



The New Heretics of France: Minority Religions, la République, and the Government-Sponsored "War on Sects"

Susan Palmer

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Since the Age of Enlightenment, France has upheld clear constitutional guidelines that protect human rights and religious freedom. Today, however, intolerant attitudes and discriminatory practices towards unconventional faiths have become acceptable and even institutionalized in public life. Susan Palmer offers an insightful examination of France's most stigmatized new religions, or "sectes," and the public management of religious and philosophical minorities by the state.

The New Heretics of France tracks the mounting government-sponsored anti-cult movement in the wake of the shocking mass suicides of the Solar Temple in 1994, an event that ushered France's most visible religious minorities onto a blacklist of 172 "sectes" commissioned by the National Assembly. Drawing on extensive interviews and field research, Palmer describes the controversial histories of well-known international New Religious Movements including the Church of Scientology, Raelian Movement, and Unificationism, as well as esoteric local groups. Palmer also reveals the partisanship of Catholic priests, journalists, village mayors, and the passive public who support La République's efforts to control minority faiths - all in the name of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity."

Through historical and sociological theory, Palmer analyzes France's war on "sectes" as a strategic response to social pressures arising from globalization and immigration. Her study addresses the impact of these social pressures on traditional cultures and national character, as well as important issues of religious freedom and public tolerance.

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