

Mark Juergensmeyer, UC-Santa Barbara, "The Global Rise of Religious Violence"
Steven Wasserstrom, Reed College, "Political Mysteries"
Michael Barkun, Syracuse University, "Sacred Secrets: Religious Privacy and National Security"
Diane Bell, George Washington University, "Secrecy: In Whose Interest?"
Mark D. Jordan, Emory University, "Negative Theory and Clerical Secrets"
Paul Christopher Johnson, Princeton University, "When Priests are Politicians: Papa Doc Duvalier and the Secret Police of Haiti"
Hugh B. Urban, Ohio State, "Fair Game: Secrecy, Security, and the Church of Scientology in Cold War America"
Rebecca Moore, San Diego State University, "Secrets and Lies: The U.S. Government and Jonestown"
Jeffrey J. Kripal, Rice University, "The Powers of Professor X: Some Mythological Reflections on Cultural Mutation and the Forbidden Knowledge of Religious Studies"

The Department of Comparative Studies, the Mershon Center, and the Office of International Affairs at the Ohio State University are pleased to announce a small conference on the theme of "Religion, Secrecy and Security: Religious Freedom

Why do some religious traditions insist that certain aspects of their beliefs and practices remain secret and closed to outsiders? Is secrecy a potentially dangerous force within religious traditions, either as a means of concealing immoral activities (such as pedophilia or other sexual crimes) or as a means of conducting subversive and violent activities (such as terrorism)? Conversely, how far should government agencies be allowed to go in order to monitor or infiltrate religious groups that may pose a threat to other individuals or to national security? And to what degree do such groups retain the rights to privacy and freedom from government surveillance?

This conference, conceived and organized by Hugh B. Urban, Associate Professor of Comparative Studies, explored these questions. Drawn from a variety of disciplines, including religious studies, sociology, history, and women's studies, participants presented research that promotes better understanding of the connections between secrecy and religion and its relationship to issues of security.

These questions have become all the more critical in the wake of recent events within the United States itself. The spread of terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda have generated a whole new wave of fears --not only the fear of infiltration by secretive and destructive religious movements, but also the fear that this will in turn lead to the loss of privacy and freedom for many alternative religious groups who now face more ever intense government scrutiny within an increasingly "surveilled" society.