



Umbanda

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Umbanda

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Obafemi Origunwa, MA

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Umbanda Fast Facts

Founder: Zelio Fernandino de Moraes Founded: Early 1900s

Location: Mainly Brazil, some practitioners in Uruguay and

Argentina Adherents: Approximately 500,000, however many followers of Umbanda call themselves Catholic

What is Umbanda?

Umbanda is a religion of Brazil that combines influences of indigenous Brazilian religion, African religions, Catholicism, and Spiritism. Umbanda is related to the Brazilian religion Candomblé, but it is not identical.

Umbanda is mainly found in southern Brazil and in small numbers in the neighboring countries of Uruguay and Argentina.

Umbanda Beliefs

There isn't uniformity of belief among all followers of the Umbanda religion, yet there are certain beliefs that are widely held. These beliefs include faith in a supreme deity called Olorum (or Zambi), who has various representations. Many followers of Umbanda also believe that various Catholic saints emit divine energies and forces called Orixas. It is also common for adherents to seek interaction with the spirits of the deceased. The ideas of karma and reincarnation are also central tenets of the religion. {1}

Historians and sociologists believe that the Umbanda religion got its beliefs about a supreme deity and the reverence of saints from Catholicism; from Spiritism, the Umbanda religion got beliefs in communicating with the dead in its various forms, including psychics and mediums; from indigenous Brazilian religions, Umbanda adopted the deification of Orixas.

Subdivisions of the Orixas

There are eight primary Orixas intermediaries:

1. Oxala is the chief intermediary. His celestial body is the sun. His ritual day is Sunday. His sacred color is white.
2. Yemanjá represents femininity in the Umbanda religion. Her celestial body is the ocean. Her ritual day is Saturday. Her sacred color is bright blue.
3. Xango is the intermediary of justice. His ritual day is Wednesday. His sacred color is red.
4. Oxum is the goddess of love, money, and waterways. Her ritual day is Saturday. Her sacred color is yellow.
5. Ogun is a defender of soldiers. His ritual day is Tuesday. His sacred color is green.
6. Oxossi is a hunter and protector. His ritual day is Thursday. His sacred color is green.
7. Ibeji are associated with the spirits of children. Their ritual day is Sunday. Their sacred colors are blue and pink.
8. Omolu is intermediary of death, disease, health, and healing. His ritual day is Monday. His colors are black and white or red and black.

The History of Umbanda

It is conventionally understood that the Umbanda religion originated in Brazil in the early 1900's in and around Rio de Janeiro, founded by Zelio Fernandino de Moraes, a psychic. It combined traditional Brazilian religion, which had many African influences, with newer religious practices, especially those advanced by Spiritist teacher Allan Kardec.

The traditional date for the beginning of the Umbanda religion is November 15, 1908. On that day, some followers of Allan Kardec's

teachings participated in a seance outside the city of Rio de Janeiro, a gathering which included 17-year-old Zelio Fernandino de Moraes.

As the story goes, the young man manifested two spirits. One called itself Caboclo das Sete Encruzilhadas; the other, Pai Anthony. Kardec's followers considered these spirits inferior to the ones they usually interacted with and this would eventually lead to his religion being considered inferior to Kardec's. {2}

This beginning established a path toward a religion autonomous from Kardec's and ultimately produced a new religion. The Umbanda religion would not see significant growth until the 1930's when political conflict led many Brazilians to unite under Umbanda, which was deemed by many to be Brazil's only genuine religion.

The Religious Practices of Umbanda

Umbanda temples are led by psychics who interact with various spirits on behalf of the living. Leaders of Umbanda temples are often referred to as priests or priestesses.

The temples are called Terreiro (meaning "backyard" because they once used to be located in people's homes) or Tenda (meaning "tent" because they once used to be located in tents).

Today Terreiros can be built like homes or Catholic churches.

Gatherings in temples occur often and depending on the particular Terreiro or branch of Umbanda, ceremonies may include chanting, offering food and other items to spirits, dancing, as well as eating and drinking.

If visitors manifest a spirit during the gathering they may be asked to become members of the group.

Opposition to Umbanda

Despite the fact that most Umbandists identify with the label “Catholic,” most Christian branches and denominations see Umbanda as a false and ungodly religion. The Catholic Church in particular opposes the worship of spirits and the inappropriate (i.e. sinful) use of saints.

Evangelical denominations, especially Pentecostal churches, have influenced Umbanda in Brazil through evangelism. Pentecostals, as well as other Christians, consider the manifested spirits in Umbanda to be demons and contend that manifestations are likely occasions of demon possession.

Umbanda Today

In the last few decades there has been a decline in the Umbanda religion, at least in identification. Attendance at Terreiros is steady. Most Umbandists are still in and around Brazil.

Sources

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2. Beraba, Marcelo. O Terreiro da Contradicao.

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Obafemi Origunwa, MA

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