

Pedagogical Reflection: The New Religions Course at Leiden

Markus Altena Davidsen

Leiden University

Abstract

This brief article discusses the context, purpose, content, and assessment procedures of the New Religions course at Leiden University, the Netherlands. Catering to a diverse population of Dutch and international students, the course aims to introduce the specific field of new religions, as well as to train students in the critical and comparative ('study-of-religion') approach to religion. Concretely, students examine a representative range of new religions and forms of alternative spirituality, and are introduced to theories on such topics as conversion and legitimization. In addition, the course includes an excursion to the Scientology Church in Amsterdam and an evening symposium. Assessment in the course is twofold: first, students are divided into groups that each analyzes one new religion in depth. In the final paper, students compare a selection of the new religions treated in class and confront theoretical distinctions and hypotheses with the empirical evidence.

Keywords:

New religions, alternative spirituality, teaching religion, sociology of religion, comparative religion, syllabus

Since 2004, Leiden University (the Netherlands) has offered a course on new religions. The course currently attracts about fifty Dutch and international students every year; between 2012 and 2025, I taught the course eleven times. With a combination of sociological and comparative approaches, the course introduces students to a range of new religions and forms of alternative spirituality from around the world, which students are taught to systematically analyze and compare. In addition to lectures and group assignments, the course includes an excursion to the Scientology Church in Amsterdam and an evening symposium on a varying theme. In this brief article I sketch the context, purpose, content, and assessment procedures of the New Religions course at Leiden, in the hope that aspects of the course may prove inspirational to colleagues who already teach a similar course or who are in the process of designing such a course. Three appendices follow the article proper: (a) the course syllabus, (b) the 'Model for Analyzing (New) Religions' that students use to

analyze the new religions of the course, and (c) the instructions for the final paper in which students compare a selection of the new religions discussed throughout the semester.

1. Context and Purpose of the New Religions Course

The New Religions course at Leiden has been a mandatory course in the BA Religious Studies since 2004. The course is situated in the second semester of the first year and has a study load of 5 European Credit Points (ECs), which is to say that students are expected to use a total of 140 hours (5x28) on attending classes, studying the course materials, and completing the two course assignments.

In addition to students in the BA Religious Studies, the course attracts a variety of Leiden students from other programs who take it as an elective or extracurricular course. Furthermore, after the language of instruction changed from Dutch to English in 2013, the course has become increasingly popular among exchange students. Of the forty-eight students who followed the course in the spring of 2025, seven were students in the BA Religious Studies, eight were students in the minor program Religion in a Changing World, nineteen were Leiden students taking it as an elective or extracurricular course, and the fourteen were exchange students from all over the world, including two students from China. An additional twenty-four students had signed up for the course but had to be turned down because the lecture room that had been reserved for the class was too small.

The great diversity in the student population means that students begin the course with different levels of background knowledge and with different expectations. Students in the BA Religious Studies and the minor Religion in Changing World have already been introduced to several religious traditions. These students are also familiar with the study-of-religion approach to religion which is ‘critical’ in the sense that it may conflict with religious self-understanding, but which always remains respectful and aimed at sincerely understanding what moves and motivates those involved. By contrast, the majority of students in class have no prior exposure to the study of religion, and often the New Religions course is the only course on religion they take at university. The motivation of these students to join the course is often personal: some hope to find religious inspiration for their own lives; others have watched critical documentaries about ‘cults’ and hope that the course will demonstrate in further detail just how ridiculous cults are.

To cater well to the various student groups, I have designed the New Religions course to pursue three objectives:

1. To introduce students to a representative set of new religions (i.e. formally organized groups) and forms of alternative spirituality (i.e. loosely organized milieus and currents);
2. to introduce students to themes of importance to the field of new religions which also contribute to an understanding of religion in general (namely conversion, religious leadership, magic, the structure of religious traditions, origin and development of religious traditions, and forms of legitimization and persuasion in religion); and

3. to introduce students to (or deepen their mastery of) the study-of-religion approach to religion, i.e. an approach which is analytical, critical-but-respectful, and comparative.²⁵

In the first class, I discuss these objectives explicitly with the students. In what follows, I will discuss how I selected the content for the course and designed the assignments to promote the objectives of the course.

2. Content and Structure of the New Religions Course

The course introduces students to a representative range of new religions and forms of alternative spirituality. The exact list of new religions/alternative spiritualities changes slightly every year, but the criteria for selection are constant:

- The course includes formally organized new religions, or ‘cult movements’ to speak like Stark and Bainbridge (1979), as well as loosely organized forms of alternative spirituality in the form of ‘client cults’ (e.g., angel therapy) and ‘audience cults’ (e.g., the readership around Rhonda Byrne’s *The Secret*).
- The course always includes new religions/alternative spiritualities with roots in different parts of the world.
- The course includes new religions that have served as case studies for landmark studies in the field of new religions; concretely, the Unification Church and Scientology are always included (cf. Lofland & Stark 1965; Barker 1984; Wallis 1984).

The course is structured so that we start with formally organized groups that are easily recognized as new religions and end with loosely organized forms of alternative spirituality. In an average year, the course includes ten main cases, divided roughly as follows:

- *Group 1: Formally organized new religions:* Scientology, the Unification Church, the International Raëlian Movement, and ISKCON. (Sometimes I use a different UFO religion than the International Raëlian Movement, such as the Aetherius Society or Heaven’s Gate. In the session on conversion, students additionally become acquainted with the Dutch angel-focused new religion From the Source of Christ (Uit de bron van Christus)).
- *Group 2: Semi-organized new religions:* Wicca and Satanism. (These religions are approached as ‘milieus’, within which we may discern different traditions, currents, and organizations. In 2023, I incidentally included Santo Daime as a third tradition within this group).
- *Group 3: Alternative spiritualities/New Age groups:* *The Secret*, Angel therapy movement, and Jediism. (Sometimes I use a parody religion, such as the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster, instead of Jediism).

²⁵ In a series of methodological articles, I have discussed what such a study-of-religion approach might entail (Davidsen 2012a; 2012b; 2020a; 2020b). These articles are not part of the New Religions syllabus, but I discuss them with more advanced students. As the New Religions course draws on the methodological principles laid out in these articles, they may be useful for some readers.

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

- *Group 4: Historical antecedents to contemporary alternative spirituality:* The Theosophical Society. (Besides theosophy, I introduce in less detail also spiritualism and new thought as important ‘deep roots’ for contemporary alternative spirituality).

Roughly half the sessions in the course are devoted to discussing these ten cases. As a textbook for these sessions, I use Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein’s *Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements* (2012), which I have complemented with thematic articles, primary sources, and the use of documentaries in class.

The course always attracts a few students who are members of the new religions that we study in the course. There are always a few Wiccans, and we have also had Satanists, Unificationists, and ISKCON members. The last couple of years, several students in the course have been into such alternative spiritual practices as are popular among Generation Z, including manifestation, mindfulness, and reality shifting. Common to these students is that they enter the course with a positive personal view of religion and sometimes the hope that the course will bring inspiration for their own spiritual journeys. For obvious privacy reasons, I do not require anyone to disclose their religious identity, but after a couple of weeks the atmosphere in class is often such that students feel comfortable doing so. Much of the (textbook) literature in our field focuses on the doctrines, practices, organizations, and histories of various new religions but have relatively little to say about how it feels to be a member. It has therefore been of great benefit to the class when students share their personal experiences of growing up in a new religion, or tell about their current involvement in alternative spirituality. One year, a student supplied his presentation group with ISKCON dresses and musical instruments, and the group demonstrated the Maha Mantra in class. Another student helped fellow students arrange an interview with her father who ministered to the Unificationist congregation in the nearby city of Amstelveen, just south of Amsterdam. In my experience, the course usually does not inflict a crisis of faith on students with a personal commitment to the new religions discussed in class. They seem to be used to outsiders critically scrutinizing their beliefs and are mainly pleased to see that their religions in this course are treated in an equally serious manner as the world religions that usually get all the attention.

In addition to the course sessions on individual new religions/alternative spiritualities, another three to four sessions are used to introduce relevant theories. These sessions provide students with an analytical vocabulary for analyzing the beliefs, practices, organizational features, and legitimization strategies of the new religions of the course. In addition, they serve to demonstrate that examining new religions may shed light on the phenomenon of religion in general – for the dynamics of leadership, the structure of traditions, and the strategies for persuasion and legitimization turn out to work about the same in old religions as in new ones. For example, the hagiography around Scientology’s leader-founder L. Ron Hubbard was constructed in steps, with Hubbard and his followers gradually making bolder and more meta-empirical claims about Hubbard’s achievements and status (Christendom 2005). Students do not find this particularly remarkable, but it is an eye-opener to many that Jesus’s special life story was developed in a similar, gradually expansive way over the course of the four Gospels.

Finally, two sessions of the course are devoted to special meetings: an excursion to the Scientology Church in Amsterdam, and an evening symposium which usually has a combination of academic and ‘insider’ speakers. I include these special sessions in the course because I find it important that students not only *read* about new religions, but also engage with flesh-and-blood practitioners – and I prefer to visit Scientology because this is a new religion that many students already have a meaning about (or prejudice against). Students always have a lot of questions to ask at the Church, and we have interesting discussions in the train back home to Leiden. On a personal level, the visit to Scientology probably confirms the views of many students that Scientology is ‘too weird’ for them. Of much more importance for the objectives of the course, however, students also realize that Scientologists on the ground are perfectly normal people who have ordinary life goals, such as having a meaningful job, improving their own mental health, and doing good for the community, and who honestly find that membership of Scientology brings fulfilment to their life. During the evening symposia, we have been visited by witches, druids, and young Mormon missionaries. For the symposia, I also like to invite students working on new religions to speak about their BA, MA, or PhD theses. Topics for the symposium have included witchcraft in the Netherlands (visited by local television), divination practices in new religions (featuring a druid and former student of mine presenting an oracular coin set of her own making), and conspiracy culture and alternative religion. The evening symposium is open to the public, and we always go for a beer (or two) afterwards.

3. Assessment in the New Religions Course

Assessment in the course consists of two assignments: group work during the semester and a take-home assignment at the end. To be able to divide the students into work groups right away, I briefly introduce the ten new religions/alternative spiritualities in the course already in the first session and ask the students to state which two cases they would prefer to work on. Based on the student preferences, I divide the class into ten groups of four to six students. The students in a given group examine ‘their’ case in more depth based on extra readings. Functioning as the class’s ‘experts’ on their respective case, the groups are charged with producing two products for the benefit of all. One half of the group produces a ‘handout’ of about five pages on their new religion, using a shared format or ‘analytical model’ (see Appendix B). This analytical model is a list of analytical questions, such as ‘Which ideas does the religion have about deities?’, divided into six sections: Person-Space-Time Coordinates, Beliefs, Rituals, Ethics, Legitimization Strategies, and Social Organization. With the handouts, the class together produces structured notes that make it easier to maintain overview and to compare the various cases in the final assignment (see below). The other half of the group prepares a short presentation on an aspect of the new religion/alternative spirituality that the group finds particularly interesting. With the extra literature that I prescribe or suggest, I help the groups take up relevant issues. A week before the handout and presentation are due, I meet with each group to ensure that everything is on track. The didactical idea behind the group work is to give students co-responsibility for the learning process of the class, and I try to extend this beyond the two group products. For example, when discussing the theme of magic, I actively involve the class’s ‘experts’ on Wicca, Satanism, and *The Secret*. Interested readers may find the instructions for the group

work in the last section of the syllabus, given in Appendix A. Each sub-group (handout group or presentation group) receives a collective mark that contributes 30% to the final mark in the course.

The final exam in the course takes the form of a take-home assignment in which students are required to select at least four of the ten new religions/alternative spiritualities from the course and compare them. The instructions for the assignment are handed out and discussed in the last session of the class, and I encourage students to further discuss the instructions with the other members of their work groups before starting to write. Every year the wording of the take-home assignment differs, but the idea is the same: based on distinctions drawn in the theoretical literature, students are required to perform a structural comparison of the selected cases with the double aim of discerning patterns in the empirical material and testing the theory. The assignment in 2023 – given in Appendix C – for example, took its point of departure in Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge's (1979) hypothesis that differences in degree of social organization (formal and strict 'cult movements' vs. loosely organized 'client cults' and 'audience cults') correlate with differences in promised rewards (general compensators/otherworldly rewards vs. specific compensators/worldly rewards). The task for the students was to test whether this hypothesized correlation held up for our cases. In addition, students were encouraged to investigate whether other theoretical distinctions discussed in class, such as Roy Wallis' (1984) distinction between world-rejecting and world-affirmation new religions and Catherine Wessinger's (2012) distinction between leaders with strong charismatic claims (prophets, messiahs, avatars) and leaders with weaker charismatic claims (shamans, healers, diviners) could be observed to correlate with the Stark and Bainbridge model. Students who selected a representative sample of the course's cases, are able to demonstrate that (a) most cases fit the Stark and Bainbridge pattern (with theosophy as the outliers that promises much but lacks organizational strictness and ritual intensity), and that (b) the theoretical distinctions from Stark and Bainbridge, Wallis, and Wessinger map onto each other only to some extent and that the combination of these theoretical approaches may help identify remarkable cases, such as Scientology, which belongs to the 'strictly organized/promises much' end of the Stark and Bainbridge spectrum, while at the time being world-affirming like the loosely organized movements. Students find the assignment relatively demanding and time-consuming, but also rewarding. I like it because it tests both the students' *overview* of the curriculum (e.g., can they select representative cases and identify the useful theoretical concepts?; do they have the necessary knowledge of the chosen cases?), and their *capacity to theorize* (e.g., can they compare?; can they reflect on the implications of their findings for the theories used?). I encourage students to be bold, and every year there are some who suggest the introduction of new categories and distinctions that may improve or replace the theories worked with in class. The mark for the take-home-assignment contributes 70% to the overall mark.

4. Concluding remarks

Over the last ten years, the New Religions course in Leiden has attracted an increasing number of students – who characterize the course as interesting and challenging and in particular like the Scientology excursion. Feeling satisfied with content and structure, I have not tinkered much with the course over the last ten years, and really made only one

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

substantial change: in response to the growing student numbers, I chose to discontinue the student presentations in 2024. All students in a given group now contribute to the handout. However, since I do not consider this a didactical improvement, I have chosen to discuss the 2023 version of the course in this article.

In the years to come, I foresee that at least one other change will be necessary: I will need a newer textbook. The *Cambridge Companion* (Hammer & Rothstein 2012) is now thirteen years old, and for a course like this, one needs overview articles that cover also the most recent developments. The two main competitors to the *Companion* – *Controversial New Religions* (Lewis & Petersen 2014) and *Cults and New Religions* (Cowan & Bromley 2015) – are almost equally dated, and both second editions of older books. It would seem that our field needs an updated textbook. I would prefer a second edition of the *Cambridge Companion*, or a new book that in the same spirit integrates sociological and comparative approaches to new religions. Contributions from Asian scholars on new religions and alternative spirituality outside the West would be a most welcome addition to such a future volume.

Literature

- Barker, Eileen. 1984. *The Making of a Moonie: Choice or Brainwashing*, Oxford & London: Basil Blackwell.
- Christensen, Dorthe Refslund. 2005. "Inventing L. Ron Hubbard." In James R. Lewis & Jesper Aagaard Petersen (eds.), *Controversial New Religions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 227-258.
- Cowan, Douglas E. & David G. Bromley. 2015. *Cults and New Religions: A Brief History*, Malden, second edition, MA: Blackwell.
- Daidsen, Markus Altena. 2012a. "What is Wrong with Pagan Studies?", *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 24(2), 183-199.
- Daidsen, Markus Altena. 2012b. "Future Directions in the Sociology of Non-institutional Religion", *Implicit Religion* 15(4), 553-570.
- Daidsen, Markus Altena. 2020a. "Theo van Baaren's Systematic Science of Religion Revisited: The Current Crisis in Dutch Study of Religion and a Way Out", *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 74(3), 213-241.
- Daidsen, Markus Altena. 2020b. "Fundamental Problems and Methods in the Study of Religion: A Reply to My Critics", *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 74(3), 277-283.
- Hammer, Olav & Mikael Rothstein, eds. 2012, *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lewis, James R. & Jesper Aagaard Petersen, eds. 2014. *Controversial New Religions*, second edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lofland, John & Rodney Stark. 1965. "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective", *American Sociological Review* 30(6), 862-875.
- Stark, Rodney & William Sims Bainbridge. 1979. "Of Churches, Sects, and Cults: Preliminary Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 18(2), 117-131.
- Wallis, Roy. 1984. *The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life*, London, Boston, Melbourne & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Wessinger, Catherine. 2012. "Charismatic leaders in new religions". In Olav Hammer & Mikael Rothstein (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 80-96.

Appendix A: Syllabus New Religions 2023

Note: This appendix gives a slightly abridged version of the original course syllabus. I have here left out a formal description of the course's content, learning objectives, and assessment method (as these matters have been discussed sufficiently in the main article), as well as a list with further recommended readings (left out for sake of space). The original syllabus can be viewed here: https://www.academia.edu/143333105/New_Religions_2023.

I. Course Overview

1. February 6 Introduction to the course
2. February 13 Analytical concepts for the study of new religions + Charismatic leaders
3. February 20 Charismatic leaders (cnt.) + Types of new religions
February 27 No class (to give first groups more time to prepare)
- 4-5. March 6 Scientology + Evening excursion to the Scientology Church, Amsterdam
6. March 13 Unification Church + International Raëlian Movement
7. March 20 Conversion + Santo Daime
March 27 No class (exam week)
8. April 3 Satanism and magic
April 10 No class | Easter
9. April 17 Neo-paganism
10. April 24 New Age Spirituality + *The Secret*
11. April 24 11th Leiden Symposium on New Religiosity
QAnon and Alien Gods Plausibility Construction in the Cultic Milieu
12. May 1 Theosophy + Angel therapy movement
13. May 8 Jediism + Exam + Evaluation

June 12 Deadline take-home exam
June 26 Deadline re-exam

II. Detailed Syllabus

Session 1 | 6 February 2023 | Introduction to the Course

PROGRAMME

A. Introduction to the Course (Content)

- * Overview of the new religions we will encounter in the course (and brief mention of some additional new religions).
- * History of research on new religions.
- * Infrastructure of the study of new religions (key journals, key researchers, key questions).

B. Introduction to the Course (Form)

- * Introduction to the work forms and learning objectives of the course.
- * Examination in the course (group work and take-home exam; rules for the resit).
- * How to study effectively for this course.
- * Preparation for the group work

READINGS

A. Required Readings [9 pages]

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

- * Hammer, Olav & Mikael Rothstein (2012a), "Introduction to New Religious Movements", in Olav Hammer & Mikael Rothstein (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1-9 [9].

Session 2 | 13 February 2023 | Studying New Religions from a Comparative Perspective: Analytical Concepts in the Study of Religion + Charismatic Leaders

PROGRAMME

A. Analytical Concepts in the Study of New Religions

- * 'The Model': Analytical concepts in the study of new religions.
- * What new religions are made of: myths, rituals, ethics, and theology.
- * The rhetoric of new religions: how new religions aim to persuade.
- * Tolkien Spirituality as example.

B. Charismatic Leaders

- * Charismatic leaders in new religions: legitimisation in new religions (Lewis/Weber); typology of charismatic leaders (Wessinger); hagiography construction: interaction between leaders and followers leads to the formulation of increasingly strong claims; critical distance: how to tell the difference between hagiography and biography.

READINGS

A. Required Readings [23 pages]

- * Lewis, James R. (2003), "Legitimation", excerpt from "Introduction", in *Legitimizing New Religions*, New Brunswick, New Jersey & London: Rutgers University Press, 10-16 [6].
- * Wessinger, Catherine (2012), "Charismatic Leaders in New Religions", in Olav Hammer & Mikael Rothstein (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 80-96 [17].

Session 3 | 20 February 2023 | Studying New Religions from a Sociological Perspective: Types of New Religions

A. Charismatic Leaders (cnt.) [45]

- * Charisma and charismatic leaders in the new religions of the course (group discussion)

B. Studying New Religions from the Perspective of the Sociology of Religion I: Types of New Religions [45]

- * Types of new religious movements: cults and sects; cult movements, client cults, and audience cults; the cultic milieu; world-rejecting and world-affirming movements [Stark & Bainbridge; Bromley].
- * Rewards promised by new religious movements: this-worldly and otherworld spiritual rewards ('compensators') [Stark & Bainbridge].

READINGS

A. Required Readings [31 pages]

- * Bromley, David G. (2012), "The Sociology of New Religious Movements", in Olav Hammer & Mikael Rothstein (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 13-28 [16].
- * Stark, Rodney & William Sims Bainbridge (1979), "Of Churches, Sects, and Cults: Preliminary Concepts for a Theory of Religious Movements", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 18(2), 117-131 [15].

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

PREPARATION FOR EACH GROUP

Each group reads the required readings on their respective religious movement, meets up, and prepares answer to the following questions about their own movement:

1. Does/did your movement have a charismatic leader? If it does/did, which kind of charismatic leader is/was it (i.e. prophet, messiah, shaman – or something in between or something else entirely)?
2. Are charismatic gifts (such as the ability to communicate with the divine or to heal) restricted or shared in your movement?

You don't need to prepare a presentation, but you must be prepared to discuss your answers in class. You may choose a spokesperson to speak for your group.

27 February 2023 | No Class | To give the first groups more time to prepare

Sessions 4+5 | 6 March 2023 | New Religions with Ultimate Goals A: Scientology + Evening Excursion to Scientology Church in Amsterdam

PROGRAMME

A. Church of Scientology: Group 1 [Presentation 15 + Discussion/Teacher-Follow-Up/Preparation for Excursion 75]

- * The most striking features of the movement (use core and additional literature; exemplify with primary sources).
- * What we can learn in this course from studying the movement (connect to theoretical literature).

B. Evening Excursion to the Scientology Church, Amsterdam

- * Address: Wibautstraat 112, 1091 GP Amsterdam.

READINGS

A. Required Readings [58 pages]

- * Lewis, James (2012), "Scientology: Up Stat, Down Stat", in Olav Hammer & Mikael Rothstein (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 133-149 [17].
- * pp. 121-123 on Scientology in Rothstein, Mikael & Olav Hammer (2012), "Canonical and Extracanonial Texts in New Religions", in Olav Hammer & Mikael Rothstein (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 113-129 [2].
- * Christensen, Dorthe Refslund (2005), "Inventing L. Ron Hubbard", in James R. Lewis & Jesper Aagaard Petersen (eds.), *Controversial New Religions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 227-258 [32].
- * Church of Scientology (2012), "What is Scientology" and "The States of Existence", in *Philosopher & Founder: Rediscovery of the Human Soul*, in the *L. Ron Hubbard Series*, Glostrup, Denmark: New Era Publications International, 65-67, 119-123 [6; primary source].
- * Church of Scientology (n/y) [1954], "The Creed of the Church of Scientology", <https://www.scientology.org/what-is-scientology/the-scientology-creeds-and-codes/the-creed-of-the-church.html> [1; web; primary source].

B. Required Extra Readings for the Scientology Group

- * Cowan, Douglas E. & David G. Bromley (2008), "The Church of Scientology: The Question of Religion", in *Cults and New Religions: A Brief History*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 24-47.

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

Session 6 | 13 March 2023 | New Religions with Ultimate Goals B: The Unification Church and The International Raëlian Movement

PROGRAMME

A. The Unification Church: Group 2 [Presentation 15 + Discussion/Teacher-Follow-Up 30]

- * The most striking features of the movement (use core and additional literature; exemplify with primary sources).
- * What we can learn in this course from studying the movement (connect to theoretical literature).

B. The International Raëlian Movement: Group 3 [Presentation 15 + Discussion/Teacher-Follow-Up 20]

- * The most striking features of the movement (use core and additional literature).
- * What we can learn in this course from studying the movement (connect to theoretical literature).

C. Ultimate Goals of New Religions: Summary [10]

READINGS

A. Required Readings [44 pages]

- * Cowan, Douglas E. & David G. Bromley (2015), "The Unification Church/The Family Federation: The Brainwashing/Deprogramming Controversy", in *Cults and New Religions: A Brief History*, second edition, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 78-98 [21].
- * The Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity (2005 [1996]), "The Purpose of Creation", chapter 1, section 3 of *Exposition of the Divine Principle*, New York, in Dereck Daschke & W. Michael Ashcraft (eds.), *New Religious Movements: A Documentary Reader*, New York & London: New York University Press, 144-148, 161-162 [5; primary source].
- * Palmer, Susan J. & Bryan Sentes (2012), "The International Raëlian Movement", in Olav Hammer & Mikael Rothstein (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 167-183 [17].

B. Required Extra Readings for the Unification Church Group

- * Spurgin, Hugh and Nora Spurgin (2005 [1983]), "Blessed Marriage in the Unification Church: Sacramental Ideals and Their Application to Daily Marital Life", in Dereck Daschke & W. Michael Ashcraft (eds.; 2005), *New Religious Movements: A Documentary Reader*, New York & London: New York University Press, 148-156 [primary source].
- * Mickler, Michael L. (2013), "The Post-Sun Myung Moon Unification Church", in Eileen Barker (ed.), *Revisionism and Diversification in New Religious Movements*, Farnham, England & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 47-63.

C. Required Extra Readings for the IRM Group

- * Gallagher, Eugene V. (2010), "Extraterrestrial Exegesis: The Raëlian Movement as a Biblical Religion", *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emerging Religions* 14(2), 14-33.

Session 7 | 20 March 2023 | Conversion to New Religions | Santo Daimé

PROGRAMME

A. Studying New Religions from the Perspective of the Sociology of Religion II: Conversion [30]

- * Who joins religious movements and why? [Dawson].
- * Research history on the issue of conversion: from the Pauline paradigm to the social network paradigm and beyond [Dawson].

B. From the Source of Christ [20]

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

* Testing the conversion theory on a Dutch, angel-focused healing movement: From the Source of Christ (*Uit de bron van Christus*).

C. Santo Daime: Group 4 [Presentation 15 + Discussion/Teacher-Follow-Up 25]

* The most striking features of the movement (use core and additional literature; exemplify with primary sources).

* What we can learn in this course from studying the movement (connect to theoretical literature).

READINGS [61]

A. Required Readings

* Dawson, Lorne L. (2008), Ch. 4: "Who Joins New Religious Movements and Why?", in *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements*, 2. ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 71-94, 206-207 [25].

* Enroth, Ronald (1984), "Brainwashing", in David G. Benner (ed.), *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 141-142 [; primary source].

* Jansma, Lammert Gosse (2006), "Conversion to a Prophetic Healing Movement", in Jan N. Bremmer, Wout van Bekkum & Arie Molendijk (eds.), *Paradigms, Poetics and Political Conversion*, Leuven: Peeters, 165-181 [17].

* Dawson, Andrew (2011), "Spirit, Self and Society in the Brazilian New Religion of Santo Daime", in Andrews Dawson (ed.), *Summoning the Spirits: Possession and Invocation in Contemporary Religion*, London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 143-161 [17].

* Harvey, Graham (2012), "Ayahuasca Psychonauts and Santo Daime", in "Rituals in new religions", in Olav Hammer & Mikael Rothstein (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 105-109 [4].

B. Required Extra Readings for the Santo Daime Group

* Introvigne, Massimo, Wouter J. Hanegraaff & Holly Folk (2020), "The Santo Daime Church in the Netherlands: Why the ECHR Should Consider the Case", *The Journal of CESNUR* 4(2), CLVII-CLXII.

* Watt, Gillian (2016), "Santo Daime in the Diaspora", in Bettina Schmidt & Steven Engler (eds.), *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil*, the series *Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion* 13, Leiden: Brill, 333-345.

March 27 | No class [Exam week]

Session 8 | 3 April 2023 | Satanism and magic

PROGRAMME

A. Satanism: Group 5 [Presentation 15 + Discussion/Teacher-Follow-Up 30]

* Comparison of the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set (use the Analytical Model).

B. What is magic and how does it work? [45]

* What defines magic? Is magic something different from religion, or a part/kind of religion?

* How does magic work according to magicians?

READINGS

A. Required Readings [35 pages]

* Petersen, Jesper Aagaard & Asbjørn Dyrendal (2012), "Satanism", in Olav Hammer & Mikael Rothstein (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 215-230 [16].

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

- * LaVey, Anton Szandor (1969), excerpts from *The Satanic Bible*, New York: Avon Books, 25, 30-35, 110-113 [10; primary source].
- * Magliocco, Sabina (2004), "Defining Magic" and "Magic as an Organizational Principle: The Interconnected Universe", in *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 101-104 [4].
- * Crowley, Aleister [The Master Therion] (1990 [1929]), excerpts from the introduction to *Magick in Theory and Practice*, New York: Magickal Child Publishing, xi-xii [3; primary source].
- * Frazer, Sir James George (1994), Ch. 3: "Magic and Religion; §1", in *The Golden Bough: A New Abridgement*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 26-28 [2].

B. Required Extra Readings for the Satanism Group

- * Dyrendal, Asbjørn (2009), "Darkness Within: Satanism as a Self-Religion", in Jesper Aagaard Petersen (ed.), *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology*, Farnham & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 59-73.
- * Schipper, Bernd U. (2010), "From Milton to Modern Satanism: The History of the Devil and the Dynamics between Religion and Literature", *Journal of Religion in Europe* 3, 103-124.

April 10 | No class [Easter]

Session 9 | 17 April 2023 | Neo-Paganism

PROGRAMME

A. Neo-Paganism: Group 6a [Presentation 10 + Discussion/Teacher-Follow-Up 15]

- * The history of Wicca in broad strokes (use Pearson and Magliocco in CC).
- * Theology in Wicca: Wiccan ideas about the divine (use Vivianne Crowley).

B. Working Magic in Neo-Paganism: Group 6b [Presentation 10 + Discussion/Teacher-Follow-Up 15]

- * The Structure of a Wiccan Circle Casting Ritual (Cheal & Leverick; use extra reading by Magliocco).

C. Neo-Paganism in the Netherlands: Group 6c [Presentation 10 + Discussion/Teacher-Follow-Up 15]

- * Types of Neo-paganism in the Netherlands (use the Internet to find groups).
- * History and organization of Wicca in the Netherlands (use primary material).

READINGS

A. Required Readings [31 pages]

- * Magliocco, Sabina (2012), "Neopaganism", in Olav Hammer & Mikael Rothstein (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 150-166 [17].
- * Cheal, David & Jane Leverick (1999), "Working Magic in Neo-Paganism", *Journal of Ritual Studies* 13(1), 7-19 [12].
- * The Council of American Witches (2005 [1974]), "The Principles of Wiccan Belief", in Dereck Daschke & W. Michael Ashcraft (eds.), *New Religious Movements: A Documentary Reader*, New York & London: New York University Press, 102-104 [2; primary source].

B. Required Extra Readings for the Neo-Paganism Group

- * Pearson, Joanne E. (2006), "Neopaganism", in Wouter Hanegraaff (ed.), *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, Leiden & Boston: Brill, 828-834 [Groups 6abc].
- * Crowley, Vivianne (1989), "Introduction", in *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age*, London & San Francisco: The Aquarian Press, 9-19 [Group 6a; primary source].

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

- * Magliocco, Sabina (2004) Ch. 4: "Ritual: Between the Worlds", in *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 122-151 [Group 6b].
- * Minkjan, Hanneke (2016), "Magic and Divination Practices in Contemporary Paganism: Changing Life Circumstances through the Web of Wyrð", in Jean-Guy Goulet & Liam Murphy (eds.), *Religious Diversity Today: Experiencing Religion in the Contemporary World, Volume I: Suffering and Misfortune*, Santa Barbara: Praeger, 181-203 [Group 6c].

Session 10 | 24 April 2023 | New Age Spirituality + *The Secret*

PROGRAMME

A. New Age Through the Lens of Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret* Group 7 [Presentation 15 + Discussion/Teacher-Follow-Up 40]

- * Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret*: A New Age bestseller.
- * Anthropology, theology, and soteriology in New Age spirituality and in *The Secret*.
- * Typical beliefs and legitimisation strategies in New Age spirituality and in *The Secret* [Chryssides].
- * Typical rituals in New Age spirituality: healing, channeling, divination, exemplified with *The Secret* [Hammer].
- * Is *The Secret* a form of magic? (Comparison with magic in Satanism and Neo-Paganism).

B. Social Organisation of New Age Spirituality [20]

- * The notion of 'the cultic milieu'.

C. Historical Roots of New Age Spirituality I: New Thought and Spiritualism [15]

READINGS

A. Required Readings [46 pages]

- * Chryssides, George (2012), "The New Age", in Olav Hammer & Mikael Rothstein (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 247-262 [16].
 - * Hammer, Olav (2015), "New Age", in Christopher H. Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World*, London: Routledge, 372-381 [10].
 - * Byrne, Rhonda (2006), *The Secret*, London: Simon & Schuster, 3-11, 25, 45-57, 68-69, 93, 111, 123, 139, 153, 175 [≈20; primary source].
- [Optional extra reading: Rapport, Jeremy (2015), "New Thought Traditions", in Christopher H. Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World*, London: Routledge, 207-219].

B. Additional Required Readings for the *Secret* group

- * Palmisano, Stefania & Nicola Pannofino (2016), "Sacred Creativity in the Spirituality of *The Secret*", *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* 7(1), 3-21.
- * Rapport, Jeremy (2015), "New Thought Traditions", in Christopher H. Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World*, London: Routledge, 207-219.

Session 11 | 24 April 2023 | 11th Leiden Symposium on New Religiosity

PRACTICAL DETAILS

Venue: Lipsius

Time: 7.30-10.00 p.m.

SPEAKERS

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

Marijn Bethlehem, MA: QAnon and failed prophecy

Luuk Odekerken, MA: Ancient deities, modern conspiracies: Strategies of persuasion in Zecharia Sitchin's Anunnaki theory

Session 12 | 1 May 2023 | New Age Cases: Theosophy and the Angel Therapy Movement

PROGRAMME

A. Historical Roots of New Age Spirituality II: Theosophy: Group 8 [Presentation 15 + Discussion/Teacher-Follow-Up 35]

- * The main beliefs of the early Theosophical Society, from Blavatsky to Leadbeater.
- * Theosophy today and the link with New Age spirituality.

B. The Angel Therapy Movement: Group 9 [Presentation 15 + Discussion/Teacher-Follow-Up 25]

- * The most striking features of the movement (use core and additional literature).
- * What we can learn in this course from studying the movement? (e.g., what does it tell about the relation between New Age spirituality and Christianity?).

READINGS

A. Required Readings [27 pages]

- * Hammer, Olav (2015b), "Theosophy", in Christopher H. Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World*, London: Routledge, 250-259 [10].
 - * Virtue, Doreen (2005), "Introduction", Ch. 7: "Angels, Afterlife, and Healing from Grief", and "Angel Affirmations", in *Healing With The Angels*, London: Hay House, 1-6, 91-100, 189-190 [17; primary source].
- [Optional extra reading: Hammer, Olav (2015c), "The Theosophical Current in the Twentieth Century", in Christopher H. Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World*, London: Routledge, 348-360].

B. Extra Required Readings for the Theosophy Group

- * Santucci, George D. (2012), "Theosophy", in Olav Hammer & Mikael Rothstein (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 231-246.
- * Hammer, Olav (2013), "Theosophical Elements in New Age Religion", in Olav Hammer & Mikael Rothstein (eds.), *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, Leiden & Boston: Brill, 237-258.
- * Lubelsky, Isaac (2012), Ch. 4 "The Theosophical Doctrine", in *Celestial India: Madame Blavatsky and the Birth of Indian Nationalism*, Sheffield & Bristol: Equinox, 118-146.

C. Extra Required Readings for the Angel Therapy Movement Group

- * Gardella, Peter (2007), excerpts from Ch. 4: "Angels, Therapists, and Exorcists", in *American Angels: Useful Spirits in the Material World*, Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 93-102, 110-131, 254-256.
- * Davidsen, Markus Altena & Bastiaan van Rijn (2020), "Studying Religions as Narrative Cultures: Angel Experience Narratives in the Netherlands and Some Ideas for a Narrative Research Programme for the Study of Religion", in Dirk Johannsen, Anja Kirsch, and Jens Kreinath (eds.), *Narrative Cultures and the Aesthetics of Religion: Storytelling—Imagination—Reception*, in the series *Supplements to Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, Leiden: Brill, 91-122.

Session 13 | 8 May 2023 | Jediism + Exam + Evaluation

PROGRAMME

A. Jediism: A Case of Fiction-based Religion: Group 10 [Presentation 15 + Discussion/Teacher-Follow-Up 30]

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

* The most striking features of the movement (use core and additional literature).

* What we can learn in this course from studying the movement.

B. Evaluation of the Course [20]

C. Exam [25]

* Handing out exam.

READINGS

A. Required Readings [1 page]

* Davidsen, Markus (2011), "Jediism: A Convergence of *Star Wars* Fan Culture and Salad Bar Spirituality", *De Filosoof* 51, 24 [Brightspace; 1].

B. Required Extra Reading for the Jediism Group

* Cusack, Carole M. (2016), "Invention in "New New" Religions", in James R. Lewis & Inga B. Tøllefsen (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, vol. 2. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 237-247.

* Davidsen, Markus Altena (2017), "The Jedi Community: History and Folklore of a Fiction-based Religion", in the special issue 'The Folk Awakens: *Star Wars* and Folkloristics', edited by John E. Price, *New Directions in Folklore* 15(1/2), 7-49.

12 June 2023 | Deadline for handing in take-home exam

26 June 2023 | Deadline for re-exam

Total 336 pages + c. 40 pages additional literature

III. Overview over the Group Work

Group	Max # Students	Meeting (suggestion)	Presentation	Topic
1	6 (3+3)	Mo 27 February, 15.15	6 March	Scientology [15]
2	6 (3+3)	Mo 6 March, 13.30	13 March	The Unification Church (Moonies) [15]
3	6 (3+3)	Mo 6 March, 14.15	13 March	International Raëlian movement [15]
4	6 (3+3)	Mo 13 March, 14.15	20 March	Santo Daime [15]
5	6 (3+3)	Mo 26 March, 14.15	3 April	Satanism [15]
6	9 (3+2+2+2)	Tu 11 April, 15.15	17 April	Neopaganism/Wicca [3x10]
7	6 (3+3)	Mo 17 April, 14.15	24 April	<i>The Secret</i> [15]
8	6 (3+3)	Fr 21 April, 12.30	1 May	Theosophical Society [15]
9	6 (3+3)	Fr 21 April, 13.15	1 May	Angel therapy movement [15]
10	6 (3+3)	Mo 1 May, 14.15	8 May	Jediism [15]

Practical Information About the Group Work

- Each group consists of maximally 6 students (with the exception of group 6).
- Each group is given additional readings (see syllabus).

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

- Each group is divided into sub-groups with different tasks. One sub-group is responsible for making a handout (c. 3 pages), including an analysis of their new religion using the Analytical Model. The other sub-group is responsible for preparing a short oral presentation on the most important characteristics of their new religion. (Exception: the neo-pagan group includes three presentation sub-groups). The sub-groups work closely together.
- Groups meet with the instructor roughly one week prior to the session in which the presentation and handout are due. Important: before this meeting, all group members should have carefully read both the standard literature and the required extra literature on their new religion. Also, prior to the meeting the sub-group responsible for the handout sends a draft handout to the instructor; the sub-group(s) responsible for the presentation sends an email outlining their plans for the presentation.
- In class, the groups give a presentation and hand out their handout to the other students. Presentation groups receive brief oral feedback in class (also for the benefit of the other students). After class, each subgroup receives a mark and written feedback on their presentation or handout. Each subgroup receives a collective mark.
- Good marks will be given for presentations that: (a) are well-structured and kept within the time limit; (b) are delivered in an engaging style; (c) are evidently the result of co-operation within the presentation sub-group (i.e. are coherent, not redundant) and with the handout sub-group; (d) have a clear focus and add information to what the other students have read in the core curriculum; (e) make use of the technical terminology from the Analytical Model; (f) give a deep analysis of the movement in question rather than just a bunch of facts; and (g) treat the movement in a neutral and critical way that avoids both debunking and taking movement claims at face value.
- Good marks will be given for handouts that (a) are evidently the result of co-operation within the handout sub-group (i.e. are coherent, not redundant) and with the presentation sub-group; (b) concisely answer the standard questions in the Analytical Model and draw on all the necessary sources to do so (shared readings, group readings, additional sources where necessary); (c) offer information that goes beyond what the other students have read in the core curriculum; (d) treat the movement in a neutral and critical way that avoids both debunking and taking movement claims at face value; and (e) use a proper referencing style and formal bibliography. Aim for about 1500 words; never use more than 2000.
- NB: The mark for the group work counts 20 % towards the final mark for the course.
- There stands 16 hours work for the group work, so expect to work hard and begin early.

Appendix B: Model for Analysing (New) Religions

I) PST-coordinates

What are the religion's 'coordinates' for persons, space, and time?

- Which **persons** are adherents of the religion? How many adherents are there? Who leads the religion? Who founded it?
- Which **space** does the religion occupy? Where did the religion originate? Has migration of people or ideas later transported the religion to other parts of the world?
- Where are we in **time**? When did the religion originate? What are the most important things that have happened in the religion's history?

II) Beliefs

What does the religion teach about the nature of humans, gods, and the world?

- **Cosmology** (Gr. 'study of the world'). Which 'worlds' does the religion count on the existence of? What is the nature of those worlds?
- **Theology** (Gr. 'study of god'). Which ideas does the religion have about deities, including intermediary beings (such as angels and saints)? Is the religion monotheistic or polytheistic? Are there both good and evil gods? What are the gods like and what do they want?
- **Anthropology** (Gr. 'study of man'). What does the religion teach about human beings? Are human beings in some way divine or non-material (e.g., by possessing a soul)?
- **Protology** (Gr. 'study of the first things').
 - **Cosmogony** (Gr. 'world birth'). How was the world created according to the religion? Did a Fall or some kind of evolution subsequently change things for the worse or for the better?
 - **Theogony** (Gr. 'birth of god'). How did the god(s) come into being?
 - **Anthropogony** (Gr. 'birth of humans'). How did humans come into being?
- **Eschatology** (Gr. 'study of the last things').
 - **General eschatology**. What does the religion teach about the end of the world? What happens after?
 - **Personal eschatology**. What does the religion teach about 'individual eschatology', i.e. about what happens to humans after death?
 - **Soteriology** (Gr. 'study of salvation'). Is the religion a 'religion of blessings' that promises its adherents health and wealth in this life (= this-worldly rewards), or is it a 'salvation religion' that promises salvation after death (= other-worldly rewards)?
- **Texts**. Are the religion's beliefs codified in sacred texts? What kind of texts?

III) Rituals

Which rituals does the religion have?

- **Calendrical rituals**. Are some rituals repeated yearly? Are these feasts tied to the change of seasons or to historical events?
- **Transition rituals**. Are there rituals marking great transitions in life (birth, puberty, marriage, death)? Does the religion have rituals for initiation?
- **Exchange with supernatural powers**. How is ritual contact made between This World (TW) and The Other World (TOW)? (E.g., in prayer, sacrifice, communion, divination, worship,

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

possession, spirit travel, etc.) What motivates this interaction, i.e. what do people hope to obtain?

IV) Ethics

What does the religion teach about moral behaviour?

- **The good life.** What kind of life does the religion prescribe for its adherents? Are certain things forbidden or mandatory, for instance regarding food or sex? What is the religion's impact on the everyday life of its adherents?
- **Religious virtuosi.** Is there a religious ideal that only certain religious virtuosi (e.g., monks) are expected to realise but that doesn't apply for lay people? What does that ideal entail?
- **Stance on 'the world'.** Can the religion be qualified as world-affirming, world-accommodating, or world-rejecting (cf. Wallis)?

V) Legitimisation Strategies

How does religion defend the truth of its teachings (cf. Lewis)?

- **Charismatic appeals.** Does the leader (or the leaders) claim to speak with divine authority as prophet or even messiah and/or do(es) he/she/they claim to possess special gifts (such as the ability to divine or heal)? Do ordinary members claim to have any such charismatic powers?
- **Traditional appeals.** Does the religion claim to be ancient rather than new – to be an original religion restored, or even to be *the* 'primordial religion'? Does the new religion 'claim' authoritative figures from existing religions (e.g. Jesus, Buddha)?
- **Rational/scientific appeals.** Does the religion use scientific language, or even claim to be a science rather than a religion?

VI) Social organisation

How is the religion organised socially?

- **Type of movement.** Is it a cult movement, a client cult, or an audience cult (cf. Stark & Bainbridge)?
- **Leaders.** How is power distributed within the movement? Are leading positions in the movement open to everyone? Does the religion have a charismatic leader?
- **Founder.** Is the founder still alive or has his authority been delegated to a representative? Did the founder's death cause a crisis in the movement? Has the religion developed a **hagiography** (gr. 'writings about a saint') about the founder?
- **Organisation.** How is it funded? Does the religion engage itself in non-religious sectors of society (e.g. education, healthcare)?
- **Members.** What kind of persons join (gender, age, ethnicity, class, nationality)?
- **Legal recognition.** Is the religion legally recognised as a religion (where) or is it fighting for recognition?

VII) Things not covered

Appendix C: Instructions for the Exam

FORMAL ORGANISATION, PROMISED REWARDS, AND PATTERNS OF BELIEF AND PRACTICE IN NEW RELIGIONS AND ALTERNATIVE SPIRITUALITIES

Many scholars of new religions, including Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, have theorised a relation between the degree of formal organisation of new religions and the types of spiritual rewards they promise their adherents. According to Stark and Bainbridge, formally organised 'cult movements' that require much of their adherents also tend to promise much (in their terms 'general compensators'; we can also speak of other-worldly salvation), whereas less formally organised groups (in their terms 'client cults' and 'audience cults', and we may add 'grassroots cults') that require relatively less commitment from their adherents also tend to promise less (in their terms 'specific compensators'; we may also speak of blessings that materialise in this world). Does the evidence on the new religions and alternative spiritualities treated in this course support or challenge or nuance this proposition? And does the evidence from our course indicate that the degree of organisation and the type of promised rewards of new religions and alternative spiritualities correlate with certain beliefs and/or practices?

Write a paper that discusses the above questions. Make sure that your paper:

- (a) briefly introduces different ways in which new religions and alternative spiritualities can be organised;
- (b) thoroughly reflects on whether different forms of organisation of new religions/alternative spiritualities tend to go together with differences in spiritual rewards promised (as proposed by Stark & Bainbridge), and
- (c) thoroughly reflects on whether different forms of organisation and differences in spiritual rewards promised tend to go together with differences in other characteristics, such as beliefs, rituals, leadership, and attitudes towards the world.

In your own paper, you should not repeat the posed assignment word for word. Instead, introduce in your own way the research problem and any terminology from Stark & Bainbridge that you will need. Adapt their terminology if you need to. Throughout the assignment, you can make your argument stronger by integrating additional theory from the course, for example on charisma and charismatic leaders and/or on different attitudes towards the world that new religions may have. The paper does not need to cover all the new religions/alternative spiritualities discussed in the course, but you must discuss at least four new religions/alternative spiritualities.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Write the assignment based on the curriculum (= the shared curriculum, our class discussions, and the extra literature used for your own group assignment). The use of additional literature is not necessary but is permissible as long as it does not detract from a detailed engagement with the required readings. Good marks will be given for papers that are (a) well-structured and written in a clear language; (b) demonstrate overview of the curriculum as well as analytical depth; and (c) employ a critical, independent, and curious attitude. I advise you to form study groups and to talk

Wuhan Journal of Cultic Studies

the curriculum and the assignment over before you begin writing. You can use your work groups as study groups.

FORMAL REQUIREMENTS

1. Hand in the paper via Brightspace no later than **12 June 2023 at 11.59 p.m.** If the paper is handed in after this time, it will not be graded.
2. The document must have a title that includes your name and surname (not 'newreligions.docx' or 'exam.docx', but 'JaapKozijnsen_NewReligionsExam.docx').
3. The maximum length of the paper is **2,000** words. This total does *not* include the bibliography or footnotes that provide bibliographical information, but it does include footnotes that offer substantial information such as definitions of core terms (for this paper, you probably want to avoid explanatory footnotes altogether). Papers exceeding the word limit are not accepted.
4. The paper must have a proper layout, including
 - a. your name and student number, date, title of the course, and a word count (including footnotes; excluding bibliography);
 - b. page numbers; and
 - c. a bibliography, formatted like if you had written a paper or a thesis.
5. You may hand in the paper either in Dutch or in English. In any case, proper spelling, sentence construction, and academic style are required. Use paragraphs and headings to structure the argument. Dutch students are recommended to write in Dutch.