



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:**

**Friday, September 13 2019**

**Submit to:**

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