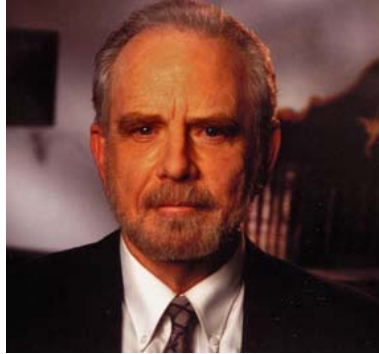




THE RELIGION AND DIVERSITY PROJECT/RELIGION ET DIVERSITÉ



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Research Statement

My research interests in recent years have focused on the interface of religion and law, and studies of how religion and law influence each other. One major focus has been on law as a tool of social control, particularly of minority religions. Another has been how religious groups arise and develop as they interact with the society in which they occur.

I began my career many years ago studying new religions, just to see how they recruited members, how they were organized, and societal reactions to NRMs. This early focus made me aware of controversies surrounding New Religious Movements (NRM), particularly those dealing with conversion and recruitment, which led me into the “cult/brainwashing” battles that have occurred over recent decades. I also found myself involved in how NRMs finance themselves and how they use their resources.

Both these research foci led me in the direction of the legal issues and the law, and contributed to my seeking a law degree later in life. I now spend my scholarly efforts integrating law and sociology, and seeking to understand the ways that the law impacts society including religious aspects of life. I focus my efforts on studies of various courts and legislatures or parliaments, and how those institutions relate to religious groups and religion in general. I am also interested in Shari’a and how it is being developed and integrated into Western societies, and am pursuing research in that area with colleagues in Australia and the U.S.