



THE RELIGION AND DIVERSITY PROJECT/RELIGION ET DIVERSITÉ



**Susan J. Palmer**

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### **Biography**

Susan Palmer is a researcher and writer in the area of new religions ("cults"). She received her PhD from Concordia University where she is a part-time instructor and an Affiliate Professor. She is also an Affiliate Member of the Religious Studies Faculty at McGill University.

### **Research Statement**

My research area has always been in the field of new religious movements. I like to visit groups, live with them, conduct interviews, and participate in rituals. I am an ethnographer who writes articles, chapters and books on specific new religions, among them the Raelians, the Rajneesh, the Twelve Tribes, The Family, and Scientology. Some of my books focus on themes in new religious studies, such as charisma, gender and children, millennialism, healing, the anticult movement. Most of my research has taken place in Quebec, the U.S., Germany and France.

### **The Social Control of New Religions**

I was initially attracted to new religious studies as a weird, entertaining pastime. Then I became fascinated by the ritual and theological innovations I found in NRMs. However, it has become difficult ignore the fierce opposition to new religions. Thus I find my work tends to focus more and more on religious freedom issues, human rights, legal disputes involving religious minorities, *antisectisme* (in France) and anticultism (in the U.S.).

My most recent book, *The New Heretics of France* (Oxford, 2011), describes the rise of the government-sponsored antisecte movement in France, and the opposition and discrimination experienced by French citizens whose spiritual association was on the National Assembly's list of 173 sects. My previous book, *The Nuwaubian Nation: Black Spirituality and State Control* (Ashgate, 2010), explores the opposition to a Black nationalist messianic movement whose leader tried to establish a "sovereign nation" in rural Georgia that was raided by the FBI.

### **Current Research**

**Our** book, "Storming Zion: Government Raids on Religions" co-authored with Stuart A. Wright (editor of *Armageddon in Waco*) is coming out in October 2015, published by Oxford University Press. Much of the material for the book was gathered from the groups I visited in the U.S., France and Germany, of police raids, and this research that was funded by SSHRC. We, the authors, have an activist agenda, for our book documents the injustices and religious discrimination that fuels many of these raids on religious minorities and NRMs. We also find in our study an exponential increase in the number of raids, as well as a tendency towards militarization over the last twenty years.