

ET 303 Cults and Sects in the African Context



Teacher Coursebook
Nazarene Theological Institute

--Note to teachers--

This teacher coursebook was prepared by
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ET 303 Cults and Sects in the African Context

Syllabus Certificate or Diploma

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Description

Course Description

This course is designed to describe the traditional beliefs of God in Africa, regarding God's omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence and as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. This course will explore various teachings of sects and cults in Africa in light of biblical revelation and Christian theology. This course is designed to assist members of the African Church to understand the belief in one and only God revealed in Jesus Christ and to preach and teach same, and above all to live for Jesus Christ.

Course Rationale

Narration

For many cultural and spiritual reasons, Africa has given birth to many traditional religious practices, and sects of which several are aberrations of true Christianity. Even if members of these groups convert to Christianity they sometimes need to be well educated in the Bible and theology without mixing their old beliefs with their newfound faith in Christ. It is the primary responsibility of the pastor to make these new believers into followers of Jesus Christ.

Ministers in the Church of the Nazarene in Africa will find themselves at some point in an area where many people follow one of these religious groups and sects. It will be necessary to know how to explain with love the errors of these movements and also to proclaim the Gospel in a clear manner to gain the attention and the hearts of those lost inside these traditional religions, cults and sects. The commitment of the local Church must not be to only evangelism, but to life-transforming discipleship program to each new convert.

For a pastor to be an effective witness among people in these traditional religions, cults and sects, it is necessary that they are up-to-date not only with these movements, but the cultural tendencies that give birth to these groups.

Program Outcomes

The following program outcomes assigned to this module are identifiable competencies required of the student in this course.

- | | |
|------|--|
| CN 4 | Appreciation of the theological foundations of the Christian faith from the Biblical point-of-view when read from a Wesleyan perspective |
| CN 5 | Realization of the biblical, theological, and practical implications of holiness doctrine when taught from a Wesleyan perspective |
| CN 8 | Appreciation of the position and teaching of the Church of the Nazarene concerning religious phenomenon |
| CN 9 | Acknowledge the differences between evangelical doctrines and the teachings of cults and sects, in particular African cults and sects |
| CP 3 | Ability to defend the doctrines and positions of the Church of the Nazarene |
| CP 3 | Ability to worship God by using personal and public means of grace |
| CR 5 | Ability to express humility and interdependence in all of one's personal relationships |
| CR 8 | Ability to stay faithful to the Church of the Nazarene and maintain a spirit of collaboration |

| | |
|------|--|
| CX 1 | Ability to understand African history in the context of world history |
| CX 2 | Ability to understand the context within which he or she lives with objectivity |
| CX 3 | Ability to understand the principles of cross-cultural ministry |
| CX 5 | Ability to interpret on a scientific and biblical bases the Christian position on magic, spiritism, medicine and traditional healing |

Course Outcomes

Upon the completion of this course of study, the learner will be able to:

1. Understand the way(s) Africans believe in God (CN 4, CN 9; CXT 3).
2. Identify the difference between god(s) and the God (CN 9; CX 5).
3. Compare and contrast the Western and African concepts of God. (CN 5, CR 3, CX 3, CX 5)
4. Understand the customary beliefs and practices and use them to evangelize effectively. (CN 8, CN 9, CX 2, CX 3)
5. Reach out to the traditionalists with the Christian message of salvation (CN 4, CX 2).
6. Describe the rites of passage in the local context and think about how it can explain Christian spiritual growth into maturity (CP 3; CR 3).
7. Give an oral presentation on customary practices and their religious advantages and disadvantages to the community. (CN 4, CN 9; CP 3)
8. Examine existing traditional/customary practices that could be used for Christian/evangelism advantage. (CN 9, CR 3, CR 5, CX 2, CX 3, CX 5)
9. Make a case study of families/communities that are deep rooted in traditionalism. (CX 2, CX 3) (OPTIONAL)
10. Identify a sect of Christianity that veers away from the essential aspects of Christian theology. (CN 4, CN 5, CN 9, CX 2, CX 3)
11. Apply Paul's method of preaching to the people of Athens. (CN 4, CN 9, CP 3, CR 3, CR 5, CX 1, CX 2, CX 5)
12. Defend the articles of faith using biblical truth as an antidote to the contrary beliefs of these traditionalists, sects and cults. (CN 4, CN 8, CN 9, CP 3, CR 5, CR 8, CX 2, CX 5))

The following sessions and exercises of this course offer the following percentages of the four Cs:

| | |
|------------|-----|
| Content | 30% |
| Competence | 10% |
| Character | 25% |
| Context | 35% |

Bibliographie

Harold J. Berry, *What They Believe*. Lincoln, NE: Back to the Bible, 1990.
 Ruth A. Tucker, *Another Gospel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989.
 Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou. *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.
 Wes Tracy and Stan Ingersol. *Here We Stand: Where Nazarenes Fit in the Religious Marketplace*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1999.

Course Requirements

1. The student must be present and on time for all course sessions with a Bible and any other required materials. If students are absent from one course session it will result in a 25% reduction of the final mark. Each following absence will result in a 25% redaction.
2. Students must attend each session and be able to participate in discussions related to the course content. (Course outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12)

3. Students must conduct research on at least one traditional practice, sect or cult that is influential in their environment (course outcome 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10).
4. Students should come up an oral presentation that critiques the African traditional religious practices found in the ministry and practices of the Church. Be sure to compare these practices to what is found in traditional religions and historical Christianity. (course outcomes 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 12).
5. Students should prepare to take part in a debate on the following subject: "A Christian attitude needs to be loving in helping turn others away from these traditional practices, cults and sects." (course outcomes 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11)
6. Final examination

Course Evaluation

| | |
|--|-----|
| Class Participation | 20% |
| Oral Presentation on African sect or practices | 20% |
| Research on belief system and practice an African sect or cult | 20% |
| Critique on key teaching of traditionalist or sect | 10% |
| Oral Debate on attitude toward followers | 10% |
| Final Examination (Oral exam s is an option) | 20% |

Les Notes Finale

| | | |
|---|---------|---|
| A | 90-100% | (18-19 Excellente) |
| B | 80-89% | (16-17.9 Très Bien) |
| C | 70-79% | (14-15.9 Bien) |
| D | 60-69% | (12-13.9 Passable) |
| | 45-59% | (9.5-11.9 Passable pour gagner le niveau de certificat et pour passer les exigences d'être ordonnée à l'Eglise du Nazaréen) |

If students earn a mark lower than 45%, they will still need to pass the course with a higher mark if they want to obtain a diploma.

Course Schedule

This course can be given as an intensive. The course material is divided into several units of various length, and the number of activities in each section.

Section 1 INTRODUCTION.

- 1.1 What is a Cult?
- 1.2 Characteristics of Cults
- 1.3 Sectarian Tendencies.
- 1.4 Psychological Factors

Section 2 Why Sects Grow

- 2.1 Human Needs and Aspirations
- 2.2 Who leaves the Church to join a cult?

Section 3 Overview of Certain Cults

- 3.1 Moonies
- 3.2 The Way International
- 3.3 Baha'i Faith
- 3.4 Rastafarians.
- 3.5 Jehovah's Witnesses
- 3.6 Brahmamists
- 3.7 Mormonism: Church of the Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

- 3.8 Are independent churches to be considered cults?
- 3.9 African Traditional Religions (ATR)

Evaluation Chart for African Traditional Religions

Section 4 African Challenges and Pastoral Responses

- 4.1 African Challenges
- 4.2 Global Concerns
- 4.3 Pastoral Approaches
 - A sense of community
 - Education and continuing education
 - Prayer and worship
 - Participation and direction "leadership"
 - Personal approach
 - Cultural identity
 - Tolerance and discernment

Section 5 CONCLUSION

Student's Ability to Complete Course Work

A reasonable effort to assist every student will be made. Any student who has handicaps, learning disabilities, or other conditions that make the achievement of the class requirements exceedingly difficult should make an appointment with the instructor as soon as possible to see what special arrangements can be made. Any student who is having trouble understanding the assignments, lectures, or other learning activities should talk to the instructor to see what can be done to help.

Instructor's Qualities and Availability

The instructor has committed to preparing the content and being familiar with the objectives of the course. The instructor's life and attitude inside and outside of the course should reflect the lifestyle of Jesus Christ—the main subject of the New Testament story. Good faith efforts to serve the students both in and beyond the classroom will be made.

Small Group Activity Guidelines

Educational research demonstrates that shared-learning activities, such as small group projects and discussion groups, raise the student's ability to gain and retain knowledge for practice outside the teaching environment. Students are able to develop critical thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis as they work in small group. Assigning small group projects help students to:

1. Learn how to work together in a team environment through positive interdependence.
2. Understand group processes, including process management, conflict management, synergism, collaboration, resource utilization, individual accountability, shared knowledge, cooperation, planning and problem solving.
3. Effectively and efficiently develop oral and written presentation skills.
4. Be better prepared for social interaction at work.
5. Explore and integrate a broader range of ideas and expertise.
6. Respond to different learning styles.
7. Supplement the knowledge of the facilitator/teacher.
8. Develop a sensitivity to and awareness of cultural and gender diversity.

When engaged in small group activities, the following guidelines should be followed:

1. When considering the formation of groups, take into account that it is desirable to balance the small groups by gender, age, geographical origin, local language, and experience. Try to bring as much diversity as possible to the group.
2. Select a spokesperson(s)/Leader(s) for the group to keep the team on task and for reporting back to the rest of the class about the small group's findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The spokesperson(s) should also serve as the recorder(s) for the group.
3. Select a timekeeper for the group. Most small group activities should not exceed twenty minutes. The timekeeper's task is to keep the group moving forward and on task to complete the assignment within the allotted time frame.
4. During the course, students are encouraged to try to participate in as many small group roles as possible—spokesperson, recorder, timekeeper.
5. Solicit the facilitator/teacher's assistance at any time the small group is unable to stay on task.

Section 1 INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest **PROBLEMS** for the Church in Africa is the proliferation of religious cults. This growing phenomenon does not only worry the Church, but also the public and even some governments.

There is religious freedom in most countries of sub-Saharan Africa. For the civilian authorities, the main concern is for faith communities comply with the laws and public order.

Part of the price of freedom is that we will see the creation and installation of some groups in our countries with whom we can never be **AGREEMENT**.

1.1 What is a cult?

Etymologically the word "cult" derives from the Latin *cultus* (care or adoration) and the French *culte*. In fact, the French-speaking Church uses the word "culte" to refer to any type of worship service or religious devotion. A similar word for cult and most closely associated with the subject matter of this course is the word "**sect**" which comes from the Latin verb is *sequi* (**FOLLOW**), the verb *secedere* (**GET RID**), the verb *secare* (**CUT**).

Sociologically a sect is nothing else than the following:

A group of people who follow the same master or group of volunteers who share the same belief, and, in doing so, voluntarily separate from the surrounding environment.

The reality of a cult exceeds the **BOUNDARIES** of religion and church.

The creation of cults is a **HUMAN** phenomenon which is found in the ideological, social and political domains than the religious. Examples::
The ancient Greeks, for example, has philosophical-religious sets, traditional religious know their secret cults, and the modern ideologies will not hesitate to vigorously denounce the "sectarian tendencies" in the ranks of their supporters.

In its usual sense, the term cult or sect connotes **SCHISM** and a willingness to **FOLLOW** someone else's lead or an extraordinary or idealistic **DOCTRINE**.

We can even say that cults are usually separated from another group to follow a master or different aspirations from those of its original group. The sect then takes its own character, developing its doctrine and practices, putting focus on the things that gave it birth as a new church or community.

Therefore, we must distinguish between groups simply resulting separations and schisms - for which there are often very good reasons - and those we may designate the true sects, in full pejorative sense, the doctrine and practices deny the essence of the Christian message.

Therefore, we must **DISTINGUISH** between groups – such as sects -- simply resulting from separations and schisms - for which there are often very good reasons - and those we may designate the true cults, in the full pejorative sense, in which their doctrines and practices deny the essence of the Christian message.

But there is a problem in distinguishing between those groups that are truly Christian in origin and in practice from those others which derive from non-Christian beliefs. The issue needs even more discernment when one considers those groups which spun off from Christian denominations to form their own group and are legitimate movements within orthodox Christianity. **This distinction is an important one to remember.**

The critical distinction between sects of Christian origin could perhaps look into the source of the **TEACHINGS** of these groups. For example, those who add other revelations or prophetic message to the Biblical canon or which treat the Bible as protocanonical or radically alter its content.

A sect differs from the Universal Church by placing an **EMPHASIS** upon a **point**, in such a way that the other **core values are sometimes LOST** with regard to that particular point;

EXAMPLES:

- **Christian Science** attracts because it denies the existence of disease, evil, sin and because it is reserved for a Christian intellectuals who do not feel at ease with simply-minded people;
- **Jehovah's Witnesses** exaggerate the theme of the damnation of the many, and they insist on particular verses rather than the whole canon of the Bible, forgetting other texts or changing their meaning in translation to fit their beliefs.
- **Among all those we disapprove. . .** Often, we always uses the term "sect", which we find even in the New Testament, to designate groups and religious groups **that we strongly disapprove of**. So we can see that the term has almost always a sharply negative and pejorative meaning. For example, Catholics once used this word to describe the Protestant churches, at least those that were smaller, fundamentalist and separatist.

1.2 Characteristics of Cults

Cults have a number of distinct behaviors in common.

For some they are characterized by a "**sectarian spirit**" containing the following general traits:

The conviction that they are the **PURE** or **ELECT** who often have the feeling of being persecuted;

The belief that they are **RIGHT**, that they are set against the whole world, and especially against authority;

The lack of **INTEREST** in the masses or the authorities;

A monolithic character and unyielding judgments in which they carry out with passionate.

Cults are often **AUTHORITARIAN** in their structure;

They use brainwashing and mental **CONTROL**;

They maintain a **COLLECTIVE** constraint and inspire feelings of culpability and fear.

1.3 Sectarian Tendencies

To better discern between what is "admirable" and what is "unacceptable", it is necessary to identify sectarian tendencies that are always pernicious for any group or church.

The sectarian tendencies suppose that there is:

-- **Alienation of people**; to alienate means to remove someone's personality in order to inculcate the other.

-- It operates through gentle persuasion, psychological conditioning;

-- For ideological indoctrination, sessions can be intensive;

-- By depriving one of sleep and extending the hours necessary for religious activities like focused and repetitive prayers;

-- By separating people from their families (for example, the Moon sect);

-- **Direct communication with God**, several sects claim to be in direct communication with God. What attracts people who let themselves be deceived by the phenomenon of exaggerated ecstatic utterances.

-- **Manipulation of the word of God**, by simplifying it too much or just changing it, in order to prop up (build, support) the particular doctrines of the sect.

Examples: To say that the Bible gives the exact historical date of the creation of Adam; that it determine the number of people who will be saved (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses); that it speculates on the date of the end of world; that it imposes taboos on certain food for all people

-- **Cocooning or Closure of the group and its certainties instead of universal communication.**

Some cults will sever all connections to other religions except for recruitment. They condemn others, and accept only their way of looking at things. Some groups might be called sects or cults but they are really extensions of certain religious beliefs such as Hinduism or Buddhism.

One can correctly stigmatize sectarian tendencies "present" within Christianity. The solidifying of doctrinal distinctives, the narrowing of the mind, and rigorous practice has indeed spawned attitudes and practices against which the great churches have reacted against with regularity of clock work: awakenings, reforms, renewal. This clearly shows that the tendency toward "sectarian" is a permanent temptation of the human spirit, and especially its religious sentiment. In religion, people seek certainty and safety, confident in one's god(s), surely one will not fail. According to the Christian faith, someone must also believe, lay themselves in God's hands, surrendering to Him in faith as its sole Savior.

The presence of sectarian tendencies within large churches is not a justification for the existence of sects.

The fact that Christianity began as a "sect" or "cult" in the eyes of contemporary Romans and Jews, and has gradually formed as a church, does not justify the existence of cults, but simply demonstrates that Christianity in its origins, and in its basic structure, was not only a sect, but an open religious movement, open to all, universal in its reach, to become what we call sociologically and theologically a "Church."

1.4 Psychological Factors

There are some points of reference, especially psychological factors, to help us describe cults:

1. Consciousness of belonging to a group that has a monopoly on the truth and salvation:

SAFETY FACTOR

2. Awareness of reliance upon the group; they live in a ghetto and can not contact others except to convert them (i.e. proselytizing), **AFFECTIVE FACTOR**.

3. Primacy of the principles in the doctrine upon people; **FACTOR OF DOCTRINAL RIGIDITY**

4. FACTOR OF **FANATICISM**.

Designated Targets for Proselytism

The group targeted by cults are the **YOUNG**. They are “unattached”, unemployed, non-active in community life or community volunteer work, coming from an unstable environment or belonging to ethnic minorities, living in places rather remote from the influence of the Church, and so on. They seem to be a prime target for proselytism in new movements and cults.

Some cults seem to find their followers among adults; others thrive in families from the upper rungs of the socio-economic ladder. In this context, we need to reference the context of the **UNIVERSITY CAMPUS** as a favorable breeding ground for the proliferation of cults and their recruitment effort. Difficult relations with clergy or an irregular marital status may also lead to a break with the Church and the transition to a new group. Very few people seem to join a cult for dishonest reasons.

The greatest problem with cults, but it also makes them effective at recruiting new members, is that they abuse the good intentions and desires of dissatisfied people.

Finally, **cults usually succeed where society and the Church have failed to acknowledge those intentions or desires.**

Section 2 WHY CULTS GROW

Crisis situations and times of vulnerability may induce the needs and aspirations that motivate some people to turn toward cults for safety and answers to their problems. One must take into account the recruiting practices and indoctrination techniques used by many cults.

2.1 Human Needs and Aspirations : (What cults appear to offer.)

a. The search for MEMBERSHIP (sense of community.)

The structure of many communities has been destroyed by war, sickness or immigration. The traditional way of life has been dislocated; homes are disbanded; people feel uprooted and alone. Hence, there is a need for belonging.

Cults seem to offer: human warmth, attention and support found in small communities; share a common goal and fraternity; offer individuals some kind of protection and security, especially in crisis situations; social reintegration of marginalized individuals (e.g. divorced people) into a group that focuses on the individual.

c. The search for ANSWERS

In complex and confusing situations, there is naturally a quest for answers and solutions.

Cults seem to offer: simple answers and all relevant perspectives on issues and complicated situations, as well as simplified versions of partial truths and traditional values, a pragmatic theology, a theology of success, a theology syncretism through a "new

revelation"; " a new truth "for people who know little" old "truth, well-defined guidelines, a call to moral superiority; evidence of supernatural "elements: glossolalia (speaking in unknown languages.), trances, mediums, prophecies, possessions, and so on.

c. The need to be RECOGNIZED, to be special

People need to emerge from anonymity, and build an identity and a feeling that they are special in one way or another and not just a number or a face in the crowd.

Large congregations, administrative reports and clericalism, leave few opportunities to connect to each person individually in their personal situations.

Cults seem to offer. a concern for the individual, seemingly equal opportunity for ministry and leadership, participation, expression, a chance to develop their own potential, the chance to belong to an elite group.

d. The need for VISION

The world today is an interdependent world, of hostility and conflict, of violence and fear of destruction. People feel concerned about the future, often desperate, helpless and powerless to change their present circumstances. They look for signs of hope, a way to escape. Some people, however, have the desire to make the world a better place.

Cults seem to offer. a "new vision" of itself, of humanity, of history, of the cosmos. They promise the beginning of a new age of a new era.

f. The need for a spiritual DIRECTION

There may be a lack of parental support in the seeker's family or a lack of leadership, patience, personal commitment on the part of church leaders and educators from which they come.

Cults seem to offer. direction and guidance on the part of charismatic leaders. The master, or chief guru, plays an important role in linking the disciples to the leader, to other members, and to a common vision. Sometimes there is not only submission but almost hysterical devotion to an influential spiritual leader (messiah, a prophet, guru).

g. The search for CULTURAL identity.

In many Third World countries, society contains largely disparate social and cultural values as well as varying religious traditions, the same is true of believers.

Cults seem to offer much room for various religious and cultural heritage in terms of participation, as well as a style of prayer and preaching closely linked to traits and aspirations of the people. It seeks common ground by combining these disparate values into one religious package.

h. The search for WHOLENESS

Many people are not okay with who they are, in their relationship with others, and with their culture and environment. They are experiencing a rupture in wholeness. They might have been hurt by their parents or teachers, the church or society. They feel excluded. They want a religious vision that can harmonize everything and everyone, such as a cult

that makes room for the body and soul, participation, spontaneity and creativity. They want to be cured emotionally and physically (African adherents particularly insistent on this point.)

Cults seem to offer: A religious experience that satisfies basic needs; focus on salvation, on conversion, a place for sensations and emotions, for the spontaneity (e.g. in liturgical celebrations), the chance for physical and spiritual healing, help in overcoming problems with drugs or alcohol; and offer some connection with a better life.

2.2 Who might leave the Church to join a cult?

1. Those who need security; those who feel abandoned.

While acknowledging the common human desire for something greater than themselves or a universal hunger for religious devotion, there are many in society whose emotional capability is not fully mature. They feel overwhelmed by the tension of adult life - unemployment, dependents, challenges of all sorts. That is why many are looking for the security of a small group. There are those who are caught up in the anxiety or the need to be rescued or who feel isolated in the world.

2. Those seeking intellectual satisfaction.

There are also those who have a religious temperament or intellectual preoccupation, and without having lived their faith in depth, jump to a glimmer of light unveiled in a cult.

3. Those who seek a purified religion.

Some are discouraged by the imperfections they see in the Christian life. Sin and failure are inevitable in large communities. It may then be tempting for them to seek a community of "***pure people***". But, Jesus condemned the Pharisees for pretending to observe the law through their obsessions. Jesus, then and now, accepts sinners and the poor in spirit in order to save them.

4. Those who want to reach directly to God.

Others have a deep thirst for the absolute or seek God through the easiest route. Such people become discouraged to see too passive attendance at the Sunday worship. Disappointed by the materialism of the world, they thirst for the absolute and spiritual experience. Cults are promised the key to this kind of experience. Example: "We pray in a way that reaches directly to God." This is a misleading illusion that obliges God to meet our needs, and in doing so avoids the courage that is required to live in faith.

In summarizing it can be said cults seem to thrive because:

They believe in someone or something, with conviction, devotion and commitment that are powerful (and often magnetic).

They are going to meet people where they are, in a way that is warm, personal and discreet, leaving the individual in anonymity, yet promoting participation, spontaneity, taking the responsibility to gain commitments

through an intensive follow-up of multiple contacts, visits to homes, support and continuous guidance.

They help them to re-interpret their own experience, to reaffirm their own values, and to confront the critical issues within a comprehensive system that meets spiritual, emotional, and physical needs.

Normally they use convincing stories: preaching, literature, mass media, and often also on the healing ministry.

Simply put, they present themselves as the only answer in a chaotic world.

All this is very important in the success of cults.

We continue to explore a few particular cults that are common in Africa.

Section 3 Overview of Certain Cults

3.1 Moonies (The Unification Church)

This cult has diverse denominations:

- Association of the Holy Spirit for Unification;
- The Unification Church;
- Pioneers of the New Age;
- The cult of the Moonies.

The Church of Unification is not a denomination but a movement trying to bring its type of salvation to the world.

The Moonie cult is known by several different names as listed above.

The Association of the Holy Spirit for the Unification of World Christianity is one family of adherents, created by Rev. Moon, the "new messiah."

Each "family" is a designation within the local community, each region, each country and is headed by a chief. It depends entirely on Moon, the uncontested leader of the association of the cult.

Who is Moon?

Yong Myung Moon, called **Son Myung Moon**, i.e. "The message that illuminates more than the sun and moon together" was born in Korea in 1920 to a Protestant peasant family. From a young age, Moon was interested in the spiritual side of life and practiced religion characterized by a life of prayer. At the age of 16, in 1936, he testified to a vision of Jesus on Easter morning. According to this vision:

"Jesus could not reveal everything he had to say to assure total salvation."

In Moon's estimation, Jesus did not fully and completely accomplish his mission because he never married, which Moon thought was necessary, to produce perfect children of God and thus create a perfect family to be the basis for the kingdom of God on earth.

Moses and Buddha also gave him similar ideas. Moon alleges that over a period of nine years, he came to understand and to share the immense sadness of God at the failure of Jesus.

So he battled his conscience during those years before disclosing his mission in life. The fruit of those years of meditation and research resulted in "the divine principles" (the basic treatise for its teachings and so-called final revelation of God).

He returned from Japan where he obtained an electrical engineering degree, though he had no formal theological or biblical education. He became a pastor in a Pentecostal community in Pyongyang, capital of communist North Korea. He intended to fight Satan, especially as he saw the Enemy expressed in communism. In 1950 he founded his own church in the southern Korea in Pusan. In 1951 from the city of Seoul, Moon launched, in its first form, the "Association for the Unification of World Christianity," which expanded rapidly in the southern part of Korea. It was not until 1954, also in Seoul, that he finally and formally organized the Association of the Holy Spirit for the Unification of World Christianity. Moon is at the sole leader at the pinnacle of this organization.

Members owe him blind obedience and total submission, because he is the sovereign authority. There was no shortage of persecution for Moon:

- In 1948, he was arrested for breach of social order. His first wife Sung Kil Choi abandoned him. He divorced her to marry a member of his congregation.
- In 1949, he was arrested again for the crime of adultery, bigamy and sexual immorality. Throughout his life, Moon has often had trouble with the law but more often for tax evasion.
- Moonies put great emphasis on physical suffering as their leader has suffered. It gives him a halo of heroism.

According to the non-Moonist sources, Moon has been connected with three or four women.

In 1960 at the age of 40, he married Hanhah-ja, a girl aged 18, who was and is regarded as the "new Eve." This marriage is the so-called "honeymoon of the lamb." Hanhah-ja became the true mother of the universe, which means that Moon and Hanhah-ja form the true parents of humanity. And members of the movement are members of the True Family.

It is important to note that Moon has a considerable fortune estimated at several tens of millions of dollars with a luxurious standard of living. He has a corporate network including factories that produce pharmaceutical products and another that makes weapons. His fortune comes through the earnings gained through these businesses that provide revenue for the association.

One of Moon's main objectives was to raise an army of international volunteers for the armed struggle against communism in northern Korea that he viewed as the main weapon

of Satan. The cult of Rev. Moon soon relocated to Japan and expanded rapidly to the United States and then in various countries of Western Europe and is currently moving into in several African countries.

The number of followers has reached more than 2,000,000 members.

The Teaching and Doctrine of Rev. Moon

The doctrine or teaching of Rev. Moon, the so-called "New Messiah" and "Lord of the Second Advent" is contained in the "divine principles."

According to the Association of the Holy Spirit for the Unification of World Christianity, the Bible is a code, but Moon is the only one able to interpret it accurately. Over the centuries, the Bible has been distorted, but thanks to the "principles" of the Divine Moon, the correct interpretation is again possible. So the divine principles for Moonies constitute the key for interpreting and understanding the Bible.

The book of Divine Principles is a syncretic mixture of Biblical ideals, Eastern philosophies, and scientific theories. They constitute for Moonies a new divine revelation on the original and ultimate purpose of God.

According to the Divine Principles, the purpose of the creation of God is to establish His kingdom on earth. The first attempt in the Garden of Eden failed. The second with Jesus Christ was also a failure but with the third attempt, Moon succeeded. Moon is in the process of establishing the kingdom of God on earth; at the same time he realizes the fulfillment of the work of Jesus, unfinished because of the errors committed by John the Baptist and the Jews in general. Thus, Moon sees himself as the Messiah and Lord. He is the second coming of the Messiah. This third attempt is necessary because according to the Moon, the mission of Jesus had not been fully accomplished.

According the teachings elaborated in the Divine Principles and other works, by Moon, God wanted the union of Adam and Eve to produce perfect children who would lead His kingdom. But Eve was seduced by the archangel Lucifer. Satan in his jealousy fornicated with Adam and corrupted him. It was then that God wanted his son Jesus to find a perfect woman to create a perfect humanity and establish a new visible kingdom of God. Jesus failed because he never married. The Jews had crucified him before he found the ideal companion of his life. His death was a failure that God did not desire. Satan takes the initiative and sends his disciples on earth, including Karl Marx, and so all communists are considered demons. But God does not abandon humanity. He sends a new messiah, "Lord of the Second Advent," who will be the father of a family and inaugurate the perfect earthly and visible kingdom. And as Revelation suggests, "an angel rises from the east," the country of origin for the new messiah can only be—Korea.

Moon, the "new messiah" will create the ideal family, a model for all families. His followers marry according to His choice and are conducted in large group ceremonies. The members of this ideal and perfect family, and members of the Moonie cult, are those who accept Moon as the "new messiah" and his teaching.

Methods and Strategies for Recruitment

The methods and strategies for recruiting Moonies are grueling and appalling. When they hire and train followers, the members of the cult do not talk about Moon in the first contact, but everything that is going wrong in the world, and the need for peace, love and brotherhood to be born anew. They invite the recruits to spend an evening in their community centers which are very welcoming, and then for a weekend heavily programmed and inundated with information without time for the recruits to reflect on what they are hearing.

Each new adherent is supported by a “**father**” or “**mother**” who is the recruit’s spiritual advisor.

Moon uses his fortune to recruit followers. Thus being extremely rich, Moon can provide scholarships for study abroad. Once abroad, separated from their natural families, these new recruits and followers can be further manipulated, indoctrinated, and alienated until they reject any attempt to reconcile with their own families.

The Errors of Rev. Moon

Let's say forcefully that the Moon sect has absolutely nothing about it that is Christian. His on the “divine principles” contains major errors especially in his teachings about Jesus Christ. ”

- A. Indeed, for Moon, Jesus Christ was not God. Jesus is the servant of God. He was not equal to God and has no divinity. So contrary to the Bible, Moon denies the divinity and the virgin birth of Christ. He was simply and perfectly man, but he had a natural father and his resurrection was only spiritual.
- B. According to the doctrine of Moon, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross did not fall within the plan of God for the salvation of the world. Moon did not come to die as Jesus did. By his death on the cross, according to Moon, Jesus disappointed others especially since he did not marry to produce perfect children of God. Thus, Jesus Christ failed in his mission because he did not build the perfect family and produce perfect children.

On the other hand, according to Moonies, Jesus is not really resurrected, but only alive in spirit. And in this spiritual resurrection, Jesus has opened the doors of spiritual freedom. All people and all nations will eventually be universally saved.

According to the teachings of Moon, Jesus will not return to judge the world, but it is another Messiah, meaning Moon himself, which will establish the kingdom of God on earth. To say that Moon is the Lord's second coming is a very serious heresy. (According to this cult, adherents cannot leave, otherwise they will be persecuted or die).

The beliefs and teaching of the sect are syncretic and unorthodox. And Moon’s methods are characterized by street proselytism. The authority of the Bible is undermined, ridiculed and replaced by “divine principles.”

3.2 The Way International

Origins of the "The Way"

VICTOR WIERWILLE was born in 1916. He earned a Master's and a Doctorate in theology from Pike's Peak Theological Seminary, a "degree factory." At one time he was pastor of a reformed evangelical church. But in 1942, he announced that God spoke to him and confided a response to his long search for the "secret of a victorious and powerful life."

God promised to teach the Word as no one since the first century. He accepted this call to teach others what he thought God spoke to him.

In 1953, he began teaching by emphasizing Biblical inerrancy in how it should be "correctly dispensed." This was something only Wierwille was capable of doing.

His teaching was given ultimate authority. His farm in New Knoxville, Ohio is the epicenter for this international movement that reached as many as 100,000 adherents.

The organization of the "The Way"

His organizational chart is compared to a tree. Each group is a twig, and several of these groups in the same town forms a small branch, and together with others from the same state make a branch. The head of a band reports to the regional director who reports to an international coordinator at the HQ of the movement located in Ohio.

After the new member finishes the basic course they continue to the next level. Then, the member becomes an ambassador. They work part-time and devote eight hours per day to establishing a new group and organizing studies for new members.

Marie Leonetti who was a member for 22 months recounts that each member must be accountable for how they use every minute of every day. Each one receives a form entitled "Analysis of How You Redeem Your Time." At the top of one of the columns, it reads, "How I spend my time" and another says, "How I can do better" There is a blank space after each hour from 5:00 a.m. to midnight.

The Teachings of the "The Way"

- The Bible is not the word of God, but it contains it.
- Jesus was not God but a Jew conceived by God. His perfect life was a perfect sacrifice for all.
- Jesus was crucified with four criminals on a Wednesday.
- The Holy Spirit is not a person but only a heavenly power.
- The Old Testament and the Gospels are not useful for Christians today. Only the epistles of the New Testament are worth studying, according to these teachings.

3.3 Baha'i Faith

The Forerunner

The origin of the faith Baha'i dates back to May 23, 1844. A young man named Mulla Hosany visited the Iranian city of Shiraz. He belonged to the sect of Shaykhis and was a devout Muslim, who believed that a divine messenger would soon be sent into this world.

In Shiraz Hosany met a young Iranian who took him home. "How will you recognize one who is the messenger?", asked his host Mirza Ali Muhammed. He replied, "It will be between 20 and 30 years, he will be of average size, he will not smoke, he will have no physical defects, possess a great knowledge and will be a descendant of Fatimah Muhammad's daughter. "That's me," replied his guest. From that moment, he was named Bab, which means door.

Since that day, the Baha'i celebrate every year on May 23, the anniversary of the declaration of the Bab, when God was manifested to his people by the forerunner who announced the coming of the Messiah.

The Founder

The Bab spent three years of the next six in prison before being shot in Tabriz in 1850.

Meanwhile, 10,000 of his followers submitted to martyrdom and several thousand more were imprisoned.

Among them, there was a wealthy noble Husayn Ali Mirza. In prison he claimed in a vision that God had asked him to announce to the world the coming of the Promised One. Four years earlier he had taken a new name, **Bahâ'u'llah**, which means "the glory of God."

After being released from prison, he was sent into exile in Baghdad, where he began to write texts for the Baha'i faith. Soon, he announced publicly that he was the Promised One. In 1863 his half-brother fomented a religious uprising to oust him from power, so the Turkish government decided to ban them both.

The Interpreter

Bahâ'u'llah was sent to Constantinople and then Adrianople. In 1868, he began writing to the world's leaders to announce his mission. That same year he was sent again into exile.

Bahâ'u'llah spent the rest of his life in Acre near Haifa in Palestine. Toward the end he was set free and lived in peace. After his death in 1892, his son **Abbas Effendi** succeeded as leader of the movement and took the title of **Abdu'l Baha**, the servant of Baha. He was the new interpreter of this movement.

At present, the administrative centre of the Baha'i faith is in Haifa.

Lifestyle

The Baha'i have neither clergy nor religious rites. Their worship is a result of prayers, readings and a devoted spiritual life. Work is also seen as an offering to God if it is done in a spirit of service. The Baha'i submit to the laws of their countries. They may try to change unjust laws, but should not be involved in a political conflict.

An original aspect of the Baha'i faith is its schedule of 19 months, each of which has 19 days. The privacy of the Baha'i is one of very high ethic standards. They do play games, speak ill of others, take drugs or drink alcohol. They consider marriage as a union of mind and body that lasts for life.

Key Beliefs

The Baha'i stress the following ideas:

- The unification of God: God is one and there is only one God in the world.
- The uniqueness of religion: All major religions have their origin in God who revealed himself by his messengers. (The great prophets are those who permitted the Bible but also wrote their own books. Ex: Mohammed). They are all accomplished adherents in the Baha'i faith.
- Unity of truth: science and religion are two aspects of the truth and can be contradictory.
- Uniqueness of man: All are part of the human family. "The world is a land in which men are citizens" (Bahâ'u'llah).
- Equality: Any discrimination on racial, religious, social, political is a scourge that destroys and should be outlawed.
- Equal Gender: Men and women are equal. They are the two "wings" of humankind. "Unless both wings are strong the bird (humanity) can fly skyward."
- Education: Every child should have the opportunity to learn.
- A universal language: to foster communication and eliminate misunderstanding; every child should learn a second language in addition to their maternal language.
- A world parliament by representatives elected by each country should have enough authority to impose peace where necessary.

Baha'i Faith and Christianity

Baha'i claims to be the fulfillment of Christianity, but differs from it in several respects.

The Baha'i faith teaches that there have been several revelations of God to humanity, each providing the most complete revelation that people of that time could understand. The message of Jesus was the most appropriate for its time and died so that people can live. Bahâ'u'llah was basically the same revelation as Jesus, but Bahâ'u'llah came later, and his message was more complete and revealing especially the common origin of all religions.

He was imprisoned so that people can be free. Christians believe that this is in contradiction with the teachings of the Bible that Jesus is the only Son of God. The Baha'i teach that the error requires development turning from darkness to light. A falsehood is due to a lack of veracity. They recognize evil but they do not provide the same answer as Christianity. The Bible states very clearly that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" and that salvation comes by no other name than Jesus.

In the eyes of the Christian faith, Baha'i is superfluous. By his death and resurrection Jesus Christ responds to the real need of humanity.

3.4 Rastafarians

Its Roots

It is the religion of Parias, present-day Israel in exile in "Babylon," which is the State of Jamaica, but also the Western world and all its institutions.

In 1920s, very few people gave attention to the Jamaican preacher **Marius Mosiah Garvey** who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association to encourage his countrymen to return to Africa, the homeland of their ancestors. The company failed and even those whose interest was awakened soon forgot his prophecy: "'urn toward Africa' and soon a black king will be crowned."

Huminité Garvey retired in England where he died in 1940. But when in 1930 RAS (Prince) TAFARI who claimed to be a descendant of King Solomon was crowned Emperor of Ethiopia under the name of **Haile Sellasié**, the most sceptical turned their ears toward him when they heard the titles that were conferred to him during his coronation. "Lion of the tribe of Judah", "king of kings," "Lord of lords."

Jamaicans began to read the Scriptures. Some argued that Revelations was an allegory of their history and suffering and that Haile Selassie was a Jah (God) in the flesh.

They supported their ideas on texts like Revelation 19:16: "On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords."

Garvey was now passing for a hero. He came to be known as the father of black nationalism. In the eyes of those living in the Caribbean wandering from one island to another in search of a job and a home, victims of the economic crisis and segregation, Africa had the attraction of the promised land.

Garvey had predicted that they should leave the Caribbean around 1960.

In 1959, and later on many occasions, up to 15,000 people arrived at the port of Kingston with a ticket that they had been sold to return to their homeland. However, no vessel waiting because they were counterfeit banknotes!

Some Rasta (wise men) then sought to improve their lives by engaging in politics. In the 1970s, when the Prime Minister Michael Manley introduced himself as "Joshua that brought the people into the Promised Land", He overwhelmingly won in the elections.

In April 1969, their messiah Hailé Sellassié visited Jamaica and he was given a delirious welcome. Many refused to believe the news of his death when it was announced in 1975.

Lifestyle

They have no organized church or place of worship

They are identified by wearing their hair in braided dreadlocks and a head covering in Ethiopian national colors of red, black, green and gold. Because of their refusal to quit smoking marijuana or to cut their hair, they cite Bible verses to justify their stance. The Rasta men have great difficulty in finding work and many of them are unemployed.

They say they are peaceful but some supporters of the sect viewed it as a projection of violence.

Followers of the faith "Rastafari" deliberately speak creole to embarrass non-members. But many of them have a photo of Haile Sélassié and have a small chapel in their garden painted red, black, green and gold.

They also have particular behaviors that are unique to their perspective :

A. Alcohol: many Rasta refuse to drink alcohol because they believe whites have enslaved blacks to intoxicating drinks so they can take advantage and enslave them;

B. Drugs: They smoke "ganja" or marijuana to prepare themselves for meditation, either alone or in groups. They seek drugs for healing both mental and spiritual. After smoking it, they discuss the thoughts that come to them during their meditations;

C. Food: They eat only natural foods and outlaw canned foods, chemicals, pigs and shellfish;

D. Marriage: As part of the established order, they see marriage as a sin. Sexual permissiveness is banned but a couple is obliged to stay together as long as they wish;

E. Morality: It is quite ethical in their outlook. They condemn fraud, evil thoughts, deception and theft.

Key Beliefs

Many Rastafarians do not know exactly what they believe. These are the same people who are not sure of the identity of Rastafari (= Haile Séllassié). But here is an overview of their main beliefs.

-- God, Jesus, Israelites and the first Christians were all black. They accuse Christians of having a European Society of Jesus characterized by blue eyes.

-- God became man, not in person of Jesus but that of Haile Séllassié who is still living in another dimension; They are the real Jews;

-- The Bible was written by and for blacks;

-- White people are demons;

-- Blacks will be free only when they return to Africa;

-- Some believe in reincarnation and some insist they remember their voyage as slaves en route from Africa. Others say that Elizabeth 1 was reincarnated in the present Queen of England and the Duke of Edinburgh is a reincarnation of the King Philippi of Spain.

Discussion Questions

- **Are you comparing the Rastafarians with the followers of "The Way" or Baha'i faith? What there are similarities or differences?**
- **What is the motivation of Africans to join the Rastafarians? How cant eh Church respond to this movement with a theology of the land/earth/the environment?**

3.5 Jehovah's Witnesses

Its Origins

Before 1931, this group was known as "Students of the Bible." From this date, at a conference in Cedar Point, Ohio, Joseph F. Rutherford wanted to break from certain groups loyal to the founder Charles Taze Russell, opting for the name "Jehovah's Witnesses" based on Isaiah 43 :10-12. "You are my witnesses said Jehovah."

As a matter of principle, they do not celebrate Christmas or Easter or birthdays. They provide religious instruction for their children, do not accept no blood transfusion even when medically necessary, refuse to participate national service such as in the military, and do not participate in elections or patriotic events. As a result, they were greatly persecuted in Germany under the Hitler's Nazi regime.

They are still persecuted even today in some African countries. Despite all previous efforts to destroy them, they numbered 2,250,000 in 1983.

Four presidents

"The Pastor" CHARLES TAZE RUSSEL

Born in 1852 in Pennsylvania, USA, Russell founded a youth movement that reacted against a community dominated by the strict Calvinism. So, he began to study Eastern religions and philosophies. He was about to reject all religious faiths when Jonas Wendelf, an evangelist, persuaded him that the Bible was the Word of God. Russell then began to gather friends to systematically study the Bible by making commentaries, and then publishing their work in a magazine called Food for Thinking Christians. Today this periodical has been replaced by the bimonthly periodical The Watchtower.

Russell rejected the idea of a heaven and a hell, but there was not a church that accepted his views. So he decided to sell goods related to sewing, a career inherited from his father. In 1874, he founded a new religious organization that was incorporated five years later as "The Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society."

Russell wrote numerous tracts, as well as a monumental work in six volumes, as well as scriptural studies, which reveal his teachings. He predicted wrongly the end of the world in 1914. It did not take place on the date he specified. Two years later, Russell died in October 1916.

The next president of the organization, Frederick W. Franz dealt with numerous defections among the Jehovah's Witnesses during his leadership. Indeed, more than 25,000 members left the movement.

"The Judge" Joseph Franklin Rutherford

A native of Missouri and legal adviser to the organization, Rutherford was the successor to Russell. In 1917, he and six other leaders of the movement were sentenced to 20 years in prison for war propaganda after seeking to end hostilities during WWI for nine months.

Until his death in 1932 at the age of 72, Rutherford successfully led the organization as it spread throughout the world.

In 1931 he gave his followers the name of "Jehovah's Witnesses."

"The President" Nathan H. Khorr

He became the third leader of the movement at the age of 36. During his tenure numerical growth was faster than at any time in its history. He put an emphasis on training and opened schools, including a Biblical training school with a five-month short course in South Lansing, New York as well as a radio station.

A Theocratic Organization

A theocratic organization of the Jehovah's Witnesses works with the same effectiveness as a commercial enterprise. At its head is the president with a board of seven members, followed by other leaders and administrators. Each local group or "Company" meets in its Kingdom Hall and is led by a supervising president who is accountable to the district leader

for the current state of his company. He is assisted by a committee that organizes home visits.

The Jehovah's Witnesses only celebrate the Lord's Supper once a year because they claim that we must do so only on the day of the anniversary of Christ's death, on day 14 of the Jewish month of Nissan.

The Lord's Supper and baptism are the only formal part of their worship. Apart from that, they operate a theological school where they learn more about the Bible, a school of ministry where they are taught to make home visits, attend public lectures, and study Sunday lessons in The Watchtower.

The Six Steps for becoming a Jehovah's Witness

Home visit No. 1

At the first visit, the Jehovah's Witnesses are seeking to enter the home and to leave some literature. Many people try to get rid of them by buying a magazine have realized that it was a means toward receiving a second visit.

Home visit No. 2

Each buyer is visited for a second time to see how he or she reacts to what was has read in the periodical. The JW evangelists proposes a home study.

Home Study: They encourage the person to invite his friends or family to the study, which takes place in the prospect's home. After a few weeks, they incorporate a larger group for further study.

Kingdom Hall: After that, they propose attending meetings at the Kingdom Hall. There, the prospect is treated with utmost consideration. Since he or she has been well taught in the home, they are ready to receive other, and more extreme, teachings in the public lectures.

Door-to-Door Visitation: They have weekly meeting where adherents learn how to go door-to-door recruiting new members.

Baptism: The final step to become a Jehovah's Witness is baptism.

Key Beliefs

They are the only ones to proclaim God's truth, and that they are the only hope for the world, therefore everyone must join their movement;

God is a single person, Jehovah, who has existed since the beginning of time:

A. God created Jesus, who, in heaven was the archangel Michael. On land he was a man, not God. When God raised him from the dead, he returned to heaven as a spirit;

B. The death of Jesus on the cross, or rather "torture stake" as they prefer to call it does not assure anyone of eternal life. He can accept it as the price of his past sins, but the only

guarantee of one receives is to continually strive to obey God according to the directives given by The Watchtower Society;

C. The Holy Spirit is the invisible force of God that compels servants to do his will;

D. The present world will end soon at the Battle of Armageddon. Survivors will reign with Christ for 1,000 years;

E. During this period there will be no sickness or death. There will be an abundance of flowers and fruits, and all the wild animals will be tame (The Peaceable Kingdom);

F. At the end of the 1,000 years, all the dead will be raised. The 144,000 elect will go on to live in heaven, but the overwhelming majority will stay on earth. Those who have rejected their doctrine will be annihilated;

G. The kingdom of God on earth was established in 1914 when Christ returned to the temple and began to purify it. The devil was expelled from heaven and God established his heavenly kingdom. The earthly land will continue during the lifetime of those who lived in 1914. Each earthquake, famine, war or disaster is a sign of the approaching end.

Conclusions on Jehovah's Witnesses

Can we really say that they are witnesses for Jehovah? Where are biblical proofs to support their beliefs?

- They cite the Bible but their New World Translation is full of inaccuracies;
- Thus when translating John 1: 1, instead of translating "in the beginning the Word was God," they translate it as "the Word was a god." By adding the indefinite article "a", they make Jesus a secondary divinity. This is obviously wrong. Also, other verses are torn from their context to prove their point of view. For example, they prohibit blood transfusions, leaving the patient to die in their sickness. They support this practice by quoting Leviticus 3:17; 7:27; 17:10-11. But these passages have nothing to do with blood transfusions. They also believe that the second coming of Jesus has already taken place though it was invisible. This contradicts Revelations 1:7.

Discussion questions:

- **Compare recruitment strategies of Moonies with those of the Jehovah's Witnesses.**
- **What is the importance of Christology (the study of Christ) in the ministry, preaching and teaching of the evangelical church in light of the distorted teachings propagated by these cults?**

3.6 Brahnamists

The Founder

William Marion Branham was born in Kentucky (USA) on April 6, 1909. Branham had a lumberjack for a father and a mother who was half Native American.

At the age of seven, he received a visitation from an angel who gave him instructions; he did not feel free to share with others. But at 20 years old, after he received an anointing in a Baptist church, he gave his testimony which led to the possibility of becoming an evangelist. He refused this offer following the advice of his parents and friends

Thus, the anointing was removed as he went through a difficult period. The angel appeared to him again and asked him to accept the anointing of the Lord that he may begin to heal the sick and have knowledge of the past and the future.

He received several visions (around 100,000 at least five to six times per day because he has lived for fifty years. He predicted that the year 1977 would be the end of the world. He referred to himself as John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah. His word was final in terms of how he revealed truth in his teachings.

Key Beliefs

- They deny the Trinity (the existence of three persons in one; they misinterpret Isaiah 45:6: "I am the Lord there is no other").
- The Crucifixion for them is a myth, a legend;
- Original sin was that Eve had sexual relations with the snake and she had sexual relations with Adam. Therefore, the birth of Cain and Abel, the first being born of the snake; as a result, Cain killed his brother);
- They believe that God is three revelations: one God with three titles of father, son, holy spirit;
- The Holy Spirit is not God, but a force of God;
- Jesus is not God but a temple in which God is revealed;
- At the cross, God withdrew from Christ when he was crucified;
- Jesus is an image, Christ is the anointed.

3.7 Mormonism: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

History

The church was founded in 1820 by the "prophet" Joseph Smith in New York, USA. According to Smith, he was praying for wisdom, according to James 1:5, when an angel appeared and gave him another version of the Gospel. Using precious stones, he read the inscriptions on ancient tablets written in a cryptic language that came from the angel. Smith translated these rocks into English. The translation is called "The Book of Mormon."

After some time, others have joined Smith in establishing what they thought of as the one true religion in which Jesus Christ long ago visited America. The faithful adherents of the new religion fled in the western United States to a place now known as the state of Utah. The Mormons believe it is their mission to evangelize all people with the gospel according to their beliefs.

Key Beliefs

The real source of authority comes from the "Book of Mormon" and also the current president of the church. They believe that God is an exalted man in the role of a God. All righteous men can become gods with their own planets. They reject Christ as God. Baptism is needed to be saved even more than faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism works for salvation even if someone is already dead. The Mormons are trying to replace the true message of the Gospel with their recent interpretations.

The organization and methods

The Mormon church has its headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah in the United States. They call for young members to spend two years as missionaries. They wear a uniform of white shirts and neckties. They use biblical words but change their meanings to suit their perspectives.

Discussion question

Name the "small truths" the cults tell in order to hide their bigger falsehoods. These "small truths" might be phrases, beliefs, or practices that are generally good things but only reveal one small part of the whole biblical truth.

3.8 African Independent Churches: Are They Cults?

When we speak of independent churches in Africa, one immediately thinks of the largest such as Celestial Christianity (Christianisme Celeste) in Benin, the Cherubim and Seraphim, Harrisists of Côte d'Ivoire, or the Kimbanguist Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Yet there is a proliferation of independent churches in most African countries.

Some have origins that are Protestant and evangelical, others follow a prophet or practice a particular mix of pagan rituals and Christian beliefs. The latter are usually a reinterpretation of the biblical truths and link orthodox beliefs as only something to be found in the religion of the white man or foreigner.

Being an independent church is not to say that this community of faith is automatically to be considered a cult. The practices may well differ from those of established churches or those started by missionaries. What is distinctive and bizarre—sometimes even threatening—often represents an affirmation of the “Africanness” of the independent church’s response to European or American churches and their attempts to control the African church.

In churches established by missionaries, African Christians often behave like Europeans in their worship, in their homes, depending on the culture and rituals imported by the missionaries or international TV broadcasts. Pastors will often wear a jacket and tie, even during the hot season.

Churches soon take on a particular character and adopt distinctly African practices that we might not want to oppose without further consideration and reflection. We must look at all the issues before classifying an African Independent Church as a cult. If we look closely, we will see that our own churches have great practices and traditions that arise from particular contexts and historical situations that cannot be based solely from the word of God.

The distinctive character of the independent church can reveal its true colors by viewing its doctrine of Christ (Example: deviating from any statement about the person of Christ or trying to make Jesus into a black Christ). Or, how they desire to practice Christian worship in a way that saturates it with local traditional religious practices.

3.9 African Traditional Religions

We can evaluate the role and practice traditional religions in Africa. By using the following chart, each of the students will identify the most important aspects of traditional religions in their context and how to respond and minister to adherents in these religions.

Directions: Each student must conduct research on a cult or African traditional religion that is prominent in the community by filling out the “Chart of African Traditional Religions.”

After that, students will form small groups in which they will choose a cult or traditional religion to study together. They will prepare an oral presentation by following the method of developed by Paul Hiebert called "critical contextualization."

In the oral presentation, the groups will offer responses in the following areas:

- The outline of beliefs and practices in comparison with Christianity.
- The liturgy and preaching in these churches.
- The attitude to adopt when dealing with the proliferation of cults.
- To know why they are adopting certain pastoral attitudes in their responses to these cults and traditional religions.

The teacher should present the idea of "critical contextualization" and the evaluation chart for African traditional religions. And, then they should explain how the small groups should work together (see the guide for small groups on page 7.)

The missiologist Paul Hiebert offered a method for evaluating ministry in various context called "critical contextualization." There are four steps to this approach:

STEP 1: Observation: The minister observes the practices and religious phenomena in its context.

Requirements for the first step: Observe good, consider every detail, try understanding what is seen, but do not judge it.

The student will need to ask the following questions:

What are the beliefs or traditional practices in our context?

What happens in the community through these practices or beliefs?

STEP 2: Analysis: The minister must be able to identify the importance of practices or beliefs in the context.

Requirements of research in the second step: **examine** the observations through the lens of Scripture and against the perspective of objective reality.

Using the Scriptures, we approach the observations according to the vision of the world that is found in the Bible: the message that teaches us through the stories of creation, fall, redemption, and also the restoration of God's reign.

At the same time, we must bridge the gap between the Christian message and the local context. Avoid the tendency to reject others' perspectives without first trying to understand them.

The student will need to ask the following questions:

What is the meaning of practices and beliefs in the context?

How are the observed religious phenomena to be compared to the revelation of the Christian Scriptures?

How are the observed religious phenomena to be compared to other cultures of Africa or the world?

STEP 3: Evaluation of our analysis: The minister must evaluate traditional and localized beliefs with the Bible and Christian beliefs.

Now, the researcher needs to evaluate the old beliefs and practices in light of the new light given by the Bible. It is not just a process that includes spiritual leaders, but a process that involves the input of as many as possible.

The student will arise the following questions:

What are the implications if we start to change old practices in light of the new Christian beliefs?

Why is there no conflict between the old practices shared between other cultures around the world?

Or: How can we adapt old practices that they are also acceptable for Christianity?

STEP 4: Create a ministry of transformation: The minister must organize practices to transform their context with the message of the Gospel. The final step requires us to continue the process of restoring the reign of God on earth. Our actions are to be full of grace, according to James 2:13b, "Mercy triumphs over judgment."

The student will arise the following questions:

How does the Church guard Biblical truth and orthodox belief against beliefs or practices that arise primarily from their culture?

Are there local beliefs or cultural practices that correspond to the message of the Gospel?

How can cultural forms be incorporated into the ministry of the Gospel in this context?

Students will use the following chart to help identify the beliefs and practices of traditional religions or cults according to Step 1.

Evaluation Chart for African Traditional Religions

| | Conception | How this conception is identified in context |
|----|---|--|
| 1 | God: The conception of God in Africa; names, attributes, ideas | |
| 2 | How God acts: by the means of intermediaries, little gods, dream, visions, natural phenomena | |
| 3 | God and humanity: How God punishes and rewards humanity (judgment); morality and social ethics and standards for behavior | |
| 4 | Rites of passage: birth, puberty, marriage, death, influence of these rites in society and worldview | |
| 5 | Festivals: origin and meaning of these rituals (general and/or specific) | |
| 6 | Superstition and mysticism in Africa: explaining fortune and evil in the African context (individual and groups) | |
| 7 | Veneration of divinities: divinities and their powers. Personal or community divinities. | |
| 8 | Cheiftains: order of successions; cult and institution of chieftaincy, chiefs and society | |
| 9 | Communal cohesion: clan, tribe, village, city, wars, and catastrophes | |
| 10 | Means of spiritual education and formation: secret societies, sorcery, spiritual beings, jinas, monsters, water beings, (Maame, sirens), etc. | |
| 11 | Practices and Customs: significance of groups. Localized practices, such as genital mutilation, rights of widows, and inheritance of property rights | |

12 **Informal education:**
apprenticeship, relationship
between servant and master;
obedience, submission, role of
educators: parents,
masters, co-horts, mentors

13 **Healing practices:** what
causes sickness; and how are
they healed or treated
r

14 **Knowledge of the Future:**
how are decisions made and
commitments for the future

15 **Afterlife:** What happens after
life on earth?

Section 4 African Challenges and Pastoral Responses

4.1 African Challenges

The destruction of social structures

A great challenge is posed by the destruction of social structures, cultural patterns and traditional values caused by industrialization, globalization, urbanization, migration, the rapid development of technocratic systems, etc.

This destruction is leaving many Africans confused, uprooted, insecure, and, therefore, vulnerable.

The search for a solution

The most acceptable solution is sometimes the one that makes itself available and accessible to the seeker. The temptation remains, however, to accept this solution as the sole and final possibility. This is what cults and traditional religions promise to their adherents in the effort to become the ultimate solution to the world's problems.

4.2 Global Concerns

By reviewing African societies, it is possible to list some of the symptoms of the pathologies infecting today's global society and that cause suffering for so many. There are worries and concerns arising from unemployment, threat of war, terrorism, poverty, etc.).

Seekers ask themselves about the nature of truth and how it is found

They wonder about uncertainty and political instability, about economic and ideological domination of the "haves" over the "have-nots", on the meaning of life, who they are and how they are different from others, how to survive a daily barrage of struggles, and what might be there in the afterlife.

Seekers seek real answers to real questions.

They suffer from a loss of leadership, a lack of guidance, participation in decisions. They are experimenting with fear because of various forms of violence, conflicts, terrorism, hostilities, the fear of an ecological disaster, and a holocaust of a nuclear war; conflict social, handling.

Researchers feel frustrated and uprooted. They are without . . .

Without homes, without protection, without resources and without hope and consequently without motivation, alone at home, at school, at work, at the university in the city, lost in anonymity, isolation, marginalization, alienation, i.e. they have no affiliation; they feel they are not listened to, rejected, and not taken seriously.

Seekers are disappointed by . . .

The technological society, the military, business, labor, exploitation, the education system, practices of the church, government laws and policies.

They become empty, indifferent, aggressive, and so they begin to search for something else.

Seekers are among the faithful.

There is sometimes a number of deficiencies or inadequacies in the current life of a local church that can facilitate the success of sects, because the church no longer offers solutions to the problems people face.

4.3 Pastoral Approaches

We will focus on the positive pastoral approaches to the problems encountered by those who seek solutions in today's world.

If they haven't accomplished anything else, maybe the presence of cults and alternative religions have been the impetus to encourage spiritual renewal in the church.

A sense of COMMUNITY

We need to rethink the "system of traditional community" and search for a model community that is more intimate, more humane, and more suited to the situation of people's lives, more "base Christian communities" that are a living faith witnessing to love (warmth, acceptance, understanding, reconciliation, brotherhood) and hope; communities that celebrate; communities who pray, communities that are missionary: outwardly focused and who bear witness; open communities that support people who have special problems: divorced and marginalized.

Education et CONTINUING education

We must put great emphasis on the need for evangelization, catechesis, education and continuing education in the Bible and theology for each local community, for clergy and lay alike.

Prayer and WORSHIP

We must review the classical models of the liturgy, which are often unrelated to the situation of daily life.

The word of God needs to be rediscovered as an important element in building up of the Christian community.

Emphasis should be placed on the dimension of the biblical preaching; on the need to speak the language of people and upon the need for careful preparation of preaching and liturgy (as much as possible through a team process, including the participation of the laity). The preaching must not be theoretical, intellectual and moralistic, but includes the vitality of true faith in the testimony of the preacher's life and character. The practice of preaching the Word, worship, and prayers should not be confined to traditional places of worship.

Participation and direction ("LEADERSHIP")

Pastors should not be regarded primarily as administrators, office clerks or judges, but rather as brothers, guides, counselors, people of prayer. There is too often a distance that must be bridged between the people and their pastors, and even between pastors within one another. The ministry is about unity and communion, which must become visible to the faithful and to those who seek.

PERSONAL approach

We must help people realize that they are unique, loved by a personal God, from birth to death to resurrection in glory. Special attention should be paid to the dimension of experience, i.e. the personal discovery of Christ through prayer and a committed life. Many Christians live as if they were never born anew!

Particular attention needs to be given to the ministry of healing through prayer, reconciliation, brotherhood and consideration for others. Our pastoral concern should not be one-dimensional; it must extend not only to the spiritual dimensions, but also the other domains of life including the physical, psychological, social, cultural, political, and economic.

Cultural IDENTITY

The challenge of inculturation is a fundamental need. Africans want a simpler Christianity, integrated with various aspects of daily life, suffering, joy, work, aspirations, fears and needs of Africa.

TOLERANCE AND DISCERNEMENT

Cults have been an embarrassing problem for both churches and governments.

The French Protestant theologian, A. Dumas said:

"If we knew how to better preach, heal, confess, love others in the church, we would not be abandoned for the cults by those living a disoriented existence who are then harvested by these cults as ones who have been lost and abandoned [by us, the church]."

P. Mvengs wrote a few years ago:

"The tragedy of cults in Africa is that in their quest for Jesus Christ, they are neglected by their Mother Church. But they did not kill their mother, they have never known they were snatched from her tenderness in the cradle. The Christian sects [and other cults] in Africa are the result of colonial history. At a time of ecumenism and the liberation of Africa, we must help them to encounter Christ not [as] disfigured, but in the authenticity of its African incarnation."

The success of the cults reveals the failure of churches and society. Humankind does not live by bread alone, though development might also be necessary, as well as socio-economic planning. Humanity, though, is deeply rooted in the mystery, and with a regard adventure that only becomes apparent in the arena of religion, where humanity might encounter the mystery of existence before God.

Cults are a reminder of this mystery but without the ambiguity. They are very exciting, interpretations are to the conscience of humanity, but Christianity often points people to churches in which there is "evidence of a duty not accomplished." There is frustration and disappointment felt by seekers who do not find anything there. Young people are looking for truth, the human ideal, and spiritual answers. They want to take an active part in building tomorrow's society. And a society without a spiritual ideal is doomed to failure. Cults are attractive because they attempt, in an insufficient manner, to offer a spiritual alternative.

If an attitude of acceptance and dialogue to engage the real causes for growth of cults in Africa, it must not ignore these deficits existing in the church. Cults challenge every Christian and every local church. They can provoke us to return to our humble spiritual roots, and continue in a sincere search for truth that frees our lives from mediocrity. In the fifth century, St. Augustine knew how these groups flourished. The challenge for the church is still the same.

Faced with the threat imposed by cults, there is a renewed need for discernment. "Proof everything," says Paul the apostle. Certain it is not always easy to discern between what is admirable and unacceptable, between the subjective and sincere enthusiasm and objective and harmful errors. In some countries of parent associations have been created to defend individuals and families from the threat of cults. In other places, governments have taken a stance against the harmful effects of cults that are particularly misleading and harmful to society.

It is up to the Church in Africa to find the means to educate others on the religious needs of African today. It is for the Church to bear the heavy responsibility of promoting the conversion of those "'Cries of the Africans" toward a liberating act of faith in Jesus Christ. Because the most effective defense of the Church is the testimony of one person who radiates Christ's light to the darkened world.

Section 5 Conclusion

We need religious freedom.

We enjoy religious freedom in most countries of Africa. For the civilian authorities, the main thing is that the faith communities comply with the laws and public order. But freedom and religious tolerance come at a price. Part of this freedom is that we will see the creation and installation of cults in our countries. We must accept this reality.

By contrast, we need to act in ways that avoids distrust and regrettable reactions, knowing that the threat of cults needs a less offensive response. We can take preventive action through faithfully the whole word of God to the whole church, which must then demonstrate brotherly love and witness to the work of the Holy Spirit.

We need biblical teaching.

This requires training to be taken seriously at all levels, in order for the church to be a positive witness in our communities to coincide with an effective strategy for relational evangelism. Too few of our churches provide a rationale for the biblical teaching during sermons. Not too mention the need to invigorate our youth ministries by giving youth a vision for how they can impact their world. That Bible will give them that motivation.

We need salvation by grace through faith in God and mutual cooperation between believers.

When churches face a spiritual crisis, Satan will take advantage of this situation. Faced with the legalism of sects, there is a new threat to encourage rigorous discipline in place of the right focus on salvation by grace through faith alone. We want to avoid a sterile formalism in Sunday worship. At the same time, we need to encourage the active participation of everyone, especially young people, in the community life of the church and mutual collaboration with other churches. We want to make each member responsible according to their spiritual gifts.

We need to avoid a sectarian spirit, including anything we ourselves need to avoid ourselves, including authoritarianism and legalism.

By following the word of God, we will avoid a sectarian spirit, as well as authoritarianism and legalism. In the case of a disciplinary action in a local church, the leaders need to act in accordance with the teachings of the New Testament. This means they need to approach situations with love and understanding and seek the rehabilitation of the brother or sister. They must remember that revolt and schism often arise because of injustices that occur in conflict.

We need to be good observers and not reactionary.

It is wise to be alert, while observing our situations and not reactionary when encountering difficulties. Be aware of new happenings in your community and the presence of new groups, cults, and sects. You will need to communicate knowledgeably with them and about them.

What should be our attitude and our approach in ministry?

Obviously it is not possible to give a simple answer to this question. Cults and sects are diverse that are located in various religious, cultural and social settings.

What if we thought of those involved with cults and sects as those who are unchurched, unbaptized, or just non-believers? The truth is people involved with these groups are quite spiritual, and they are interested in spiritual affairs. They may know the beliefs and background of the Protestant or Catholic church better than lifelong members of these churches.

We cannot afford to be naïve about how we approach cult members.

Analyze the actions of cults and sects

We have sufficiently discussed the efforts of cults to understand their attitudes and methods they use to destroy personalities, disrupt families, and how their doctrines distort or deny Jesus Christ and His teachings.

In some countries these cults are forces of ideological, economic, and political interests totally alien to a genuine concern for humanity. They are busy using human beings for inhuman designs.

Inform the membership and especially the youth

There is a need to inform people, especially young people, to help them maintain vigilance against the threats of cultic activity. We may even need to acquire professional assistance to advise and provide legal protection.

Nevertheless, if we want

To be faithful to what we believe and in our principles:

- Respect for the human person;
- Respect for religious freedom;
- Faith in action mind working in accordance with the principles for the purpose of God's love for all humanity, every individual, man, woman or child, we can not simply be satisfied by just avoiding cults. We must know how to respond to them in our context according to biblical principles.

Understand their point-of-view

The "challenge" of cults or new movements must stimulate our own renewal for a greater pastoral effectiveness.

This "challenge" must also develop within us and our churches the capability of having the spirit of Christ toward them, trying to understand "where they are at" where possible to point them toward the love of Christ.

We must pursue these goals confidently in the truth taught by Christ that we are to act with love for all people.

Final Remarks

We must not allow other preoccupations to all cults to gain a foothold among us.

Try to view honestly all of your shortcomings in your life and faith, and resolve to improve them. Cults always try to fill a spiritual, religious, or cultural vacuum with wonderful promises of a better future

Let us remember also that offense and defense are both easier if you understand the tactics of the enemy and the mentality of its soldiers. "But take heart! I have overcome the world," said Jesus Christ to His disciples (John 16:33b).

Critical Contextualization

By Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, Tite Titenou, *Understanding Folk Religions* .(1999), pp. 20-29

STEP 1: Observation: The minister observes the practices and religious phenomena in its context:

What are the beliefs or traditional practices in our context?

What happens in the community through these practices or beliefs?

STEP 2: Analysis: The minister must be able to identify the importance of practices or beliefs in the context.

What is the meaning of practices and beliefs in the context?

How are the observed religious phenomena to be compared to the revelation of the Christian Scriptures?

How are the observed religious phenomena to be compared to other cultures of Africa or the world?

STEP 3: Evaluation of our analysis: The minister must evaluate traditional and localized beliefs with the Bible and Christian beliefs.

What are the implications if we start to change old practices in light of the new Christian beliefs?

Why is there no conflict between the old practices shared between other cultures around the world?

Or: How can we adapt old practices that they are also acceptable for Christianity?

STEP 4: Create a ministry of transformation: The minister must organize practices to transform their context with the message of the Gospel.

How does the Church guard Biblical truth and orthodox belief against beliefs or practices that arise primarily from their culture?

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how are decisions made and
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15 **Afterlife:** What happens after
life on earth?

Evaluation for Small Group Presentations

| Group 1 | Members | Total time | | Points | Total points | Notes |
|---------|---------|------------|---------------|--------|--------------|-------|
| | | | Content | | 100 | |
| | | | Participation | | 100 | |
| | | | Presentation | | 100 | |
| | | | Total | | /300 | |

| Group 2 | Members | Total time | | Points | Total points | Notes |
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| | | | Content | | 100 | |
| | | | Participation | | 100 | |
| | | | Presentation | | 100 | |
| | | | Total | | /300 | |

| Group 3 | Members | Total time | | Points | Total points | Notes |
|---------|---------|------------|---------------|--------|--------------|-------|
| | | | Content | | 100 | |
| | | | Participation | | 100 | |
| | | | Presentation | | 100 | |
| | | | Total | | /300 | |

| Group 4 | Members | Total time | | Points | Total points | Notes |
|---------|---------|------------|---------------|--------|--------------|-------|
| | | | Content | | 100 | |
| | | | Participation | | 100 | |
| | | | Presentation | | 100 | |
| | | | Total | | /300 | |

| Group 5 | Members | Total time | | Points | Total points | Notes |
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| | | | Content | | 100 | |
| | | | Participation | | 100 | |
| | | | Presentation | | 100 | |
| | | | Total | | /300 | |

| Group 6 | Members | Total time | | Points | Total points | Notes |
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| | | | Content | | 100 | |
| | | | Participation | | 100 | |
| | | | Presentation | | 100 | |
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Notes:

Course Report

Course: ET303 Cults and Sects in the African Context
Location:
Instructor:

Student Name:

| Assignment | Pourcent | Note |
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| Attendance and Participation | 20% | _____/200 pts |
| Research and Evaluation Chart for ATR | 30% | _____/300 pts |
| Oral Presentation on a cult or sect | 30% | _____/300 pts |
| Final Exam (Optional: add points to presentation) | 20% | _____/200 pts |
| | 100% | _____/1000 pts |

Final Mark over 20

Signed _____

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Date _____

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Course Report

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| | 100% | _____/1000 pts |

Final Mark over 20

Signed _____

_____/ 20

Date _____

Course: ET303 Cults and Sects in Africa Instructor _____

Teaching Center _____ Date _____

Each student starts with 10 points for attending and participating in class. Absence and lack of participation will reduce these points.

Student Registration Form

| # | Name | ID | Attendance | | | | | | | | | | Total |
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Nazarene Theological Institute

Course : ET303 Cults and Sects in Africa

Instructor _____

Teaching Center _____

Date _____

| Name | Attendance /200 | Chart /300 | Oral Presentation /300 | Final Exam /200 | Sub-total | Absence deux fois (-25%) | Total / 1000 |
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