

2014/2015 Graduate Research Grant Report
Religion and Diversity Project

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Host Institution: Guest-PhD-Candidate
Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)
Trondheim, Norway

Host Supervisor: Dr. Jesper Aagaard Petersen
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Duration of Research Project: January 6, 2015 to June 30, 2015 (6 months)

November 3, 2015

A Tribe of Outsiders: A Study on the Church of Satan

In January of 2015 I travelled to Trondheim, Norway, to work with Dr. Jesper Aagaard Petersen, one of the few experts in my field. Our intensive collaboration was designed to cover two streams of related material: the broad field of “western esotericism” and the specific focus of dissertation, the Church of Satan. Modern religious Satanism has multiple factions and offshoots, and generates a large amount of titillating public interest and media coverage, though academic studies on religious Satanism remain few. As Dr. Petersen is but one of a handful of scholars fully knowledgeable on the direct and related scholarly works on religious Satanism, my time spent in Norway under his tutelage has been extremely helpful on multiple fronts.

First on our six-month agenda was to co-author a book chapter, titled “Modern Religious Satanism: A Negotiation of Tensions,” to appear in the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of New Religions*, edited by Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen and James R. Lewis. Dr. Petersen and I worked together to present a cohesive chapter about how religious Satanism deliberately provokes, engages, and tempers its popular and academic dynamics.

Secondly, Dr. Petersen provided reading materials that we then discussed in his office on a weekly basis, wherein the format varied from me submitting responses to vigorous debate over interpretations and applications of the material. These sessions were enormously constructive, as it

was the first time in my academic career that I had been able to have discussions with a scholar fully knowledgeable in my particular field. This active give-and-take allowed me to work through ideas and pinpoint or evolve my positions on various issues and concerns related to the dissertation topic. It also served to filter through previous similar studies in order to assess the usefulness of other methodologies and theoretical approaches.

Thirdly, Dr. Petersen also helped guide the reading list for one of my comprehensive exams on western esotericism, which I will take upon my return from Norway. He provided detailed feedback on the direction and focus of my thesis, thoroughly commenting on my thesis proposal. We worked together to bolster any gaps in my knowledge, clarify the outline and claims of my work, and ensure that I provide ample evidence for arguments. Perhaps most importantly, we developed a unique and exciting methodology catered to my doctoral project.

Lastly, I attended several talks and lectures from scholars and practitioners on topics related to my studies, as well as giving a talk myself on magic in Church of Satan. It was part of a lecture series produced by a local Norwegian group with esoteric interests. It was attended by both scholars and the general population, and the following question period was stimulating, as it surrounded local Norwegian understandings of magic, as well as how scholars study the topic.

The research conducted in Norway will be immeasurably valuable for my doctoral dissertation. I am extremely grateful for the support provided by the Religion and Diversity Project Graduate Research Grant.