

Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Influence of Sectarian Movements and the Effects of Their Practices on the Physical and Mental Health of Children.

This 213-page document was published in December 2006 by the French National Assembly. It is referred to on the newly resurrected Avife web site and can be viewed in full at <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/pdf/rap-eng/r3507-rapport.pdf>

The witness statements and influential expert opinion it contains constitute a damning indictment of sects like the Exclusive Brethren.

The Report was produced by a Commission of Inquiry set up by the National Assembly, and it conveys the unequivocal message that sects often infringe their children's legal rights in numerous ways, impose upon them a social seclusion that retards their intellectual development, particularly the capacity for critical thinking, puts their mental health at risk, cripples their education and breaks up their families. This report will probably have a material influence on future legislation and court decisions.

The word *secte* in French has more sinister connotations than the word *sect* in English. It implies a religious organisation that has several of the following characteristics: it restricts communication between its members and the rest of the world; it exerts strong control over what its members must do and must not do; it achieves this control partly by techniques of mind control and partly by a system of rewards and punishments; it entraps its members by making it difficult or traumatic to leave the organisation; and it exploits its members for its own ends.

The Exclusive Brethren is probably the most obvious example of an organisation that shows most or all of these sectarian or cultish characteristics. Some sections refer specifically to the Exclusive Brethren. The Jehovah's Witnesses are another well-known example. If it is any comfort, there are a few sects, such as Scientologists, that are even more abusive.

Here is my (Ian McKay's) attempt at a translation of parts of the Report

[the first few pages contain a list of contents, an explanation of how the Commission of Inquiry came to be formed, and an account of a visit of educational inspectors to a religious community called Tabitha's Place.]

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Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights establishes the right to respect of private and family life. So there could be a great temptation for the authorities to consider that the influence of sects on domestic life – and notably on the lives of children – come under the protection of this Article, and this could be used to justify a certain lack of action.

Nevertheless, and according to consistent legal principles, although Article 8 has the aim of protecting everyone from arbitrary interference from the authorities, it does not go so

far as to prohibit them from taking any action. As the European Court of Human Rights regularly reminds us, this limitation on the interference of the authorities is not incompatible with their duty to undertake positive obligations. The guarantee offered by Article 8 is, indeed, also intended to ensure the development of each person's personality, and for this purpose it is up to the authorities to apportion the right balance between the interests of society and the interests of the individual.

The public interest is obviously not to allow situations to persist in which children, under cover of the liberties that adults can exercise, are victims of veritable social seclusion, deprivation or treatment prejudicial to their development and taking their place in society: however, that is exactly what happens when children become the victims of sects.

The Child Victim

Social seclusion

A phenomenon hiding behind freedom of thought

“In 2006, the essential difficulty relating to children is the problem of seclusion.” It was in these words that Mr. Michel Huyette, adviser on child protection in the Court of Appeal of Bastia, expressed the main problem of children subjected to sectarian influences. During his hearing before the Commission of Inquiry, while explaining why the current French penal legislation seemed fully adequate to deal with all situations that can occur in sects, he made the point that the criminal law did not prevent the confinement or seclusion of children. This does not, in fact, constitute a punishable offence. However, social seclusion is not only a complete challenge to the rest of the world, but, if the child one day leaves the sect, he will suffer from being seriously maladjusted for outside life, in a society that was constantly stigmatized during his stay in the sect. For this family magistrate, “The problem, for the children who live in a sect, is that their parents say to them every day [...]

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that the outside world is monstrous and harmful. That means that even when they are adults they will not go out there.” Also the lawyer must apply “the rights of the child, which are defined in many French and international documents: right to freedom of thought, right to education, knowledge, right to find employment... The children who are locked up in sects are completely deprived of all these rights [...] We must always take seclusion into account. When they are secluded, the children are deprived of the right to live like others.”

This discrepancy between the rights of the children as enshrined in international conventions and their actual situation within sects was brought up at various stages before the Commission of Inquiry.

Thus, Mr. Jean-Michel Roulet, president of MIVILUDES, cited Articles 13 and 17 of the 1989 International Convention of the Rights of the Child (the New York Convention), recalling in particular that: “According to Article 13, The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart

information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers. It is clear that all these provisions are not respected.” In fact, as Members of the Commission of Investigation emphasised several times, the New York Convention includes, more generally, many protective provisions favorable to the development of a child’s critical faculty.

Freedom of religion, which is also enshrined in international conventions, may often act against those who are working to prevent social seclusion of children within sects. Nevertheless, under cover of respect of the freedom of thought, belief or religion, one could not justify certain practices prejudicial to the development of the child. As Mr. Jean-Michel Roulet remarked, “It is very important, with respect to our fellow-citizens, not to let this debate develop around the topic of an attack on religious freedom [...]. What worries us, much more than the philosophical or doctrinal content, is actual practices that have nothing to do with beliefs [...]” After reminding us that the International Convention on the Rights of the Child itself guarantees the religious freedom of children, Mr. Michel Duvette, Director of Legal Protection of Youth at the Ministry for Justice, denounced in these terms the use of this argument: “In our country, where this freedom one of the best protected, and where we remember the dramas which occurred in the past as soon as there had been attained individual religious ideas, one is always extremely reluctant when it is thought necessary to impose restrictions on this inalienable fundamental freedom. Sects excel in the art of leading this debate in

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court so as to embarrass the legal establishment, while making the protection of children partially ineffective.”

Sharing the opinion expressed by many speakers, the Members of the Commission of Investigation judge that the suffering associated with social seclusion of children could not be hidden behind the freedom of belief of their parents. The authorities have set themselves the objective to fight, not against sects, but against their tendencies, the victims of which may include children. As Mrs. Sonya Jouglu, a psychologist, summed up during her testimony: “Until now, the children who are victims of sects have been a large group forgotten by society and by the professionals responsible for the protection of children at risk; perhaps because it is even more difficult to protect a child from the beliefs of his parents than from their blows or their incestuous sexuality; perhaps also because the limitations that parents impose by immersing their child in a sect are perfectly legal.”

A significant number of child victims, which is still difficult to estimate

In response to questions from the president, Mr. George Fenech, about how many children are associated with sects, Mr. Emmanuel Jancovici, who is responsible for coordinating the prevention and treatment of sectarian tendencies at the Ministry for Health and Social Security, indicated, “The total is at least 60,000 or 80,000 children brought up in a sectarian environment. The statistics do not make it possible to be more precise. To be safe, I prefer to say some tens of thousands of children. It is a considerable figure.” He also specified, “As for children brought up among Jehovah’s Witnesses, the surveys carried out in 1997 and 1998 at the request of this group suggest that three

quarters of the members have children. If we assume that in these families there is at least one child, we arrived at the figure of 45,000 children. For other groups, we cannot determine the number of children scientifically. I think that there are some tens of thousands of them, 35,000 or 40,000, without counting the integrist movements, which have many members. If we take account of all these data, we can easily finish up with an estimate of over 100,000. And in terms of protection of the children, that raises questions of a political nature.”

Concerning children in the Church of Scientology, no precise estimate has been given to the Commission of Inquiry. Thinking back on the total membership of the movement, Mr. Roger Gonnet, ex-member and former president of his Lyons Branch, declared at the Commission of Inquiry, “The Scientologists in France say they number 10,000. I would say more like 2,000 or 3,000.”

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Even the changes occurring in sects make it difficult to get a more precise estimate of the number of children concerned. Many speakers noted a tendency of these organizations to disperse in much smaller units than before. Those would have invested particularly - but not exclusively - in the fields of the wellbeing, health and the personal development. Mr. Michel Gilbert, president of Parental Network Europe, emphasised the ease with which they branch out: “Certain plants have the ability, when you cut their head off, to spread out underground on all sides. That is what has happened to sectarian movements in France: the large sectarian organizations that were decapitated have swarmed out in recent years into alternative therapies.” On the basis of about thirty years’ experience, Mrs. Sonya Jougla shares this analysis: “There were then large sects, well defined, quite clear. Today, there is an enormous number of little sectarian groups of twenty people at most.”

[Then there was a bit of discussion about the failure of some parents to register the birth of their children, and proposals to enforce registration by a fine of 3750 euros and six month’s imprisonment]

Questioned by Mr. Jean-Pierre Brard, secretary of the Commission of Inquiry, on the types of sects she has most often had a bone to pick with in her professional capacity, Ms Line Kaoua, a lawyer

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whose chamber specialises in family disputes related to sectarian problems, indicated for her part, “The groups on whom I have worked are mainly Jehovah’s Witnesses, who mainly head the list. Next is Soka Gakkai, currently very active, then all the movements like Mahikari and Scientology. Nearly all the large sectarian movements are included. Our work has become much more difficult because we are currently dealing with some movements which have only a few followers but who really behave as a sect. It is difficult to know their doctrines, which are not written down, and to get witness statements, given the small number of followers.”

[then there is a lot of discussion about the fact that the children at risk cannot be reliably counted and in most cases no one knows who they are or where they live]

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The difficulty in identifying children suffering from social seclusion in sects is exacerbated by the sects' wish to mislead the public about the accusations that may be made against them. In communities that appear open, the children are simultaneously conditioned by the group and educated by the State. Mr. Nicolas Jaquette, who was brought up in the Jehovah's Witnesses and very recently left the movement, summed up in this way the children's conditioning to deception: "The Jehovah's Witnesses pride themselves in not being a sect, alleging that their children are not cut off from the world: they go to school, sometimes higher education, and work in the outside world. But the recruitment is well established, and there is a real assault on the child's identity, personality, and emotional, moral and physical life, even if, from the start, it has been foreseen that the child will conceal it from the outside world."

By being "otherwise enjoined to participate, to behave as a model pupil, and especially never to be a subject of difficulty or concern in educational circles", the child lives a form of schizophrenia.

Moreover, everything is done to ensure that the child remains a "happy slave" as was pointed out by Mrs. Charline Delporte, President of ADFI Nord-Pas-de-Calais: "The couple is happy in the sect. As long as the child remains there, he is conditioned to be another happy slave. It is quite different the day the young adolescent wants to leave, towards the age of sixteen or seventeen." Mr. Jean-Michel Roulet described in these terms the role assigned to the minors in sects: "Certain children are the direct target
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of the sectarian organizations, who want to be able to format them, robotize them, and exploit them. They will make them go proselytising from the earliest possible age, then they will make them into "happy slaves" as Ron Hubbard put it (the founder of Scientology).

The Disappearance Of Childhood

"There is no time for childhood any more": this expression used by Mr. Emmanuel Jancovici characterizes perfectly the nature of social seclusion, whose victims can be children. Even in communities open to the outside world, the children "are designed to become followers, and nothing else." This observer of the sectarian phenomenon explains that in all these groups the children allocate a lot of time to prayer, religious observance and proselytising. Estimating that a Jehovah's Witness child from the age of eight or ten devotes, per week, about twenty hours to the group, which is considerable if one adds the time spent on schooling, he concludes that: "the situation is completely unbalanced", the time for childhood being no longer respected.

Mr. Nicolas Jaquette laid before the commission of inquiry a typical week of a JW child: "The tempo is very brisk, but must be assessed over one week. Each day a "spiritual program" is allotted to you. Like any JW, the children are compelled to attend

three meetings – in my case, it was two hours on Tuesday, one hour on Thursday and two hours on Sunday - and to preach, even when they may well be neither baptized nor capable of public speaking. To this program outside the relatively busy home environment must be added the child's personal program: he must prepare for each meeting of his leader by taking the literature provided by the sect, and checking the accuracy of the verses in the Bible; that generally comes to an hour or an hour and a half of preparatory work the day before each meeting; without forgetting the activities inside the family circle: "the text of the day", i.e. a small booklet from which one reads, each day, a small text followed by explanations of it given by the sect, reading of the Bible in family, which lasts approximately three quarters of an hour, and the personal reading that the child must do each evening, also lasting three quarters of an hour. **I have calculated that in this way a primary school child was to devote to the sect almost twenty-three hours per week...**"

The National Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, to which the Christian Federation of Jehovah's Witnesses had sent the questionnaire addressed by the Commission of Inquiry, estimates, in a document dated October 16, 2006, that the parents "associate their children the religious teaching given in the Kingdom Halls for four or five hours a week".

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Concerning minors whose parents are Scientologists, Mr. Roger Gonnet indicated that some children can be called to work for the central command of Scientology (Sea Org) from the age of six:

"Some children can be in post from the age of six. They do a very great number of hours, transporting papers. Starting from a certain age, they are liable to be sent into the Gulag of Scientology, the RPF: Redemption Project Force. There is one at Hemet, at Los Angeles, at Clearwater in Florida; there is one in Denmark, one in England and probably one in Australia.

Mr. Jacques REMILLER: What do they do there?

Mr. Roger GONNET: Five hours a day of cranium cramming, plus ten hours of work. They run without stopping. They are not entitled to have a radio, a television, or newspapers. In most cases, people can no longer see their children, their wife or their husband, etc. They cannot leave until it is finished; that can last for years."

Mr. Philippe Tourtelier, Member of the Commission of Inquiry, being worried about the reaction of parents to their child being sent into a Scientologist organization like Sea Org or "Gulag" - the Redemption Project Force -, Mr. Roger Gonnet pointed out that these parents are not necessarily well-informed owing to the fact that their children were sent to "Gulag". They were told that they were sent on mission. They sometimes find the recruitment of their children to Sea Org acceptable insofar as it is part of the "sacrosanct rules of Scientology".

So minors can be grabbed by organizations in which the time for childhood and adolescence is denied, either because it is devoted exclusively to serving the organization

itself, or because the child is busy in recruitment activities aimed at other young people, by exploiting topics likely to attract them.

[Then there are some descriptions of recruitment methods used by sects. These are very worrying, but I have not translated them here, because they are not relevant to our specific aim to protect and care for the victims of Exclusive Brethrenism]

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Suffering caused by seclusion from the outside world

The loss of children's autonomy and the narrowing of their interests, as Mr. Michel Duvette has also noted, have the principal purpose "to reduce the links by which they could become attached to the world outside the sect".

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The suffering caused to a child by the impossibility of living this moment of its life with young people of its own age outside the sect should not be minimized. The testimonies received by the Commission of inquiry are unanimous. The "violence of the daily newspaper", is certainly less painful than the violence of certain serious acts inflicting life-long trauma, and is therefore free from psychological consequences, as Mr. Nicolas Jaquette emphasised. Mr. Philippe-Jean Parquet, addictologist and specialist in childhood, described in these terms the range of these psychological assaults: "Contact with sectarian organizations causes appalling emotional damage. Confidence in adults is damaged, as is self-confidence. This after-effect is serious: self-doubt will be accompanied by the doubt about others. [...]"

"The child needs an environment marked by continuity, consistency and diversity. My main reproach to sectarian organizations is that they present the child with a world in miniature, a closed world, whereas it needs diversity, the presence of its parents, its grandparents, other members of the family, different theses in the culture; in short, a world open to diversity. That is what defines a liberal education. From there, the child will be freely able to find his own way."

In certain cases, social seclusion is pushed to the limit. Mr. Jean-Philippe Vergnon, President of the Association to Aid the Victims of Exclusive Brethren (AVIFE), explained that the Plymouth Brethren community, which he left, comprises a very closed circle of 1,250 people in France and that one belongs to it only by being born into it. According to his testimony, the members have the right to own neither television nor radio. They can read the newspaper except for the sporting pages, for only seven minutes and while standing up.

This community forbids its children to mingle with the other children or join their activities, even if, like Jehovah's Witnesses, the children can be educated at the State school, at least until the Third Year.

Access to outside life remains nevertheless very limited, as is seen in this answer to a question from the Reporter:

“Mr. Philippe VUILQUE, Reporter: How did the organization distrust education? Was there was a reconditioning after school? More specifically, did the group follow the children to prevent them from having too many contacts outside?

“Mr. Jean-Philippe VERGNON: In fact, one is always under surveillance: even at school one’s friends can report what one did during the day. At midday and in the evening as soon as the school finishes, somebody would come to look for us to take us home. Out-of-school activities

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and membership of a sports or cultural association are prohibited. One is not allowed to go to public libraries.”

Moreover, this witness added, “There are many moral punishments, the first stage of which is public confession. For example, if you are caught doing anything silly at school, which might be only eating a candy in the playground with a classmate, in the evening you would have to confess it in front of the assembly, i.e. in front of two hundred people.”

In reply to questions from the President George Fenech on psychological disorders diagnosed during her professional life, Ms Line N’Kaoua declared: “Generally, we see marginalized children, victims of a separation from the organisation. They do not take part in certain festivals. Certain Jehovah’s Witnesses throw away the Christmas balls when the teacher asks them to decorate the fir tree. Some refuse to take part in out-of-schools activities, because they must not compete.

“Certain children are in great suffering and express it by nightmares, by a rejection of the other relative, rejecting for example all the paternal side of the family if the father is not a member of the sect. ”

Only someone who has himself grown up among Jehovah’s Witnesses can give an account of the mental manipulation that prevents a child from joining in the games or festivals of other children. Mr. Nicolas Jaquette described before the board of inquiry in a particularly clear way this process of manipulation, depicting the suffering that results from it:

“Relationships with others are obviously elements to which the children are very sensitive, especially when it is a question of cementing these bonds at festivals which are such times of social cohesion. To give a good indication of the movement, they allow the children be close to others, but in a prescribed and very limited way. Among the most repeated messages: “You have friends in the congregation, don’t go and make any elsewhere.” [...] In same time, people outside are called “the world”, which all the Jehovah’s Witness literature says is evil, under the control of the Devil and destined to disappear. The demonisation applies to the little schoolmates, which one learns to distrust; [...] Festivals are a particularly painful subject for all the Jehovah’s Witness children, even if they are taught that it is not true: to see one after another all the midnight suppers of Christmas, New Year's Day and birthdays, without anything

happening but a normal day, to hear all the buddies the next day speaking about the presents they received [...] One learns to spout a whole series from slogans to justify yourself and especially to protect yourself from the pain which a child feels who is separated from the others by his circumstances: to be invited to a birthday and not able to go, not to be able to celebrate his own ... I do not even know how old my parents are: they have never celebrated a birthday. For everyone,

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this annual festival gives us an idea of how time passes for the others. Me, I do not have this concept, not even for close friends. That can appear banal, but when you think about it again, you realise that these completely deranged situations, added one to another, eventually form a terribly heavy baggage to carry..."

The mockeries that these constrained children have to suffer have been depicted both by Mr. Jean-Philippe Vergnon, who was formerly a young "Exclusive Brother" and by Mr. Nicolas Jacket, in answer to questions put by Mr. Serge Blisko, a Member of the Commission of Inquiry, which related to the reactions of society to the "strange" behavior or at the very least reserved behaviour of these children. Mr. Nicolas Jaquette described in these terms the phenomenon of mental influence which leads the child to the acceptance of his suffering: "The 'odd' behavior that the child is held to adopt towards his friends - refusal to celebrate birthdays, obligation to say the right things in conformity with the ideology of the sect - are obviously likely to cause mockery, which makes it all the more painful. When you reach adolescence, you already don't need to be a Jehovah's Witness to lay yourself open to criticism: but to dress out of fashion, to go preaching door-to-door in a suit and tie, not to go to birthdays and parties and outings, that has a big effect ... And as for the others who make fun of him, the Jehovah's Witness child is confirmed in his status as a victim by the sorts of ways the sect puts it: "The world persecutes you because you are one of the elect; just as Jesus was persecuted, you will be too; if you are persecuted at school, then you are with the truth." And that works very well: the child finds it normal to be persecuted, even if it is extremely painful and even unbearable."

To the question of the Commission of Inquiry: "Do you encourage the children to take part in activities that promote relationships with other children not belonging to your organization, or, on the contrary, do you consider it preferable to restrict such contacts?" the Christian Federation of French Jehovah's Witnesses did not reply. The mail dated October 18, 2006 sent by its president in response to this questionnaire is of a general nature and refrains from answering the questions point by point. It indicates in particular: "The terms of your questionnaire show that our fellowship is not relevant to your investigations". It mentions that "Jehovah's Witness parents entrust their children to educational establishments and put all possible effort into ensuring their full development and their social and professional integration".

The National Union of Plymouth Brethren considered itself irrelevant to the inquiry of the Commission, but having been accused by the testimony of Mr. Jean-Philippe Vergnon, it provided the following answer to the question about contacts with other children.

"The practice of Protestant Darbyite worship is compatible with the exercise of the civic and social life of the children of the faithful, who enjoy the attention of their parents,

without general restrictions being imposed on their relations with other children at school,

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with neither peculiarities nor exceptions to the permitted standards in France from the point of view of compliance with the Laws of the Republic. The faithful try to preserve their children of the dangers inherent in the use of drugs or activities that endanger health.”

In addition, your Reporter notes that the social seclusion of children living in these communities is seldom described, as several of the witnesses reported. They are integrated seemingly perfectly, particularly in class. The remarks made by Mr. Jean-Yves Dupuis, Inspector General of the administration of National Education, in response to the questions of Mr. Jean-Pierre Brard on the reaction of the authorities concerned, illustrate the perception of this phenomenon by National Education: “It is certain that the Academic Inspectors do not attempt to describe the cases of children in a state of mental distress at not being able take part in certain sporting or other activities.”

So the attention of the authorities are not drawn to their situation any more than to that of children living in very small communities, often difficult to locate.

A couple of ex-members of the community of Tabitha's Place provided the Commission of Inquiry with disturbing examples of the pressures exerted to prevent any access of their children to the outside world and to block contacts between children, including even other children within the community. Thus, these parents were requested, on their arrival in the community, to give up the toys their children had received at Christmas, because they frightened the others, some of whom, it seems, had never seen a doll. The children, whom it is ill-advised to allow to play freely are, on the other hand, involved in adult work (cleaning, maintenance of the garden, etc). Brought up within the community, they do not have links with the outside world and their opportunities for contacts are strictly supervised. Two children each accompanied by an adult can be punished if, when they meet, they speak to each other without it first having been authorized. In the same way, a young girl can be corrected for having spontaneously greeted her mother without the permission of the “teacher” accompanying her.

Still to come:

instillation of feelings of guilt

regulation of learning by correspondence courses

The lack of critical thinking as a result of social seclusion

“The establishment of a collection of beliefs held up as absolute truth, indisputable and unverifiable, leads a child to give up all critical thinking, all rationality. It is immersed continuously in the certainty of a single vision of the world. To deviate from this truth is to find oneself alone, abandoned by everyone, no longer subscribed as a member.”

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That is how Mrs. Sonya Jouglu expressed herself before the Commission of Inquiry in an attempt to identify “single vision” as one of the causes of psychological ill-treatments. Among these, she added the difficulty of achieving abstract reasoning, this “single vision” inhibiting the release of the child’s capacity for abstraction and promoting a sort of doublespeak. The child is indeed caught between two contradictory languages; the discrepancy between the two conceptual models of the world, that of a utopian fantasy universe as communicated inside the sect, and that of external reality, causes “compartmentalisation and permanent stress leading to a dazing, paralysing state of distress.”

Professor Philippe-Jean Parquet gave a report on the deficiencies suffered by a child in some sectarian organizations. They create in him a dysfunction in his understanding of the emotional world, “which will be presented to him in a black-and-white mode: this is good or this is bad”, because “there is no question of a sect considering things from several perspectives, with several possible scenarios”.

Mr. Jean-Michel Roulet pointed out that the Jehovah’s Witness children at home hear teachings that discredit the teaching they receive at school: “So these children are asked to learn and recite something they are told is untrue, something that is presented to them as a work of the devil. So they appear to be in an open learning environment, while in fact they are in a closed circle, while being obliged to act a part in a comedy. ”

These last remarks were illustrated by the testimony of Mr. Nicolas Jaquette concerning teaching as well as choice of reading material: “On entering school, the child is already preconditioned with the yardstick of the sect’s own teaching: any teaching that agrees with the sect’s teaching is acceptable, and any that does not is only an object of contempt. [...] The Jehovah’s Witness clearly understands that “if there is interesting external literature, you will be told, but do not decide for yourself to take an interest in it: spend more time studying to confirm your faith and to convert others too, look more deeply into your personal study, but do not look outside”.

“In fact, this carefully cultivated contempt for historians, scientists, the world of learning and the world of medicine, leaves the Jehovah’s Witness child completely immune to anything that can be taught at school: since anything that does not agree with the creed of the sect is not acceptable, it is false. So he will have a self-defence reflex and will block all absorption without even having any doubts in his own mind.

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This attack on the development of autonomous thought and critical thinking in the child can seriously retard his personal and social development. Mr. Emmanuel Jancovici quoted the case of this young member who, having followed a rather long therapy, realized for the first time in his life that he had started thinking. When he had left the group and was beginning to regain his liberty, he stored his thoughts in his computer to hide them. For him, thinking had become something forbidden and dangerous.

Mr. Emmanuel Jancovici stigmatized the process of mental manipulation which leads to the suppression of all capacity for reflection in the child: “You repeat the same thing ten times to a little six year old. The eleventh time, you congratulate him by saying he is very intelligent. It is a process of mental manipulation. The child gets the impression he has thought by himself something that was actually repeated to him ten times. In this

system, thought does not exist, thinking is impossible. It is very dangerous to mental health.”

Concerning an obstacle to the development of critical thinking, one could say, to use Mr. Emmanuel Jancovici’s expression, that is simply amounts to “the capacity of children to be alive”.

The solutions intended to support the development of the child’s critical thinking are, however, not obvious. To the questions of Mr. Jacques Myard, Member of the Commission of Inquiry, about the decisions likely to be made by the Children’s Judge, for example, to require parents themselves to instruct their children to take part in activities likely to take them out of their seclusion - Mr. Michel Huyette estimated that such solutions would be inappropriate: “It is not a question - forgive me for being a little abrupt - of doing a repair job on Sunday afternoon when from Monday morning until Friday evening, as I heard in the mouth of parents who belonged to Sahaja Yoga, it is repeated constantly to the children that the outside world is bad and harmful and that inside the sect is the only place where one is safe. Let us imagine that I force to them to reserve ten minutes every Saturday: that will not have any effect on their indoctrination. The only way that a child can achieve the citizenship that Mr. George Fenech spoke about it is to be permanently exposed to a plurality of opinions. [...]

“There must be constant contradiction. That is what being a citizen is about. It is a completely illusion and light-years from reality to imagine that an exit of a few hours at the weekend will compensate for a week’s seclusion. You have no idea of the doctrines conveyed by Sahaja Yoga or Tabitha's Place! ”

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The Characteristics of Mental Influence on the Children: Conditioning and Induction of Guilt

“It should be clearly understood that we are not dealing with a system that would let its followers think freely. It builds into them a mental mechanism that makes them feel guilty as soon as they think and which imposes on them, as a duty, the need to convince themselves.”

These remarks of Mr. Alain Berrou summarize perfectly the process of conditioning and induction of guilt, the victims of which are the children. He dissected its mechanism in front of the Commission of Inquiry: “All the mental apparatus, the system of concepts that you are made to assimilate, by which you think, by which you judge, by which you sometimes feel guilty, sometimes grateful, can collapse from one blow as soon as you disobey. The problem is that I was conditioned to obey, to feel guilty if I had suddenly thought of subversive ideas, and especially to practise several times per day these mental gymnastics of autopersuasion and self-censorship.”

Mr. Nicolas Jaquette explained that in addition “It is recommended that children of the sect spy on one another: if one finds oneself with other Jehovah’s Witness children in the same establishment, one will adapt one’s behavior according to the edicts of the sect, but also with an eye on one’s co-religionists so as not to be seen to have infringed the edicts of the sect. The child is thus permanently under the eye of Big Brother...” He also

broadly depicted the conditioning and the very heavy induction of guilt of the child in his proselytising activities. This “also induces a feeling of responsibility to evangelise, which is transmitted very early to the children: you take responsibility for the life of your comrades. Imagine that you know there will be an earthquake: if you do not warn anybody, you are a killer. In evangelism it is the same thing: you know that the world will disappear; if you do not save them so that they become Jehovah’s Witnesses to survive this condemned world, you bear the responsibility for their death. This responsibility is laid on the adult members, but equally on the children.”

In these movements, the outside world is systematically demonised and the children are taught to be wary of it. Mr. Henri de Cordes, President of the Belgian Center of Information and Opinion on the Harmful Sectarian Organizations (CIAOSN), cited the testimony of a journalist who, after having infiltrated, had managed to attend in a meeting of Scientology in Brussels, where she had heard the European governments described as the Fourth Reich and heard it declared that “We are at war”!

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The conditioning of the child is sometimes the subject of a very thorough verification. Mr. Roger Gonnet explained that the Scientology Church questioned all its followers at the end of a certain time, making them go through “Security checks” or “Confessions”; it is a question of confessing all one’s “exactions” and the children do not escape these checks. A questionnaire, heading “Security check children” - checking of safety for children - from 6 to 12 years - which the board of inquiry got, spelled out their intention. Its heading contains the following: “What follows is an interview to be used to check children. Make sure the child can understand the question. Rephrase it so that he or she can understand it. The first question is always the most powerful. ” (sic).

The wording of the first question is as follows: “What did somebody say to you not to tell? ” (sic). Follow this by questions like this: “Did you ever decide that you did not love a member of your family? Did you want something very badly, without ever saying anything to anyone? Did you refuse to obey an order coming from somebody you should have obeyed? Do you have a secret? Did you try to make others believe that your parents or your Masters were cruel to you? Did you lie to escape blame? Did you ever run away when you should have stayed where you were? ” etc

Conditioning and induction of guilt in the children of many sectarian movements can lead to serious psychological disorders, sometimes, in extreme cases, going as far as suicidal impulses. Mrs. Charline Delporte quoted several cases during her hearing. Mr. Nicolas Jaquette said he had lived until the age of twenty-two with a double personality: “I planned suicide many times to put an end to my suffering, it is so unbearable to see two profoundly antagonistic views of life clashing inside oneself”. Also, as Mr. Jean-Pierre Brard summed it up: “the children suffer [...] a conflict of loyalties. Schizophrenic children are made [...] and their suffering sometimes leads them to suicide. It is a real danger, which tends too often to be underestimated”.

The risk that exists when the teenager is still within a sect can become worse when he tries to leave. As a young female victim of a shamanic movement explained in camera to the Commission of Inquiry, the whole frame of reference on which the follower founded his existence collapses brutally and it is extremely difficult for him to reconsider all the years of certainty and conviction: “The major risk is simple: it is suicide. People must

find it very difficult to understand the state of extreme psychological fragility that follows the exit from a sectarian group; however, this state can easily lead to suicide.

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It is simple to understand as soon as you grasp the main technique of the guru, which is ambivalence. Ambivalence in his speech: one day he says white, the other day he says black. Ambivalence in his relation with you: one day he takes you into his arms, the next day he ignores you. Ambivalence in what he claims to be: one day he claims to be like everyone else, another day he says he is an initiate. To use this ambivalence, he creates in the other person a loss of reference marks, which causes a psychological and emotional imbalance.”

Without going to the extreme of suicidal temptation, the mental influence experienced in the sect can cause serious disorders of personality and behavior.

Fear of the position of parents is itself a source of such disorders. As Mr. Michel Duvette recalled: “One generally finds oneself in front of unqualified parents who do not have the inner resources to diagnose and plan appropriate therapy for their children and to agree the therapy with them. All these conditions combine to induce a dysfunction of the parent-child bond or attachment as has been described by many psychoanalytical or ethological authors. We know that these dysfunctions of the bond are important risk factors for psychological disorders of the child, especially psychosomatic disorders, disorders of training or behavior, and anxio-depressive signs. We also know that, directly or through these early disorders, these pathologies predispose to the later emergence of personality disorders, in particular deviant or antisocial personality, depressive pathologies and behavioral problems.”

Insisting on the psychological after-effects in the child victims of sects, Mrs. Sonya Jouglia showed that the projection of the sect on the child is in conflict with “the societal model”, the utopian projection of the sect overriding the interests of the child. But “even when there is no physical ill-treatment, there is always psychological ill-treatment; all children of sects are children in danger”.

[Then there is a long section on physical violence, which I don't intend to translate, except for one good quotation from M. Emmanuel Jancovici, who said, “From the moment it is a closed system, every sect is dangerous.”

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Attacks on Family Life

Social seclusion is often made generally worse by family seclusion. Indeed, if the parents belong to a sect this has many effects on the family life of their children. These effects were often referred to by the people auditioned.

The most immediate effect of this family seclusion is that the time devoted by the parents to the activities of these organizations is no longer available for the children. For some of them, the loss of family time is paralleled by the loss of family money because the family budget is cut by the money taken by the sect.

The deterioration of the parent-child bond was also strongly denounced before the Commission of Inquiry. The parents are often led to give up part or all of their parental role to the leader or leaders of the sect. Certain organizations are thus based on treating the parents like children, or on overestimating the spiritual and cognitive capacities of the children. Such a system reverses the relationships between generations. Mr. Michel Duvette stressed that these various aspects can deeply disturb the parent-child relationship, either in the direction of abandonment or in the direction of a too great involvement, pointing out that “these two apparently opposite trends have in common that they leave little room to cater for the peculiar spiritual and physical needs of the child, the educational principles of the sect overruling the educational initiatives of the parents”.

The board of inquiry wondered about the reasons why certain organizations are particularly interested in children. Thus the case was brought up of the Soka Gakkai organisation, which, in June 1999 in the Île-de-France held a meeting of nearly 700 children and their parents on the topic: “Children have the capacity to change the world”. Asked about the reasons of this interest in children who, by definition, do not have a vested interest, a witness explained in camera that the children represent the perpetuation of the movement: there is such willpower, in every sense of the term, that the children are influenced from their earliest age “to hold” their parents, to whom it is explained that they should at all costs not stop practising “because their children are there to change the world: they are the Buddhas of the future”. For her part, Mrs Line Kaoua declared during his hearing, “The family is of great importance to the sect, insofar as it is a means of transmission of sectarian doctrines. The proof that I need for that is the Soka Gakkai movement”.

In answer to the questionnaire from the Commission of Inquiry and specifically to the question: “What is distinctive about your

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views on the education of children? ” Soka Gakkai considered that they did not have any specific peculiarities in this field.

Mrs. Sonya Jougla explained “that it is extremely difficult to undertake psychotherapy of a child who is immersed in a sect and has at least one parent who is a member. The difficulty is worsened when the father or the mother is actually the guru of the sect. The spiritual heritage which then bears on the child, and his love and devotion to his guru parent block the possibility of establishing a therapeutic rapport or introducing a third-party mediator. The child denies having lived a traumatic life, so that he can continue to live with the source of influence, who is for him all-powerful, on whom he depends and whom he loves”.

On the other hand, the deterioration of the parent-child bond can result in separation or estrangement. The extreme case is that of the children being sent abroad by their parents or even by the guru “to be educated” in a sect. On this point, Mrs. Catherine Picard, President of the National Union of Associations for Defense of Families and the Individual (UNADFI) reminded us of the declarations of Sri Mataji, the “Mother” of the Sahaja Yoga Group:

“Anyone can produce an offspring - even a dog can produce an offspring [...]. Also to create a child is no big deal ... what you have to do is recognise that you have a child, you are just in charge of it, just as you are in charge of all the children of Sahaja Yogi, not just your own [...] If you say my children are no use to you, it is not true: they will completely captivate you [...] At first you gave up your family, gave up your children, gave up everything, you came the whole way; now you are going back. [...] What we understand is that our relations and our identities must be completely abandoned”. And further: “For the first five years, all parents must be extremely strict with their children. [...] If the child tries to take liberties with you and if he is shameless and does not listen, please give the child to some other Sahaja Yogi”. “Then give the child to someone else, another woman then deals with the child, and the child becomes the property of everyone, not your property”. [...] “You must just achieve your task as if you were an agent of the child, and only an agent. But you should not become attached to him: that is my job, you must leave him to me. [...] These children are mine, not yours. ”

On 7th March 2005, the Belgian Centre for Advice and Information on Harmful Sectarian Organizations (CIAOSN) gave its opinion on Sahaja Yoga, specifying that the parents are encouraged to place their children from the earliest age in a boarding school of the organization, in the nursery school in Rome starting from 4 years, and in India for primary and secondary education starting from 6 years. It was noted that geographical and emotional separation of young children

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from their parents for long uninterrupted periods (in Rome, two quarters per annum; in India, up to nine months per annum) puts these children in a situation that is a risk to their personal development.

Having received the questionnaire from the Commission of Inquiry, which contained a question relating to sending children abroad to be educated in establishments belonging to, or not belonging to the organization, Sahaja Yoga abstained from giving any answer.

To the letter sent by the Commission of Inquiry to find out if any French children were currently in India to be educated in ashrams or sectarian organizations, the Ambassador of France in India replied: “According to our register, no family or individual appears to come into this category, bearing in mind that families within the scope of your investigation, associated with a sect in India, seldom make themselves known to our consular services”.

Your Reporter wishes firmly to point out that if unaccompanied minors sent abroad are in fact seldom made known to the Consular Services, they must not on that account be excluded from their protection. Mrs. Françoise Bihan, Assistant Director of French Services Abroad at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said herself, “Our service is responsible for everything relating to the consular protection of French citizens abroad, which includes children”. However, she emphasised, “We have to start from a description: we can’t make a tour of every residence in the world”. Given that if her Ministry were provided with such a description it would be sent out to the consulates, she added, “If I, as a Consul, received a description from my Management, my first thought would be to contact competent local organizations to carry out a survey to check if the child is being educated, is well treated, and is in good health”. Your Reporter having questioned her on whether the Ministry made the Consuls sensitive to this

problem, Mrs. Francoise Bihan gave the opinion, “That is a matter of general training. Before going to take up his post, each of them knows that he must provide protection and assistance to French nationals abroad, and he takes that obligation with him.”

Also, sectarian influences aggravate any family conflicts, the first victims of which are always the children. As Ms Line Kaoua summarizes it, “If they are not protected by law, children are crushed by the sect. The sect, with total impunity, breaks up families, separates couples and destroys children”.

According to Mrs. Sonya Jougla, “In the event of divorce, one of the parents can use the sect as an excuse to obtain custody of a child. But it is

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very rare. On the other hand, a parent who is a member of a sect, if he has custody of the child, will inevitably immerse the child in the sect and will raise it according to its principles. Giving custody to this parent creates problems.”

However, it is impossible - many lawyers auditioned by the Commission of Inquiry agreed on this point - to draw the slightest legal conclusion from the mere fact that a family belongs to a sect, even when everyone would recognise it as such. The judge must find out if the child is exposed or would be exposed to physical or psychological danger with the parent who is a member of a sect, who is claiming custody, and he must examine the child’s circumstances of daily life.

The parents who were involved in marital conflicts, and who were auditioned by the Commission of Inquiry, all emphasised that the sectarian problem made it more difficult to resolve their conflict, thus aggravating the suffering of the children. Also, as was pointed out by Mr. Michel Gilbert, the magistrates “who are not close to these sufferings on a daily basis will find it difficult to understand them. Very often, if someone comes to speak to them about abuse or oppression of children, they will take him for an eccentric” [...] When a sectarian organization takes away your child, your grandchild, your wife, your partner, you very quickly find yourself completely destitute, while confronted by a well structured organization which [...] is not short of good lawyers. What can a father do in front of a Family Judge, when faced by a well prepared lawyer who will do anything to promote the interests of the sectarian organization [...] ? ”

Ms Line Kaoua confirmed the difficulties that beset the path of the parent who is not a member of the sect in the event of divorce proceedings. It consists of an oral debate, but the lawyer’s speaking time is limited, because of the great number of cases that the magistrates have to deal with during the same session. The lawyer of the parent who would wish to withdraw his child from the sectarian influence must therefore, in the shortest possible time, expose the doctrines of the sect, often ignored by the judges, and demonstrate the harmful consequences of the other parent’s religion on the physical or psychological health of the child. On the other side, she emphasised, “the lawyers of the sects are very well prepared and well paid, often by the sect. They know how these hearings operate and will use up a third of the time by raising questions of incompetences, points of order and requests for reference, with the result that the lawyer of the opposing party will have very little time left.” Added to these difficulties is the fact that the child himself, if he is under the influence of the parent in the sect, will not clearly express a wish to live with the parent who is a non-member.

Sectarian seclusion also causes isolation of the child from other members of his family, starting with the grandparents. Admittedly, article 371-4 of the civil code provides that “The child has the right to maintain personal relations with his ancestors. Only grave considerations can create an obstacle to this right.” However, when even one of the parents is a member of a sect, this right to maintain a relationship with the grandparents is very often ignored, the aim of the organization being effectively to isolate the followers, to break their family ties and friendships so as to be able to manipulate them more easily. The grandchildren suffer the seclusion of their parents, and the grandparents hesitate to take legal action, which would probably alienate their children completely. The obstacle becomes almost insurmountable in cases like those quoted by Mrs. Claude Delpuch, President of the AFSI Association (Alert to False Induced Memories), i.e. in a hypothetical case in which the grandparents have children who, under the influence of mental manipulation, come to make false but very serious allegations against them. To invoke Article 371-4 of the Civil Code before a judge then becomes likely to fail.

“This is how a barrier is set up that becomes insuperable, the Judge of Family Affairs or the Children’s Judge being reluctant to grant a right of access to grandparents whose own children have already accused them of incest. In these cases of family breakup, the grandchildren become a means of exerting pressure on the grandparents. As soon as the latter engage in judicial action, their children use their accusations to explain why they do not want their own children to see their grandparents any more.”

As Mrs. Claude Delpuch put it, it would then be necessary to find a means, not to circumvent justice, but to intervene so that the grandparents can be heard directly and quickly by the judge. If they must await the outcome of a legal procedure which can last several years, the bond with their grandchildren will have become so strained that the latter will not want to see their grandparents any more.

Mrs. Françoise Andro-Cohen, a magistrate responsible for forming the National School of the Magistrature, reminded us that juridically the grandparents have no direct access to the Children’s Judge. They must make representations to the Public Prosecutor who, himself, has access to the Children’s Judge. Most of the time, when the grandparents write directly to the juvenile court, their mail is sent to the Public Prosecutor, who can then formalize *sa sine* [execution of a court order] by a direct request to the Children’s Judge.

Mr. Jean-Olivier Viout, the Prosecutor General attached to the Court of Appeal of Lyon, stressed that it is indeed the Children’s Judge who has the ultimate responsibility to ensure the protection of the minor by applying Article 375 of the Civil Code, which provides that “if the health, the safety or the morality of a minor

are in danger, or if his education is seriously compromised, measures to assist his education can be ordered by the Judge at the request of the father and mother jointly, or of one of them, or of the person or the service to which the child has been entrusted, or of the tutor, or the minor himself or the government ministry”. This same article adds that the judge, in exceptional circumstances, can take the initiative.

Consequently, in the opinion of Mr. Jean-Olivier Viout, it falls to the public ministry to play a major role in the matter and in particular to remedy an omission in article 375, namely the role of the grandparents. In fact, although a tutor can demand justice, the grandparents are completely forgotten in this article, which predates the law of 4th March 2002, from which was derived Article 371-4, which enshrines the right of the child to maintain personal relationships with his ancestors. And Mr. Viout, in conclusion, said, “Thus it is not unusual that the public ministry is buttonholed by grandparents who not only express their concern not to have contacts with their grandchildren any more, but explain this severance of contact by the fact that the parents made them join a sect to which they themselves belong. So I think Article 375 would deserve an extension to allow grandparents to have direct access to the Children’s Judge to enforce their rights.”

It seems paradoxical indeed to give grandparents the legal right to maintain links with their grandchildren, while not allowing them to have direct access to the judge, when the grandchildren seem to them to be in danger, for example, when they live in a sectarian type of seclusion. **The Commission of Inquiry thus proposes that article 375 of the Civil Code be modified, to give grandparents the right of direct access to the Children’s Judge.**

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The Control of Remote Teaching

Under article L. 444-1 of the code of education, “Remote Teaching is teaching that does not involve the physical presence of the Teacher in charge of dispensing it at the place where it is

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received, or not comprising such a presence except on an occasional basis for certain exercises”. Under the terms of article L. 444-2, the creation of private organizations for remote teaching must be declared.

The National Centre for Remote Teaching (CNED) is a publicly owned establishment that dispenses teaching of this type. Its organization and its operation are governed by decree n° 2002-602 of April 25, 2002. According to the figures provided by National Education to the Board of Inquiry, 112,209 children, of whom 103,806 are in the Metropolis, follow courses of this establishment, for primary and secondary education. This figure however, must be seen in perspective, because it includes a great number of courses that are supplementary to attendance at a school, and which include only one subject.

The design of the courses and the exercises conform with the official programmes and are validated by qualified teachers of National Education. The correction of the pupils’ exercises and remote support are provided by National Education teachers, the number of teachers employed being estimated at 4,400. To the 112,209 pupils of the CNED, we

must also add 600 children dependent on private remote teaching, according to estimates of National Education.

However, as was acknowledged by the inspector of the administration of National Education, who is a member of the team in charge of the prevention of sectarian phenomena in education: “As far as remote teaching is concerned, we control almost nothing. [...] If we do not control remote teaching, it is primarily because of a lack of means. As far as CNED is concerned, we do not have any controlling to do: it is a publicly owned establishment that delivers teaching perfectly in conformity with the programs of National Education.

“On the other hand, private remote teaching has an extremely distinct ideology. It inevitably does not respect our programmes, and even says very openly that certain parts of our programmes are not taught, in particular in biology programs.”

The National Education services made this criticism, for example, about the correspondence courses of “Le Chêne” which is open to the children of Plymouth Brethren, in which the use of computers would be voluntarily omitted and where the teaching of sciences would be given an approach denying, for example, essential scientific topics, like those of evolution.

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In the section on recommendations

Penalise the social seclusion of minors

By supplementing the “About-Picard” legal device (Article 223-15-2 of the Penal Code) relating to the abuse of weakness, it is a matter of penalising the social seclusion of a minor. The isolation of a child in a sect goes against the stipulations of the International Convention of the Rights of the Child and the provisions of the Code of Education which gives education the duty of care to develop the personality of the child, to help him to take his place in society and to allow the exercise of his citizenship.