991. An apologetic by a Mormon scholar that is woefully lacking in truthful or relevant documentation, but is nonetheless a very popular book among Mormons and one worth reading by those who work with or among Mormons.
- Ropp, Harry L.** *Are the Mormon Scriptures Reliable?* Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1987. A classic (formerly titled *The Mormon Papers*) that goes to the heart of the issue and provides very useful information for witnessing to Mormons.

Scott, Latayne C. *The Mormon Mirage: A Former Mormon Tells Why She Left the Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979. An excellent and very readable treatment by a former Mormon concerning the inherent problems of Mormon theology and church life.

_____. *Why We Left Mormonism: Eight People Tell Their Stories*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990. Very readable. Brief testimonies that provide insight into Mormonism and some of the things that bother honest Mormons.

Shields, Steven L. *Divergent Paths of Restoration*, 2d ed. Bountiful, Utah: Restoration Research, 1982. An excellent treatment of the fracturing of Joseph Smith Jr.'s sect.

Stewart, Robert B. "Is Mormonism Christian: An Evangelical Critique of LDS Scholar Stephen E. Robinson's Arguments for Recognizing Mormonism as Christian" in *Journal of Christian Apologetics* Vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 15-33.

Tanner, Jerald and Sandra. *3,913 Changes in the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, n.d.

_____. *Mormonism--Shadow or Reality* 4th ed. Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1982. The classic work on Mormonism. A must for anybody who intends to work with or among Mormons. The format is encyclopedic in form. The most information in any single book on Mormonism anywhere, ever!

Walker, James K. "The Developmental Nature of Mormon Christology." Arlington, TX.: Watchman Fellowship, 1991. A paper originally presented as an assignment at Criswell College by the director of Watchman Fellowship in Arlington.

White, James R. *Letters to a Mormon Elder: Eye-Opening Information for Mormons and the Christians Who Talk with Them*. Minneapolis: Bethany, 1993. A useful book that asks hard questions for Mormons.

White, O. Kendall, Jr., *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1987. A brave and unique attempt by one Mormon to redefine Mormonism. Ultimately, however, it is a kinder, gentler Mormonism that emerges, not Neo-Orthodoxy, and certainly not orthodox Christianity.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Barrett, Arthur and Duane Magnani. *From Kingdom Hall to Kingdom Come*. Clayton, CA.: Witness, Inc., 1982.

Bowman, Robert M., Jr. *Jehovah's Witnesses, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989. An excellent book that provides a good, readable, not overly technical, but not superficial or shallow discussion of the New World Translation.

_____. *Understanding Jehovah's Witnesses: Why They Read the Bible the Way They Do*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992. Insights into the background of the Watchtower Society and why its followers think the way they do.

- _____. "The Whitewashing of the Watchtower." *Forward* 9.1 (1986): 9-14.
- _____. *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity: An Answer to Jehovah's Witnesses*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990. Written as a refutation of the Watchtower Society's popular booklet "Should You Believe in the Trinity?"
- Cetnar, Bill and Joan. *Questions for Jehovah's Witnesses Who Love the Truth*. Kunkletown, PA.: William J. Cetnar, 1983. A useful paperback filled with photocopies of embarrassing facts compiled by former Watchtower members.
- Clark, Dan. *I, Witness: The Shocking Insider's Story of Jehovah's Witnesses*. Englewood, CO: Villa Press, 2007.
- Countess, Robert H. *The Jehovah's Witnesses' New Testament: A Critical Analysis of the New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures*, 2nd. Ed. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1982. A scholarly analysis of the New World Translation by a first rate linguist. Knowledge of biblical languages is required of the reader.
- Evert, Jason. *Answering Jehovah's Witnesses*. El Cajon, CA: Catholic Answers, 2006. A Roman Catholic apologist responds to the Watchtower Society.
- Finnerty, Robert U. *Jehovah's Witnesses on Trial: The Testimony of the Early Church Fathers*. Phillipsburg, N. J.: P & R Publishing, 1993. An interesting book that deals with the (mis)use and abuse of Patristic theology by the Watchtower Society.
- Franz, Raymond. *Crisis of Conscience*. Atlanta: Commentary Press, 1983. Written by the nephew of former Watchtower president and chief translator of the New World Translation, this book provides an insider's view to the behind the scenes machinations going on in Brooklyn. It is, however, somewhat laborious reading.
- Leazer, Gary H. *Jehovah's Witnesses: Interfaith Witness Associate's Manual*. Atlanta: Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1984. A manual for use in studying Watchtower theology.
- Lingle, Wilbur. *Approaching Jehovah's Witnesses in Love: How to Witness Effectively without Arguing*. Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 2004.
- Love, Charles. *20 Questions Jehovah's Witnesses Cannot Answer*. Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2005.
- Magnani, Duane. *The Watchtower Files: Dialogue with a Jehovah's Witness*. Minneapolis: Bethany, 1985. A very useful book for those dealing with Jehovah's Witnesses. *This is the book that the professor recommends to people if he can only recommend one book on the Watchtower Society.*
- Martin, Walter R. *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 5th ed. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985.
- Metzger, Bruce. *Jehovah's Witnesses and Jesus Christ*. Princeton, N. J.: The Theological Book Agency, 1953. An excellent article, by one of the world's foremost Greek scholars and textual critics (editor of the NRSV), originally in the Princeton Seminary Journal, that deals with the New World Translation concerning the person of Jesus Christ.

- Reed, David A. *Answering Jehovah's Witnesses Subject by Subject*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996. A collection of alphabetically arranged articles dealing with various topics of concern for those dealing with Jehovah's Witnesses.
- _____. *Behind the Watchtower Curtain: The Secret Society of Jehovah's Witnesses*. Booksurge, 2006.
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- Wilson, Diane. *Awakening of a Jehovah's Witness: Escape from the Watchtower Society*. New York: Prometheus, 2002. An account from a former JW who now writes as an agnostic specializing in religious abuse.