

Introducing Universal Medicine

Angela Coco & Des Tramacchi

Preliminary version. Please do not reproduce or quote without the consent of the author

(Please note this is a revised version - some errors of fact have been corrected from the original)

Religious Movements in a Globalized World: Korea, Asia, and Beyond
Pocheon City, Korea 2016

Outline

- Universal Medicine
 - Structure
 - Organisation
- Tensions – two anecdotes
- Analysis (Melton, J. G. 2004 Perspective: toward a definition of “New Religion”, *Nova Religio*, 8(1): 73-87; Hume, L. A. 1996 Reappraisal of the term ‘cult’ and consideration of ‘danger markers ...’, *Colloquium*, 28: 35-52)

angela.coco@scu.edu.au



2mins



Universal Medicine (UM) began in my neighbourhood, Goonellabah, a suburb of Lismore (marked by the red star on the map), in New South Wales, Australia. Lismore is a small city/town of approximately 46,000 people so you will appreciate I am part of the media and gossip milieu in which this organization is situated.

Universal Medicine: Structure

Founder: Serge Benhayon,
1999

Structure:

Universal Medicine (UM - the
business)
Teaching & training
The Way of The Livingness
(TWL - the religion)



<http://www.universalmedicine.net/> Accessed 1 December 2015

angela.coco@scu.edu.au



Serge Benhayon (SB) was born in Uruguay and migrated to Australia with his parents at the age of 6. His parents are non-practising Jews, but Mr Benhayon says his father was very interested in religion. Benhayon distinguishes between the business side of the UM which offers a range of complementary therapies, the teaching field in which he offers training courses in the therapies, and the religion. Though the three are connected in practice as healing practitioners are enjoined through religious teachings to work on their inner self and to be actually living the religious teachings, as from there they can be more attuned to the needs of others.

Universal Medicine: Organisation

Business: *Universal Medicine*

Complementary therapy clinics

Teaching structures:

Sacred Esoteric Workshops

College of Universal Medicine

The Student Body

Religion: *The Way of The Livingness*

TWL Public lectures (sermons)

The Livingness workshops

TWL recorded sermons online

<http://www.universalmedicine.net/> Accessed 1 December 2015

angela.coco@scu.edu.au

 Southern Cross
University

Business:

Universal Medicine The name given to the business which offers types complementary therapies practiced in UM clinics.

Teaching structures:

SB runs structured *workshops* throughout the year training people in the various therapies. In June-July he usually runs these workshops in the UK (though not in 2016).

The College of Universal Medicine is run by a Board of members who may be mainstream accredited professional doctors, psychologists, physiotherapists, counsellors, masseuses etc. These people offer a community service of 'healthy living' type' workshops free of charge to any organization that requests them. There are also specific UM accredited practitioners in therapies of Benhayon's creation.

The Student Body refers to anyone who registers to participate in one of UM's offerings. When this author registered to attend a 'public lecture' an email arrived some days later addressing her as a student. The email revealed a complete weekend of events, of which the public lecture was only one item.

Religion:

The Way of The Livingness is conveyed through 'public lectures' which are called 'sermons' at the venue, related workshops and ongoing recorded sermons which are published online.

Events scheduled regularly

- The Way of The Livingness Presentations
- The Livingness (Levels 1/2/3&4)
- Enu = Esoteric Numberology
- RW = Relationship Workshop
- E&P = Expression and Presentation Workshop
- SEH = Sacred Esoteric Healing (Levels 1-5)
- ECTT = Esoteric Connective Tissue Therapy
- EM = Esoteric Massage

angela.coco@scu.edu.au

* University

This slide presents a breakdown of the kinds of healing and religious/philosophical workshops offered throughout any year. You can get a lot of detail about any of these things by going to the UM web site. Benhayon talks about sermons as *philosophical* teachings as well.

The image behind the words is of the UM Clinic in Goonellabah.

Tensions: two anecdotes

- 2012 – Media ‘invasion’ of UM gathering in Goonellabah – concerned UM members
- 2015 – Southern Cross University International Students’ orientation event – complaints from academic staff

angela.coco@scu.edu.au



These two anecdotes set the scene for the tensions that currently (2016) surround UM’s activities and their practitioners.

2012

In 2012, 2 health practitioners came to see the author at her Southern Cross University Office. They were professionals and mainstream registered in their own fields including a physiotherapist and psychologist but also worked part of the time with UM. They told the following story.

Channel 7 News had burst into a UM gathering in a local hall (unexpected and uninvited) the previous Wednesday night and started filming people and putting microphones in front of individuals in the audience asking if they were UM members. The camera crew caused quite a disruption and were a significant source of distress as people were taken aback and not expecting to need to deal with intruders. The practitioners told me that 5 local business men had incited the press because their wives had left them after participating in UM activities. The men claimed that UM was a cult that had prompted changes in their wives’ behaviours and brainwashed them. The 2 practitioners had approached me to suggest that research needed to be done on UM because they were not a secretive organization or involved in deviant activities. They were only concerned with promoting people’s health and well-being. At the time, I was unable to oblige but did indicate that if I was involved the research would need to be independent of member’s opinions.

2015

The author is a chair of the ‘Interfaith Advisory Committee’ on the university campus and therefore is closely associated with the university’s main Pastoral Care Coordinator (PCC) who acts in a chaplaincy role and supervises chaplaincy services

across the university's campuses. The University runs orientation events for International Students. Staff who had attended the 2015 event reported to the PCC that they were very uncomfortable with a musical and dance type session. That was part of the program. It was advertised as a 'Bush dance with a difference'. (A bush dance in Australia is basically a folk dance, particularly accompanied by a 'bush band' and often involves coordinated group dancing) . It turns out that the band that had been hired was one of UM's musical groups, and the hirer (an SCU employee in the International Relations Office) is also a member of UM. The staff who reported feeling uncomfortable, informally asked people present, who did not appear to belong in an orientation for international students, if they were members of UM – they were.

These two anecdotes highlight the two extremes that characterize discourse about UM in my local community. UM members see themselves as promoting health and well-being and essentially 'harmless'. Others convey stories of weirdness, loaded with suspicion, fear and misgivings – and colleagues have even expressed concern for the author who has been enjoined about the dangers of being brainwashed, of falling in love with the founder and of the need to have critical friends on the 'outside'. The SCU ethics committee even rejected the first research application because they felt I might say something unsavoury about the organization and subject the university to litigation.

Sociological framework (Melton 2004)

- Locate NRM relative to its tradition and cultural mainstream
- Look for factors leading to 'outsider' status including ideological and behavioural attributes that attract labelling of 'cult' status
- Attention to relationships developed within larger cultural scene

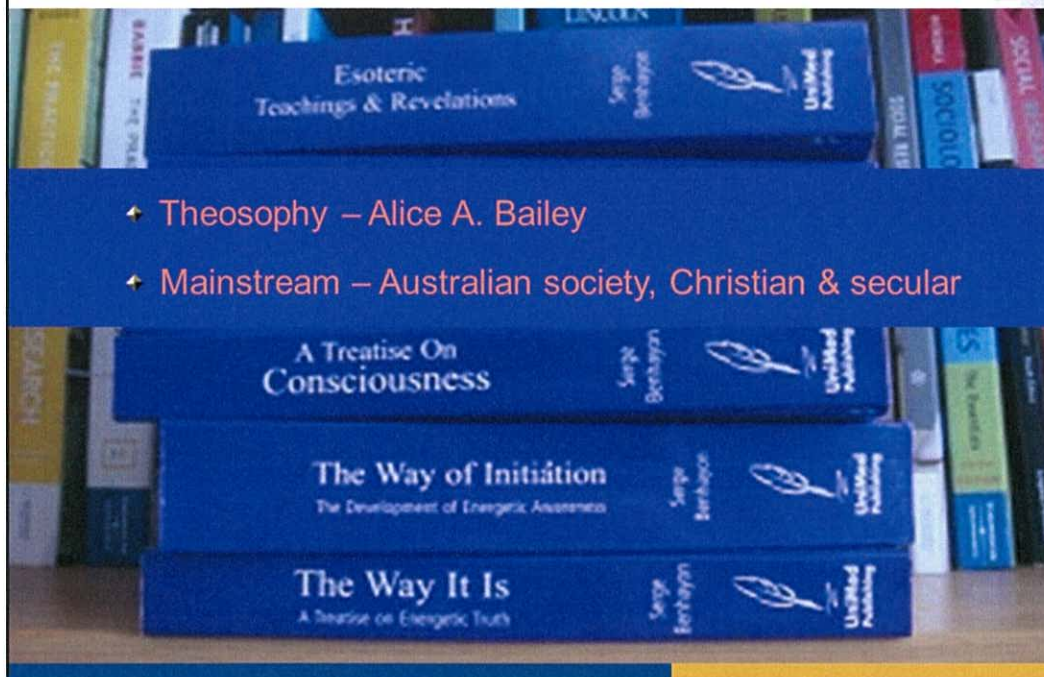
angela.coco@scu.edu.au



Melton suggests an exploration of the tensions that emerge between a new group and the broader society as a means of identifying it as a new religious movement. Here I provide just a few key observations – there are many others to consider in a properly developed paper.

The following slides discuss these 3 dimensions in turn.

1. Locate NRM relative to its tradition and cultural mainstream



- ✦ Theosophy – Alice A. Bailey
- ✦ Mainstream – Australian society, Christian & secular

Back image shows some of Benhayon's published works, there are currently (2016) eight books in all.

Melton recommends that researchers '**locate a movement within its particular religious tradition**', then determine where it fits **relative to the mainstream** of that tradition, then determine its relation to whatever tradition is dominant in the particular country in which the group operates.

SB's writings bear affinities with theosophy particularly Bailey's reworking of Blavatsky – though he reports coming to his ideas independently of that work and emphasises his focus on the practical application of the Ageless Wisdom teachings. It helps to read Bailey to understand the many turns of phrase, references and authorities invoked in Benhayon's writings, for instance;

- References to hierarchy – Benhayon signs his books as authored by Serge Benhayon and the Hierarchy
- Emphasis on soul as source of all truth
- References to the 7 rays and the 5 orders of consciousness
- References to particular masters – e.g. Dwal Kuhl

Mainstream in Australia – UM deviates from mainstream Christian & secular norms. Christian norms:

- Christianity is the predominant worldview in Australia. Christianity has a natural aversion to anything 'Eastern' – and certainly to the 'esoteric' which SB emphasises.
- Public holidays are still governed by Christian calendar, Christmas and

Easter holidays

- Reactions of Christian chaplains and local colleagues (mentioned earlier) – seduced, brainwashed, report rumours in tones of impending doom
- Suggestions of mis-representation – Some arising from the fact that many health practitioners are professionals in their own right which means their patients can access Medicare refunds (Australia's healthcare scheme; similar situations occurred in the UK where UM is also visible). Claims made by displacement, accusing UM for using Medicare for 'quackery', that is questionable 'esoteric healing modalities' designed by SB who is not an accredited health practitioner. Similarly, the musical band mentioned earlier was not listed as a UM band on the advertisement – though if it was any other band, say of a group of Catholics no one would bother to comment on that or find it problematic.

2. Factors leading to outsider status

- ✦ non-traditional religion – viewed with suspicion
- ✦ non-traditional approach to healing – ‘esoteric’ complementary therapies
- ✦ Ideological and behavioural factors leading to ‘cult’ attribution
 - ✦ Teachings about women
 - ✦ Media & ‘battle of the blogs’
 - ✦ Cult monitoring groups

angela.coco@scu.edu.au



Non-traditional approach to religion

- View NRMs with suspicion due to media moral panics labelling the organisation as a cult
- Serge Benhayon claims to superior knowledge of the truth and ultimate reality - he claims there will be a new concept of ‘scientific’ once the ‘esoteric’ knowledge is incorporated into Western knowledge base.
- Use eclectic mix of sources from many traditions & philosophies in his teachings

Non-traditional approach to healing

- Australia follows western health model which treats the symptoms.
- ‘esoteric’ alternative therapies seen as pseudo-science, ‘sleazy’ and ‘weird’
- Alternative or complementary therapies frequently subjected to accusations of quackery, relieving people of their money, pseudo-science, and court battles
- Australian Medical Association (AMA) is powerful and active in preventing legitimisation of complementary therapies ; to date they have approved only *acupuncture* and *chiropractic*.
- If therapies are not approved by AMA they cannot register with Medicare (Australia’s free healthcare system) and therefore cannot provide their clients with access to health care rebates.



An apparent conservative view of women

'The Girl to women festival' in pictures shows stereotypical ideas about women's interests, but also openly talks about menstruation 'My period diary' a topic not talked about in public in mainstream culture. Certainly no ritual exists for this in mainstream, therefore attracts criticisms of 'grooming' girls for sex.

- Focus on energetic healing of women's organs, ovaries, breasts, etc – which are believed to be damaged from living in a patriarchal society.
- Diet – ideally no sugar caffeine, meat, alcohol etc
- Detractors have complained of discipline or rules about sexual relations with partners
- Strong on support of women; teaches that it diminishes all of humanity to suppress/abuse women, however, women believed to have gone against their 'true nature' trying to be like men – women seen as emblematic of the inner energy 'stillness' as opposed to the fiery Apollonian male energy. The divine embodies both energies.

Tends to conduct activities that leave it open to charges of impropriety in relation to: children, 'sexual' allusions in massages, families, pseudo science, coercion 'bullying'

Quote: The Girl to Woman Festival is for girls and young women of all ages, with activities and workshops specifically aimed to support girls from 7 to 8 years old up to young women in their early twenties.

This event is also an amazing opportunity for families and friends to experience and learn about the pressures that girls and women can be faced with as well as the

amazing inner-qualities they hold.

As members of the community we all have an important role to play to support girls and women to truly be confident, be themselves and be untainted by the many pressures they experience today.

The information shared in the various presentations and workshops on the day are designed to help support not only girls and young women, but also the wider community, to hold girls and young women in the celebration, grace, preciousness, strength and power that they truly are. <http://www.girltowoman.com.au/> viewed 29 June 2016

Media & Internet 'battle of the blogs'

Universal Medicine cult targets kids & teens

Posted: August 20, 2015 | **Author:** [Esther Rockett](#)

<https://factsaboutuniversalmedicine.wordpress.com/2015/08/20/universal-medicine-cult-targets-kids-teens/>

Universal Medicine's Serge Benhayon to inherit bulk of devotee's million-dollar estate – Sydney Morning Herald, Dec 28 2015,
<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/universal-medicines-serge-benhayon-to-inherit-bulk-of-devotees-million-dollar-estate-20151227-qm7u.html#ixzz4CuxqDMZw>

Esther Rockett – the Internet Troll that tried to have me sacked By Jane Keep Phd, MPhil, MSc, FCIPD, MIC, CMgr, FCMI ~ Freelance Leadership Consultant and Associate at two Universities, England · On June 10, 2016 <http://universalmedicinefacts.com/esther-rockett-the-internet-troll-that-tried-to-have-me-sacked/>

New age 'medicine' of Serge Benhayon leaves trail of broken families, *news.com.au*, September 8 2012,
<http://www.news.com.au/national/queensland/new-age-medicine-of-serge-benhayon-leaves-trail-of-broken-families/story-fdp4ckr-1226467645376>

Jane Hansen: How Universal Medicine bullied me
JANE HANSEN, *The Sunday Telegraph*, March 15, 2015,
<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/jane-hansen-how-universal-medicine-bullied-me/news-story/7b7d0b1e9e27e6078f72d00059ead02>
* Southern Cross University
@-ta.coco@scu.edu.au

Media – Newspapers and online news

Image shows some headlines claiming a variety of mal-practices

- Breaking apart families, targeting children, relieving older women of their money, bullying participants.

There is a 'battle of the blogs' in which Esther Rockett (next slide) an acupuncturist tracks and reports UM activities and accuses them of many evils which she claims are 'cultic' practices. In response, the UM Student Body produces its own set of blogs that systematically respond to Rockett's claims, denying them and providing counter evidence. Benhayon appears not to engage in this online discourse.

**Universal Medicine defamation
hearing today – The Echo, May 6 2016**

*In response to a legal request
submitted to Google, we have
removed 1 result(s) from this page. If
you wish, you may [read more about
the request](#) at [LumenDatabase.org](#).
29 June 2016*



EstherRockett.com
29 June 2016

In June 2016, some 4 years after the Channel 7 issue mentioned earlier, and since Esther Rockett began her activities, SB has taken out a Defamation charge against Rockett. Rockett is asking for donations on her blog and Facebook pages to meet court costs.

Image: Esther Rockett

Re: notice in top right hand corner. When I searched for UM and defamation case, this notice appeared. This is interesting because UM has been accused of paying a company to have information about it removed from the internet – it appears that something of this nature has indeed occurred – albeit it in relation to the case presently before the court.

Esther Rockett – a self-proclaimed Health Care Activist – calls UM ‘The cult of the talking cervix’ (<https://factsaboutuniversalmedicine.wordpress.com/> viewed 28 June)

Surveillance - Cult-monitoring groups

- ✦ Cult Education Institute:
<http://forum.culteducation.com/read.php?12,107998>
- ✦ You Tube anti Universal Medicine Cult Channel
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAEgSnThJAZJSd2YFWnHvFQ>
- ✦ Cult Information and Family Support Inc.
<http://www.cifs.org.au/index.php>

angela.coco@scu.edu.au



Cult-monitoring organisations/individuals

Cult Education Institute

(<http://forum.culteducation.com/read.php?12,107998> viewed 28 June)

You Tube anti Universal Medicine Cult Channel

(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAEgSnThJAZJSd2YFWnHvFQ> viewed 28 June)

Cult Information and Family Support Inc viewed 29 June 2016

<http://www.cifs.org.au/index.php>

There may be others.

UM is under surveillance on these cult-monitoring groups, the last one on this page is an Australian group – need more research to locate the provenance of individuals in these organisations portraying UM as a cult.

3. Relationships developed in larger cultural scene

- ↪ Membership: Practising lawyers, Mainstream health professionals etc
- ↪ Court Scholarly scrutiny
- ↪ Community services

angela.coco@scu.edu.au



Many **mainstream professionals associated with UM** : practising lawyers, medical practitioners, academics

Quote Maxime Szramka – rheumatologist “... in my 20 years of experience in Medicine and in the collective experience of my colleagues, it is apparent that Medicine in and of itself does not offer the complete answer to the ills and diseases that humanity is facing. ... I have seen many things that we would consider as miracles in Medicine, yet they are everyday, ordinary occurrences in ordinary people at Universal Medicine. There is an entire global community who has adopted the Universal Medicine way of living, whose health is improving with age, and not declining.

(<http://www.universalmedicine.net/what-doctors-say.html> viewed 28 June 2016)

Welcomes ‘outsider ‘ scholarship (as this researcher’s earlier anecdote reveals), and also professional members set up their own research groups and projects related to their healing practices.

Serves community through its *College of Universal Medicine* a charitable institution established in 2011 which provides workshops on health and well-being to any organization that requests it on a voluntary basis.

Danger markers?

1. Charismatic leader
2. Separate community
3. Quasi kinships with adherents
4. High libido
5. Organised communally but patriarchal structure
6. Self-ascribed divine qualities
7. Notions of apocalypse & new millennium
8. Weapons accumulated
9. Followers coerced willing to die for ideology

Conference cyberproceedings are published for documentary purposes. The views expressed are the author's and do not necessarily represent CESNUR's opinions.

angela.coco@scu.edu.au

 Southern Cross
University

Lynne Hume outlined these 'danger markers' as a means of assessing the potential of an nrm to reduce or increase the tensions between itself and the broader society. (Hume, L. A 1996 Reappraisal of the term 'cult' and consideration of 'danger markers ...', *Colloquium*, 28: 35-52).

History will reveal the path that UM takes, but there are strong indicators that it is aiming to reduce tensions between itself and society.

Over time this researcher has seen SB modify claims he made in the media years ago, for instance the reported claim that he said he was a re-incarnation of Leonardo da Vinci. When asked, SB explained that according to The Way of The Livingness teachings, a soul does not 're' incarnate, but comes back in a higher evolutionary state so it is not the same person as before – that is an 'incarnation'.

To address each point above:

1. SB clearly a charismatic leader – some people call him 'god' though he does not say this himself
2. Separate community – this organization has many business branches and fairly permeable boundaries in terms of 'the way of the livingness' teachings. People may come and go e.g. health professionals have their own businesses outside of UM activities. The student body are those who attend workshops and become part of UM by default once they register for an event. The College of Medicine is composed of UM members and run by a board. So there are many branches of groups and a broad range of activities which in no sense have boundaries drawn around as a separate community.

3. People speak of SB as a dear friend, some treat him like a father figure, others take what they want and leave the rest. The message is 'try these practices for yourself' and see if it works for you.
4. High libido – not really any public evidence for this
5. Is organized communally with a hierarchical structure – there are men and women in highly visible leadership roles – but all initiatives are vetted by SB.
6. There are self-ascribed *prophetic* qualities – which could equate with 'divine' inspiration due to the way SB talks about the ideas 'just come to him' signs his books as authored by himself and the Hierarchy (passed masters in the tradition)
7. No notions of apocalypse etc. Human beings believed to be on an evolutionary path, perfecting themselves into love and a fiery heart to return to the original source, the light. SB believes a new rapprochement between science and religion is needed and it is his aim to facilitate the process.
8. No weapons – they preach love and self-development.
9. At a sermon the teaching was about countering evil, and speaking out against it – this as a means to be at peace with self, then to facilitate healing in the wider world. So, SB mentioned as an example the 'scandals' being spread by Esther Rockett and how the righteous path is to speak truth to these claims. It is about living well, not dying.