



Religion and Society Research Cluster
School of Social Sciences and Psychology

**“Minors in Minority Religions:
The Delicate Balance between
Religious Freedom and the
Well-being of the Child”**

17 September 2019

Liverpool City Campus, 03.8.01

13:00-15:00

**Speaker: Dr Susan J. Palmer (School of
Religious Studies, McGill University)**

Principle Investigator on the *Children in
Sectarian Religions and State Control* project
funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada (Insight Grants)

*What is happening to children born into the so-
called “cults”? Are they captive, abused or free?
And what should be done about this situation?*

Ever since the spiritual seekers of the 1960s and
'70s settled down in new religious communities to
raise alternative families, these concerns have been
expressed by journalists, social workers and
government deputies. While “hippy” parents
voluntarily embraced radical social experiments,

their children today are gazing with curiosity at the
surrounding world they never chose to reject. Many
leave, a few write their memoirs.

The presence of children in these religions
challenges basic assumptions about religious
freedom. For some, “religious freedom” means
“freedom *from* religion. For others, children have
the right to practice their parents’ faith. Palmer
shares the preliminary findings of her *Children in
Sectarian Religions* project and addresses these
issues:

- a) the conflicting evidence concerning children’s
secret lives in sectarian religions.
- b) the complex role of the “objective” researcher in
the emotionally-charged micro-sociology of
NRMs.
- c) cases of state intervention in the family life of
minority religions.
- d) obstacles to research posed by ethics boards,
“anticultism” - and the unpredictability of NRMs.

Susan J. Palmer is a researcher and writer in the
field of new religious studies. She is an Affiliate
Professor at Concordia University in Montreal and is
currently working at McGill University as Principal
Investigator on a four-year research project
supported by the Social Sciences and the
Humanities Research Council: *Children in Sectarian
Religions and State Control*. She is a Lecturer at
McGill’s School of Religious Studies where she
also teaches the course on New Religious
Movements. Palmer has published eleven books,
sociological studies of new religions, notably: *Moon
Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women’s
Roles in New Religions* (Syracuse, 1994); *Aliens
Adored: Rael’s UFO Religion* (Rutgers, 2004); *The
New Heretics of France* (Oxford University Press,
2011); *The Nuwaubian Nation: Black Spirituality and
State Control* (Ashgate 2010), and (co-authored
with Stuart Wright) *Storming Zion: Government
Raids on Religions* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

RSVP By:

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