

PART THREE: NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

(Students take either part three or part four)

Syllabus Objectives	<p><i>Knowledge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be familiar with the characteristics of new religious movements • have a knowledge of the origins, beliefs, and impact of two new religious movements. <p><i>Understanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand that religious belief is ancient, diverse and dynamic • appreciate the significance of inter-faith dialogue. <p><i>Skills</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognise evidence of religious belief in contemporary culture. <p><i>Attitudes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • critical discernment when encountering new religious movements
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Topic: 3.1 Cults and sects

Procedure

Description of content: - *what is a cult?*
 - *what is a sect?*
 - *some common characteristics of religious cults*
 - *the relationship between traditional religions and new religious movements.*

Read Handout: Cults & Sects

What is a Cult?	What is a Sect?
<p>The word cult comes from the French <i>culte</i>, and is rooted in the Latin <i>cultus</i>, which means ‘worship’ or ‘devotion to a person or thing’. The word ‘cult’ is a vague term due to the fact that there is no universal definition of a cult and there are differing opinions as to its meaning. The term's vagueness makes it necessary to establish in what sense the word is used, for example a sociological definition will differ from a religious one.</p> <p>From a sociological point of view, the term cult would refer to such factors as authoritarian leadership patterns, loyalty and commitment mechanisms, lifestyle and conformity patterns, including the use of various sanctions in connection with those members who stray.</p> <p>Most religious definitions however will state that a cult is a group that has moved away doctrinally from a ‘parent’ or ‘host’ religion. But it must have its own set of doctrinal beliefs (e.g. about God, salvation, sin) and generally a focus on the end of the world or disaster in order to qualify as a cult.</p> <p>The following are some of the characteristics of a cult:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It uses psychological intimidation to recruit, indoctrinate and retain its members • It forms an elitist totalitarian society • Its founder / leader is self-appointed, dogmatic, messianic, not accountable and has charisma • It believes 'the end justifies the means' in order to solicit funds and recruit people • It has secret initiation rites 	<p>The term sect comes from the Latin <i>secta</i>, which means an ‘organized church body.’ Therefore a sect can refer to -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a religious denomination • a dissenting religious group, formed as the result of schism (division; separation) generally over some minor differences in doctrine and / or practice. • a group holding on to a distinctive doctrine or leader. <p>Theologically, the term sect is used of a group that has divided from a larger body or movement but whose teachings and practices are generally not considered unorthodox.</p>

Discuss: What do religious traditions and cults have in common?
 How do the religious traditions and cults differ?

	Statements	Cult	Sect
1	This word comes from a Latin term which means an ‘organized church body’		
2	This word is rooted in a Latin term which means ‘worship’ or ‘devotion to a person or thing’		
3	From a religious point of view this is a group that has moved away doctrinally from a ‘parent’ or ‘host’ religion		
4	This is a group that has its own set of doctrinal beliefs		
5	This is a group that has generally a focus on the end of the world or disaster		
6	This is a group that has divided from a larger body or movement but whose teachings and practices are not considered unorthodox		
7	This is a group that have been known to use psychological intimidation to recruit members		

Take feedback and correct answers:

Cults = Statements 2, 3, 4, 5, 7.

Sects = Statements 1, 6.

Written Assignment:

The naming of religious movements as ‘cults’ or ‘sects’ is often resisted by followers of those movements. Discuss why they might not wish to be labelled in this way?

Outcomes:

- define ‘cult’ and give examples
- define ‘sect’ and give examples
- discuss why these definitions are contested
- list common characteristics/features of cults
- describe what elements cults and religions share, and how they differ.

Topic: 3.2 Some new religious movements* (*Higher level only)

Procedure

Description of content: an overview of two new religious movements
 – foundations
 – major beliefs
 – lifestyle of members

The phrase ‘New Religious Movement’ is a new term being used as a substitute for the word ‘cult’. The phrase can refer to a wider spectrum of religious movements. They are ‘new’ in that they present themselves as alternatives to official institutional religion. They are ‘religious’ in that they claim to offer a religious vision of the world, and to respond to the fundamental questions of life.

Review the results of the research completed earlier in Section C Part 1.1 analysing the answers to Question 12 on the 2002 census on religious affiliation.

Or Research telephone books / website www.localalmanac.i.e./religion/ etc. for the names of religious groups found in Ireland today.

Buzz: Name a New Religious Movement?

In taking feedback from students as a name is suggested -

Discuss: In what sense is this movement 'new'?

How does it present itself as an alternative to official institutional religion?

In what sense is this movement 'religious'?

How does it offer a religious vision of the world?

How does it respond to the fundamental questions of life?

If the name suggested by students meets the criteria describing a New Religious Movement note its name on the chalkboard.

Research Assignment: Pick two of the above New Religious Movements and produce an information sheet on each describing their foundations; major beliefs and the lifestyle, customs and practices of their members.

Written Assignment:

Give one example of a new religious movement and describe

- a. its foundations
- b. major beliefs
- c. the lifestyle, customs and practices of its members.

Outcomes:

- provide a profile of two new religious movements focused on foundations; major beliefs; lifestyle and customs/practices of members.

Resources which teachers have suggested include:

New Religious Movement - Dialogue Ireland (www.esatclear.ie/~dialogueireland); Centre for Studies on New Religions (www.cesnur.org/default.htm); Factnet (www.factnet.org/index.html); American Family Foundation (www.csj.org); Apologetics Index (www.gospelcom.net/apologeticsindex); Christian Resource Institute (www.equip.org); Statistics (www.adherents.com); Watchtower Fellowship Inc. (www.watchman.org).