Essential Information

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

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

Instructor Information

Professor: Harold E. Raser, PhD
Email: heraser@nts.edu
Office: (816) 268-5489
Office Hours: by appointment

Catalog Description

A study of the numerous perimeter or alternative religious movements in American religious history. Along with their beliefs and practices, attention is given to the historical and sociological factors that have contributed to the flourishing of such groups in America. Includes a survey of contemporary “cult” movements ([NTS Academic Catalog](https://nts.edu/catalog/), 2013-2014, p. 79)

Course Narrative and Rationale

Religions on the perimeter,” “alternative altars,” “fringe religions,” and “New Religious Movements” (NRM’s) (as well as “cults” and “sects”) are some of the descriptions that have been applied to the numerous movements in American history that have deviated significantly from the Christian “mainstream” embraced by most religious Americans. Such groups are an important part of the historical development of religious life in the United States.
This course is designed to survey some of the more important alternative, perimeter, or new religious groups (especially those with Christian roots and close connections to Christian tradition) which have appeared with regularity in America from the seventeenth century up to the present time. The origins, development, and principal beliefs and practices of these groups are examined, along with the various factors that contribute to the formation and appeal of such groups in different historical contexts. Also, some attention is given to a variety of theological, legal, and pastoral issues raised by the presence of such groups in American society. Methods of teaching and learning utilized in this course include lecture, class discussion, reading, reflection and writing, experiential visits to places of worship or gathering related to religious groups examined in the course, and watching and reflecting upon videos and other online resources that address and illuminate important dimensions of the course.

**Degree Objectives**

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

**M.Div.**
3. Development of wisdom and discernment through engagement with the literature of the Christian faith through critical, scholarly study of the history and theology of Christianity and the application of that heritage to personal and corporate life.
5. Understanding of local and global diversity through the investigation of cultural contexts, to enable the Church to proclaim effectively and to embody the mission of God.

**MACFD**
3. A discernment of the various aspects and cultural contexts that influence people and their growth along the life course, in order to design appropriate ministry strategies that form persons into ongoing faithful disciples.
5. A cultivation of practices and abilities necessary for skillfully discipling the people of God, guiding relationship in the church, and engaging in theological discernment of sound educational practices.

**MAICS**
1. Knowledge of the Christian faith understood in its biblical foundations, historical developments, and theological expressions.
3. Understanding of the factors that constitute the contexts in which the Church participates in the “missio Dei.”

**MATS**
2. Knowledge of the major theological disciplines and their interrelationships.
3. Ability to use the theological disciplines to reflect on and engage the world as informed, thinking, Christian persons.
**Course Outcomes**

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

1. Acquire familiarity with important “cults,” “sects,” and “New Religious Movements” in the United States (*demonstrated* through informed participation in class discussion, critical reflection essays, reviews, and examinations)

2. Gain knowledge of the broad history of such movements in America (*demonstrated* primarily through informed participation in class discussion, critical reflection essays, reviews, and examinations)

3. Develop understanding of such groups as something more than simply odd, weird, deviant, or aberrant – rather, as religious systems that provide a coherent and meaningful way for their adherents to order and live their lives (*demonstrated* through informed participation in class discussion, critical reflection essays, reviews, and examinations)

4. Understand the important factors (both historical and contemporary) that encourage the formation of “alternative” religions, and reasons why some people are attracted to and join these kinds of groups (*demonstrated* through informed participation in class discussion, critical reflection essays, and examinations)

5. Gain awareness of important theological, legal, and pastoral issues related to the presence and influence of “cult” type religious groups in American society (*demonstrated* through informed participation in class discussion, critical reflection essays – especially on *UNDERSTANDING NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS* by John Saliba – reviews, and examinations)

6. Develop a growing ability to relate as a Christian (minister) to contemporary alternative religious movements and their adherents in an informed, sensitive, and redemptive manner (*demonstrated* initially through informed participation in class discussion, critical reflection essays, reviews, and examinations – but only demonstrated fully over time in future ministry)

**Required Texts & Course Materials**


4. **THE MORMONS**, Thomas F. O’Dea (out-of-print, but used copies can be purchased from a variety of booksellers online)

**Course Outline**  
*(See “Course Calendar” and “Course Schedule” below)*

**Course Assignments & Requirements**

**A. PRE-MODULE**

1. Read *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History* by Philip Jenkins. Write a critical reflection essay approximately 1,000 to 1,250 words in length (see instructions below). **The critical reflection essay is due no later than Saturday, December 28** (outcomes 1-6)

2. Read *Understanding New Religious Movements* by John A. Saliba. There will be no critical reflection essay due over pp. 1-67, but this section of the book will be discussed in class during the first class session, Monday, January 27 (outcomes 1-6)

3. Write a critical reflection essay approximately 1,000 – 1,250 words in length on *Understanding New Religious Movements*, pp. 75-276 (see instructions below). **The critical reflection essay is due no later than Saturday, January 18** (outcomes 1-6)

4. Begin reading *the Mormons* by Thomas F. O’Dea (outcomes 1-6)

**B. MODULE FACE-TO-FACE**

1. Regular attendance and consistent participation in class discussions and other learning activities. Students are expected to attend class regularly and to be prepared to fully participate in class activities. **If a student is absent for 8 hours on a one week module, the professor may automatically fail the student** – (addresses outcomes 1-6)

2. Complete reading *the Mormons* by Thomas F. O’Dea. Write a critical reflection essay approximately 1,000 – 1,250 words in length on the book (see instructions below). **The essay is due no later than Wednesday, January 29** – (addresses outcomes 1-6)

3. Complete an in-class written examination on sections I-V of the course (see “Course Calendar” and “course schedule” below). **This will be administered on Friday morning, January 31** – addresses outcomes 1-6.
C. POST-MODULE

1. Read New Religious Movements and the Theological Imagination in America by Mary Farrell Bednarowski. Write a critical reflection essay approximately 1,000 to 1,250 words in length (see instructions below). This essay is due no later than Saturday, February 15 (addresses outcomes 1-6)

2. Visit at least two places of worship and/or gathering for religious movements that would fall under some category of interest to this class (a list of possible visitation sites will be supplied at the beginning of the class). Each visit should be described and analyzed in a brief review (approximately 1,000 words or less). The review should include identification of the group visited, the nature of the meeting/gathering visited, the number and sorts of persons present (mainly young, old, families, etc., primary ethnic or racial group[s] represented, apparent socioeconomic status, etc.), a brief summary of the highlights of the meeting, and some evaluation or assessment of the experience and the group in light of information and ideas you have been learning in the course. Both reviews are due no later than Saturday, March 1 (especially addresses outcomes 1,3,4,6)

3. Complete a written examination online on sections VI-X of the course (see “Course Calendar” below). This exam will be posted online and will be available to be taken at your convenience any time between Monday, March 3 and Friday, March 21.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CRITICAL REFLECTION ESSAYS (outcomes 1-6)

Each of the critical reflection essays referred to above ought to be approximately 1,000 – 1,250 words in length. The essays should include a brief summary of the content of the reading, but their main point is not summarization. Their main purpose is to interact critically with the content of the assigned book. Expected content would include: noting the author’s thesis (or theses) concerning the material presented; highlighting the most important ideas, developments, or persons discussed in the book and some indication why you consider these the most important; discussion of the implications of the information presented by the assigned material for understanding the subject of “cults,” “sects,” and New Religious Movements in America; discussion of your own personal reactions to the material presented in the assigned reading – questions it raises for you, and ways in which the material challenges, confirms, confuses – or generally affects – your general understanding of, and attitude towards “cults” and “sects” in America.
**Distribution of Student Learning Hours**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>pre-module hours</th>
<th>module hours</th>
<th>post-module hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face Class Sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Participation in forums, groups, etc.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Assignments and Learning Activities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exams &amp; Quizzes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
<td><strong>53</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Method for Submitting Assignments**

All written assignments should be submitted on the course site on NTS MOODLE. There is a clearly marked link for each class assignment where completed work may be posted, accessed and evaluated, and returned to you by the professor. **All critical reflection essays are due no later than 11:55 p.m. of the day they are due.** Late work is reduced ½ letter grade for every three days (or portion thereof) that it is overdue.

**Form and Style Expectations**

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

**Inclusive Language**

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

**Policy Regarding Late Work & Missed Exams**

As stated above, all critical reflection essays are to be submitted on the course site on NTS MOODLE no later than 11:55 p.m. on the day on which the assignment is due. Late work is reduced ½ letter grade for every three days (or portion thereof) that it is overdue. **Missed exams may not be made up at another time unless arrangements are made in advance with the instructor, and for an exceptionally urgent reason.**
**Course Grading**

It is expected that all written work will evidence graduate level writing skills and this will be taken into account in grading. In addition, all students are expected to be familiar with the *NTS Handbook for Inclusive Language* (available from the Dean’s Office) and to follow its guidelines in the preparation of written work. For any written assignment the following criteria are employed in evaluation and grading: 1) “A” quality work – is superior in every way – writing is clear, essentially without errors in grammar, syntax, word usage, spelling, etc. – content evidences careful reflection, insight, and originality; 2) “B” quality work – is above average – writing is generally clear, with few errors of grammar, syntax, spelling, word usage, etc. – content evidences careful preparation and meets the expectations of the assignment; 3) “C” quality work – average – writing is adequate, but may have errors – content is adequate, meets the minimum expectations of the assignment, but lacks insight and originality; 4) “D” quality work -- below average – writing is poor, marred with frequent errors – content evidences lack of insight or lack of understanding of assigned materials; 5) “F” quality work – failure to do satisfactory work – work evidences haste, lack of careful preparation, lack of basic understanding of the assigned material or of the purpose of the assignment.

**FINAL GRADES IN THE COURSE ARE BASED ON THE FOLLOWING WEIGHTING OF ASSIGNMENTS**

1. Regular attendance and consistent, informed participation in class discussion and other learning activities counts 15% of the final grade.
2. The reading reports together (4) count 44% of the final grade.
3. The two exams together count 25% of the final grade.
4. The site visits and reviews count 16% of the final grade.

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

**Class Attendance**

Attendance at classes is essential for realizing the maximum benefit of your education. Since the professor in each course is best acquainted with the importance of consistent attendance, he or she will determine the rules for attendance.
If you must be absent because of extenuating circumstances, contact the professor as soon as possible to discuss the situation.

If a student is absent for 8 hrs of a one week module, the professor may automatically fail the student.

Daily attendance records must be reported for those obtaining V.A. and Department of Education benefits. Students must make the professor aware if their attendance must be recorded.

**Audio and Video Recordings**

In order to foster a safe learning environment in which various viewpoints are respected, audio or video recordings or transcripts thereof by students is prohibited without the permission of the faculty member in charge of the course. If permission is granted, redistribution of these recordings or transcripts thereof outside the scope of the course is prohibited.

**Course Calendar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pre-Module Begins</td>
<td>Read, and write a critical reflection essay on <em>Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History</em> by Philip Jenkins (see “instructions for critical reflection essays” above). <strong>The essay is due Saturday, December 28.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Read, and write a critical reflection essay on <em>Understanding New Religious Movements</em> by John A. Saliba, pp. 75-276 (see “instructions for critical reflection essays” above). <strong>The essay is due Saturday, January 18.</strong></td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Read, and write a critical essay on <em>The Mormons</em> by Thomas F. O’Dea (see “instructions for critical reflection essays” above). <strong>This essay is due during the module – on Thursday, January 29.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
| 7    | Module Face to Face Begins | A. Students are expected to attend class regularly and to be prepared to fully participate in class activities and will be graded accordingly (see “weighting of assignments” and “class attendance” sections above. 
B. Submit a critical reflection essay on *the Mormons* by Thomas F. O’Dea (see “instructions for critical reflection essays” above) **no later than Thursday, January 29.**
C. Complete in-class written examination on sections I-V of the course (see “class schedule” below). **This examination (essay) will be administered in class on Friday morning, January 31.** |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8</th>
<th>Read, and write a critical reflection essay on <em>New Religious Movements and the Theological Imagination in America</em> by Mary Farrell Bednarowski. <strong>The essay is due no later than Saturday, February 15.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 Post-Module Begins</td>
<td>Visit at least two places of worship and/or gathering for a religious movement that would fall under some category of interest to this class. Write a brief (approximately 1,000 words, or less) describing and analyzing your visits (see instructions above). <strong>The reviews are due no later than Saturday, March 1.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>COURSE SCHEDULE (MODULE WEEK)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Course Evaluations (approximate release time by the Dean’s Office) – complete a short course evaluation online <strong>before</strong> you take the online exam. Complete a written online essay examination over sections VI-X of the course (see “course schedule” below). This examination will be available online from March 3 through 11:55 p.m. March 21.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday, Jan. 29</td>
<td>V. The Mormons II VI. The Millerite and Adventist Movement VII. Seventh-day Adventism and Related Movements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thursday, Jan. 30  
VIII. Jehovah’s Witnesses

IX. New Thought and Its Various Expressions

X. Contemporary Cults and New Religious Movements: Sociological, Psychological, Legal, and Pastoral Considerations

Friday, Jan. 31  
Review, Wrap-Up and Essay Exam over sections I-V of the course

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