



Acts of the conference

Systematic abuse in cults: testimonies and evidence

Saturday 7 May 2011

Kilinskiego hall of the Polish Craft Association (Związek Rzemiosła Polskiego)
Ul. Miodowa 14, 00-246 Warsaw



organized by the
European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism
(FECRIS)
and
Ruch Obrony Rodziny i Jednostki ¹ (RORIJ)
and sponsored by the
College of Education and Administration in Poznań
and the
French Government

¹ Association for the Defence of the Family and the Individual

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² The Private Army of Saddam Hussein (2003) (<http://www.iran-interlink.org>). How Rajavi changed Iran's Mojahedin from armed revolutionaries to an armed cult.

³ The Mojahedin Khalq cult (MKO, MEK, NCRI, Rajavi),

⁴ Cult of Robert Le Dinh alias Tang, French cult. Guru condemned in September 2010 to 15 years imprisonment (rape and sexual aggression)

Outline of the situation of the cult problem in Poland

Dariusz Hryciuk, MA, Centre for the Prevention of Psycho-manipulation, Lublin.

We are living in an epoch of significant transformation in the mentality of many people. It is a time of numerous worldview changes, from the transformation of hierarchy of values to the search for alternative modes of salvation. We are witnessing a serious crisis of faith and a deep spiritual thirst, which the contemporary man tries to satiate by the plethora of available means. Traditional forms of worship have lost their appeal to the contemporary audience, oriented rather towards swift results and powerful sensations. Hence the quest for new religious stimuli.

Also in Poland, starting from the political transformation by the end of 1980s, we can observe both the decline of the Catholic church's monopoly and the welcome offered to new religious movements. In a nutshell, the problem of sects in Poland can be defined as relevant and visible, yet not dramatic. It must be objectively admitted that new religious movements do not experience legal difficulties at the stage of their registration in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration. The freedom of religious denomination is guaranteed constitutionally (article 25 and 53) as well as by the bill of "warranties of the freedom of conscience and religious denomination", of May, 1989. The latter allows for registration with a minimum quota of just 15 followers.

The amendment of June, 1997 obliged new religious movements to refer in their doctrines to God. The goals of such organizations should be purely religious. At present, the right to apply for registration requires the minimum quota of 100 Polish citizens with full capacity to enter into legal transactions, while their signatures under the application have to be confirmed by a notary. In practice, only already formed religious associations with some history are registered. Impromptu founded organizations today have no chance of registration. And, last but not least, should the activity performed by a religious union be in contradiction with the law or the constitution, the above being confirmed by a valid judgment, such a group will be deleted from the register.

In the years 1990-2002 there were a total of 153 decisions concerning registering churches and other religious unions, as well as 49 refusals of the above. In legal practice, a certain change of strategy can be noticed at that point. Until 1992 all religious movements that applied for registration were automatically registered. It was only since 1993 that the applications were examined in more detail. At that time, a controversial cult founded in South Korea by Moon, called the Unification Church, was registered. Let me remind you here that in 1995, Moon was a guest in Poland, providing a speech in the Congress Hall (Sala Kongresowa). Members of the Moon sect were attempting registration before 1989 but because of their association with numerous international scams, the authorities of the People's Polish Republic refused. The regulations of the liberal act legalizing new religious groups did not require the groups to be in existence already or to have already had some tradition. Also, the authenticity of the founding list was not verified. Additionally, various privileges were guaranteed to new religious denominations, referring mainly to financial, tax and duty areas. The church as a legal entity was exempt from all income tax. What's more, it was exempted from custom's fees for gifts imported from abroad, intended for worship, charity and educational goals. The lack of clear definition of „gift” and the impossibility of checking the authenticity of donations caused important abuse and fraud. I will quote an example of a pseudo-religious group called the Church of United Christians, founded by Zbigniew Szczesiul, a thief who aimed to set up his own church and make significant money in the process. The foundation group list was obviously forged. He promptly formulated a primitive religious doctrine and a statute whereof he guaranteed for himself the position of bishop. His activity began by constituting a fictitious seminar and order. Later on, he issued certificates of studies in such a seminar aimed

to enable avoiding the army draft. He issued at the time about 60 false certificates. Next, Zbigniew Szczesiul imported goods required for alleged charity purposes; i.e. 30 tons of chocolate from Germany. He evaded paying a very high custom duty. Similarly he managed another scam, this time with a huge amount of champagne. He declared that it was, quote: “sparkling wine for worship purposes”. His activity exposed the State Treasury to serious loss. When finally arrested and sentenced to 4 years of prison, he told the press that he was proud of himself, adding that after leaving prison he intended to set up another church.

The case of the Church of United Christians was not the only one that drew public attention. At the end of 1990s, a term “car churches” emerged, meaning pseudo-religious groups set up in order to enable duty-free import of cars from Western Europe. The car churches included: the Christian Church of Advocates of the Good News and the Church of Polish Remonstrants.

Statistical data indicates, that in our country there are about 300 religious movements. They can be divided into several of the following categories:

1. Originating from one of the great world religions, often Christianity, Buddhism or Hinduism, much less often from Islam or Judaism.
2. Originating from the New Age movement, with a focus on heightening human mind potential and touch healing techniques, referring to occult cosmic powers.
3. Neo-pagan, referring to old-Slavonic traditions and forgotten pagan cults.
4. Ufological, referring to the faith in the existence of extra-terrestrial beings.
5. Satanist, focused on worshipping evil as well as developing occultist and esoteric techniques.
6. Based on private revelation, formed as an outcome of activities performed by charismatic individuals allegedly undergoing powerful mystical experiences. Economy-based, declaring help in attaining financial success.
7. Therapeutic, based on the faith that there are ways of restoring health other than medicine.

The most numerous sects that are currently active in Poland include:

- Jehovah's Witnesses – about 127 thousand members
- Seventh Day Adventists – about 10 thousand members
- Buddhist Diamond Way Association – 5 thousand devotees
- Church of Free Christians – 3 thousand devotees
- God's Church in Christ – 3 thousand devotees
- Mormons – about 1.5 thousand devotees
- International Krishna Consciousness Association – about one thousand members

The cult Niebo (Heaven) has left a particularly negative reflection in Poland's cult history. Its founder, Bogdan Kacmajor, assembled a group of fifteen or so people, on his property near Lublin. He talked them into believing that he possessed a gift of healing. His followers lived their lives sharing possessions, obliged to total subordination to Kacmajor, who decided about cult's members' marriages and sexual life. Women were to obey their husbands and give birth to children. The marriage ceremonies were performed by the followers themselves. Vegetarian diet was mandatory to all members. Refraining from sending kids to school, severing ties with society, shunning military service, avoiding registering newborn babies, ban on using medical services as well as the reports about kidnapping and holding children captive was the reason why the authorities, media and anti-cult movements became interested in the matter. It was the latter who defined the group as “destructive”. The cult derived its profit mainly from the healing activities performed by its founder. Bad fame however, caused customer outflow, financial downfall and disintegration of that destructive group.

In Poland, during the last decade, the increase in popularity among the organizations based on New Age philosophy becomes noticeable. First of all, they are small groups drawn together by common interests. They do not register their activity legally. The time of their functioning is relatively short, and after their disintegration they are replaced by others. Their members focus on perfecting meditation techniques derived from Hinduism and Buddhism. Additionally, those techniques are modified and extended by other elements.

This is possible because religious views of Poles show deep inconsistency and selectivity. According to analyses conducted by the Public Opinion Polls Centre dating for the year 2005, 53% of Poles think that there is no objective dimension of good and evil, and that the norm of behaviour is defined by circumstances. The significant part of our society willingly accepts elements of New Age philosophy. According to the research, 34% of Poles believe in reincarnation, 83% view all religions as equal and are convinced that each of them leads to God, 64% allow that some people have the possibility of foreseeing future events, and 25% believe in UFO. All this draws Poles to join cults, despite the people of Poland being, theoretically, 93% Catholic.

Scientology is an example of a destructive cult, which in the recent years, attempted entering the Polish scene several times. In the 90s the cult was hardly mentioned. The topic became hot in 1999, when a German of Polish descent, Andreas Kazimierczak came to Poland, organized a scientology seminar under the guise of an engineering office and began the sale of "Dianetics". After several unfavourable reviews in the press he closed his business. This was, however, only the first uneasy attempt. At present, scientologists are trying to settle down in Poland again. In 2007, the press widely commented Hanna Grabalska, considered the major scientology representative in Poland. She was an activist of one of the main Polish political parties. She is also the leader of the Society for Supporting Women in the Grodzisk powiat, in the town of Grodzisk Mazowiecki. Before, she ran the National Centre for Humanitarian Volunteers, which held courses in Warsaw of interpersonal communication, drug addiction coping and dealing with learning difficulties. In press interviews, she admitted openly that by that activity she was purposefully propagating the philosophy of scientology. In one of such interviews in 2007 she confessed the following: "We organize courses training people how to cope in marriage, how to offer proper upbringing for kids so they could grow up to be worthwhile people, and also, how to rid oneself of compulsive behaviour. All that, is based on the mind."

The suggestions of such courses reached a group of teachers from the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodship. They were encouraged to incorporate the scientology doctrine into the process of children's education.

In 2009 the scientologists were promoting literature. Nearly 4 thousand of Hubbard's books found their way into the Polish libraries. Those books entered, among others, into the Warsaw University or the Catholic University of Lublin.

In 2007 at a press conference, the then Commander in Chief of the police, Konrad Kornatowski, pointed out the increase of cult activity in Poland. Among the initiatives undertaken in order to counteract this pathology, police started cooperating with the Dominican Centres of Information about Cults. Additionally, at the level of the Voivodship police headquarters, special officers were designated, to coordinate and supervise events connected with the activity of cults in their respective territories.

Let me now proceed and present in a bit more detail the most threatening cult active nowadays in Poland. I mean - the Monastic Brotherhood Himavanti. Without any doubt, I can define that group as destructive or even criminal. Yet, I decided to present you at that point neither with the history of the cult nor with the stages of its activity. Instead, I will tell the story of the man who, for almost 15 years, has fought an open war with the cult's leader, Ryszard Matuszewski,. This man is Dariusz Pietrek, head of the Silesian Centre of Information about Cults, from Katowice.

His first contact with the Himavanti cult took place in 1997. A letter reached him, signed by the International Order of Knights of Holy War, stating that he would be, in no simpler terms, murdered. After some months Pietrek learned from the media who was the author of the letter; the leader of the Monastic Brotherhood Himavanti, Ryszard Matuszewski. For that letter, as well as for the threats of bomb attacks at the Catholic Church worship centres, Ryszard Matuszewski was sentenced to a suspended six months' sentence.

At that time, Dariusz Pietrek becomes one of leading anti-cult activists in Poland. Suffice it to say, that since March 1999 he cooperated with Central Investigation Office, in reference to a brutal murder performed on the grounds of Satanism in Ruda Slaska. The crime, performed by two men, less than 20 years of age, shocked public opinion not only in the area of Silesian voivodship. They organized a satanistic ritual in a bunker on the territory of Ruda Slaska where they murdered their friends: Kamil and Karina, stabbing them fifteen or so times with a knife. In such a way they were supposed to make an offering to Satan. A year later the Court sentenced one of the culprits to life sentence and the other to 25 years prison.

In June 2002 the members of the Himavanti cult started a pre-planned campaign against Dariusz Pietrek. Posters appeared on the streets of Gliwice, defaming his good name and suggesting that he was a paedophile. Later on, it turned out that Himavanti fights in that manner with anybody who has courage to oppose them. Including him, there was a total of 15 wronged persons, both ex-members of the cult and ones dealing with cults professionally. One of the cult ex-members' flat was set on fire three times. The case arrived before the courts, it was however soon redeemed because of the sickness of the accused.

In November 2005, Pietrek again finds on his front door a poster stating that he is a dangerous pedophile. On the poster there are addresses – the home address, the work address and the address to KANA (the Catholic Centre of Youth Education) on the grounds of which Pietrek was running the Silesian Centre of Information about Sects. In his home city about 15 such insulting posters were hung.

Simultaneously, postcards with obscene content would arrive by mail as well as mail parcels containing excrements.

At that time Dariusz Pietrek with a journalist who wrote for a newspaper, were accused by Matuszewski of assailing him and attempting murder. The accusation was obviously false. It was just one more step in the process of attacking the head of Silesian Centre of Information about Cults. After a short investigation the Police and the Public Prosecution Office, dismissed the charge.

In 2005 on the territory of Katowice, the next insulting posters appeared, now stating, that Pietrek was a member of the fascist organization, called *Blood and Honour*. At the same time, a leaflet by one of the female members of the sect was published stating that the police, the Prosecution Office and, of course, Dariusz Pietrek himself, raided the seat of Himavanti Brotherhood. As the addresses and names of police officers and other people were provided, the Public Prosecution Office in Zabrze instituted an investigation. The court decided that Ryszard Matuszewski is insane, sending him for compulsory psychiatric treatment, which he left after some months.

Before the court case, leaflets slandering Pietrek appeared behind car wipers one more time. They stated that he was a paedophile and a Nazi.

In the years 2007-2008, abstract legal actions were instituted against Dariusz, needless to say – all false. They were directed to Public Prosecution Offices all around Poland. Himavanti members didn't expect to win those cases, the idea was only to slander Pietrek.

At that time Dariusz was receiving threats proposing to kill him and his family. What's more, on the walls of his home city, insulting murals appeared on which his good name was defamed, and he himself was accused of the worst of crimes, among others of being a fascist and a paedophile.

The latest information of just couple of weeks ago has it, that Himavanti members are preparing another campaign against Pietrek. Namely, the Public Prosecution Office in Torun, and also in Warsaw, were contacted by fabricated reports about a crime being committed by Radio Mary (Radio Maryja). The crimes are supposedly connected with insulting the Jewish nation and spreading racial hatred. These report which were blatantly false accused Dariusz Pietrek of being the author of these reports. Pietrek pleaded that he knew nothing of such reports, that he was not a listener of RM and that his signature was a fake.

The problems described above with the Himavanti cult, even though they most painfully touched Dariusz Pietrek, extend also to other centres. Let it be enough to mention that in Lublin, the city I come from, insulting murals addressed to me and to the former coordinator of the Centre for Counteracting Psycho manipulation, Pawel Krolak, also appeared several years ago.

It is clear then, that the issue of cults in Poland, is visible. We need not worry however, as there are also effective counter-balances to destructive groups: the cult information centres acting on the territory of the whole country.

Psycho-manipulative influence as a form of abuse in cults: theory and research *Synopsis*

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The topic of psycho-manipulative influence is unquestionably one of the biggest problems experienced by people who have been abused by cultic groups. People can join cultic groups for various reasons. In some cases their decision is based on free choice, but in others it may be a result of a group manipulative influence which applies psychological persuasion. Analyzing psycho-manipulation in the context of cultic groups, many authors point out that psycho-manipulative processes are at the centre of cults' activities leading to abuse and mental harm (Abgrall, 2005; Gardiner, 2009; Krok, 2007). The awareness of these processes and ability to defend ourselves against manipulative techniques appear to be very important in contemporary world.

The aim of the paper is to present psycho-manipulative influence as a form of abuse in cults on a basis of theory and empirical results. Firstly, three main persuasion categories used by cults were identified and described: (1) personal proofs, (2) logical proofs, and (3) emotional proofs. In terms of power, people give more credence to those whom they regard as competent and credible. For that reason, cultic group leaders can use respect for authority figures and trustworthiness as a strategy to make members adopt certain values and behaviour. Cultic groups' leaders often tailor their messages to their recipients so as to obtain the most favourable attitude response from the message receivers. Emotional appeals are considered to be effective in persuasive influence, because they play a significant role in attitude change processes (Taute, Huhmann, Thakur, 2010). In order to manipulate people cults present messages that induce fear, e.g., by making predictions about the end of the world and declaring that the only way to save one's life is a total dedication to the group's teachings. Another example of emotional proofs is using scarcity. A cultic group may deceive someone by saying that there is a limited number of individuals who gain access to paradise and that only those who accept truth promoted by the leader will be admitted.

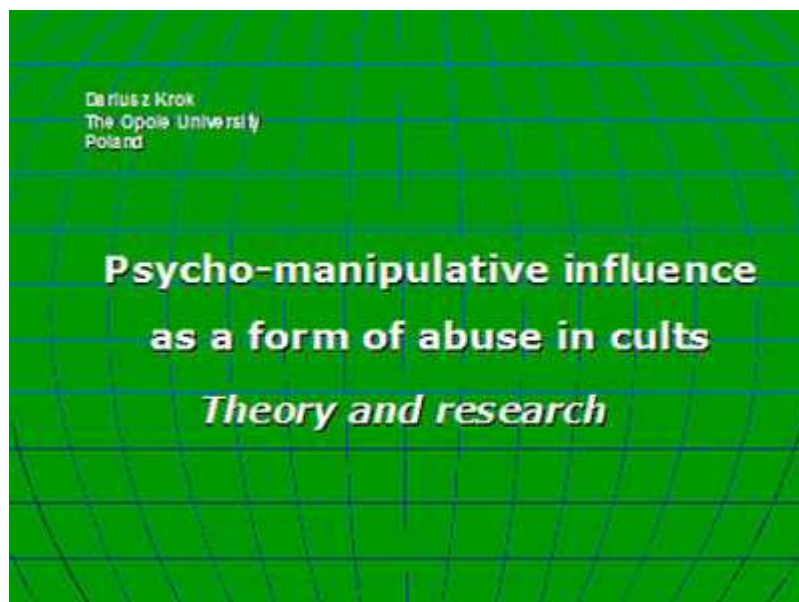
The second part of this paper demonstrates results of research carried out on manipulative strategies (existential, cultural-religious, protective) characteristic of cultic groups in the presence or absence of forewarning which is understood as revealing the group's true identity.

The findings showed that the most negative effects were found under the protective strategy, and the least negative effects occurred when the existential strategy was presented. Forewarning used in the form of revealing the group's identity caused more negative cognitive processes and attitudes towards the message and speaker (Krok, 2009).

The conclusions drawn on a basis of presented findings have significant implications for helping victims. Because the process of psychological abuse is done to victims, they should come to understand the psychological techniques that enabled the victimizer to abuse the victims' mind, autonomy, and identity. Practitioners working in the field of cultic abuse will receive practical tools that enable them work more effectively with people affected by cultic groups' manipulation.

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Plan

1. Persuasive manipulative influence in cults.
2. Techniques of manipulation in cultic groups.
3. Research in psycho-manipulation used by cults.

Two forms of influence

- Persuasion that happens in various social situations can take two different forms: positive and negative.



- The first form refers to interventions in such areas of human life as health, education, marketing, social advertisements etc.
- This persuasion tries to obey **ethical rules**.
- It consists in presenting certain sorts of information in order to change people's attitudes.



- The second is found in psychological manipulation, brainwashing, propaganda and can be used by cultic groups.
- It often violates human freedom and dignity by presenting false information or using means which distort recipients' thinking.



Manipulation in social context

- The modern research in the field of persuasion reveals a number of persuasive mechanisms which are tailored to change people's thinking and emotions so that they can affect behaviour.
- Some of the mechanisms tend to activate cognitive processes while others try to change individuals' attitudes through emotional influence.
- Various forms of both cognitive and emotional mechanisms can be used by coercive groups with the aim of manipulating and deceiving people.

Manipulation and cults

- In manipulation cultic groups often use information which is supposed to make a strong impact on recruits' thinking, emotions, and behaviour.
- This assertion is very important as theoretical analyses and results of empirical research provide evidence that persuasion in religious and moral communication plays an important role in changing and forming attitudes, especially those which are relevant to individuals' religious life (Buechler, 2008; Nowakowski, 2007; Pratkanis, 2010).

Two distinctive features of persuasive manipulation used by cults according to Abgrall (Abgrall 2005).

- 1) The members apply **sophistic arguments** trying to persuade people through ambiguous and unclear statements.
The main goal is to introduce uncertainty and hesitation in people's mind which entails making quick and false decisions.
- 2) Information presented by the members is based on **feelings and emotions**, not on rational and sensible reasoning.
They do not want to prove anything. Their real intentions are hidden and the main goal is to arise strong emotions which reduce logical thinking. It enables the members to tell lies and present a false reality as true and credible.

- „We human being are capable of doing some very strange things and believing some very weird beliefs“ (A.R. Pratkanis, in: *Critical thinking in psychology*, Cambridge 2006).

- Some examples:

In 1997, 36 men and women of a California group known as Heaven's Gate dressed in purple shrouds, black trousers and black tennis shoes and killed themselves to board a UFO tailing the comet Hale-Boop.

In 1995, members of Aum Supreme Truth placed bags of leaking sarin gas in the Tokyo subway system, killing 12 people and injuring more than 5,500.

- David Koresh was the man responsible for the confused siege and arson of his religious compound outside of Waco, Texas in 1993.
- The fire killed Koresh and 74 followers, including 21 children.



Persuasive manipulation by peripheral route

- In **cultic groups** people can be influenced by processes that occur in *the peripheral route of persuasion*. It entails attitude change that happens when there is a minimal cognitive elaboration of a message, and then people tend not to carefully scrutinize arguments presented to them.
- The relatively low amount of thinking is involved and people act in a less diligent fashion, preferring conclusions made on a superficial basis.
- In this mental state people do not think too much, but rely on quick mental short-cuts.

- By **using peripheral mechanisms** cultic groups can easily take advantage of people persuading them to follow unreasonable rules and make irrational decisions.
- A **lack of objective thinking** creates dangerous situations in which people can experience:
 - psychological abuse,
 - brainwashing,
 - negative emotional states.

Two distinctive features of persuasive manipulation used by cultic groups:

- **APPEAL TO THE MIND** – members apply sophistic arguments trying to persuade people through logical means.



- **APPEAL TO THE HEART** – information presented by the members are based on feelings and emotions, not on rational and sensible



Examples of using logical proofs

1) **Number of persuasive arguments** - the greater is the number, the higher is the level of persuasion.

While talking to people members of cultic groups can come up with all sorts of arguments which are very difficult to verify in order to influence people.

2) **Presenting a one- or two-sided message** - when an audience holds attitudes contrary to those presented by a speaker, it would be more effective to adopt a two-sided approach, in which both sides of the argument are given. But if an audience tends to agree with a speaker, he/she should turn to one-sided approach.

3) The process of delivery of arguments is more persuasive if a speaker uses **a powerful speech style**, i.e., the person speaks in a firm and decisive tone, is convinced about his/her position, avoids hesitations, and includes words and phrases that amplify the potency of messages (e.g., absolutely, utterly).

In the context of cultic groups influence *this style of speaking makes their leaders more credible and enables them to achieve goals through internal influence*. While approaching an audience they will convey their message without any hesitation and use precise, firm voice and magnifying phrases that give an impression of credibility and expertise.

4) Logical proofs can also take forms of **two request techniques**.

The first is **"foot-in-the-door"** where a very small initial request is made, and if accepted, this is followed by a slightly larger request. For instance, a cultic group member can ask you to sign a petition for climate protection (a small request which you agree to), and afterwards the person requests a donation for the group (a larger request).

The second form is **"door-in-the-face"**. Here a very large initial request is made, and once rejected a more realistic one follows. For example, a cultic group member wants you to give a donation of 200 euro, knowing his/her request would probably be rejected. Then, the member asks if you could spare only 10 euro which seems more reasonable. In that case you are more willing to make this smaller donation.

Emotional influence

- **Emotional appeals** are considered to be effective in persuasive influence, because they **play a significant role in attitude change processes** (Griskevicius, Shiota, Neufeld, 2010; Petty, Brinol, 2008).
 - 1) Cultic groups, trying to influence people, present messages that **induce fear**, e.g., by making predictions about the end of the world and declaring that the only way to save one's life is to entirely dedicate ourselves to the group's teachings.

2) **Referring to a mood state** - people form attitudes on the basis of "how do I feel about it" heuristic, often mistaking a pre-existing mood state for a reaction to an object.

When *a person who is feeling happy* is confronted with a persuasive message by a cultic group member, he/she does not feel the need to invest much effort in processing its arguments and rather rely on salient peripheral cues, e.g., appearance, voice.

On the other hand, *a person who is feeling bad* approached by the member will be motivated to invest considerable effort in message processing, so the member will have to present strong and convincing arguments in order to persuade the person.

3) **Using scarcity** – this factor operates on a basis that *individuals place greater value on rare opportunities*, i.e., if something is restricted its value increases and it becomes more desirable.

A cultic group may deceive someone by saying that there is a limited number of individuals who gain access to paradise and that only those who accept truth promoted by the leader will be admitted.

This scarcity appeals to individuals and make the group more attractive. In such situations people feel special because they managed to secure a position within limited number of places.

Manipulative strategies and forewarning (Krok, 2009)

Material pretesting

In a pretesting session, three strategies used by cults were created:

* The **existential strategy** presents arguments referring to a search for meaning of life, daily problems and difficulties, and meeting psychological needs;

* The **cultural-religious strategy** reflects universal questions about the sense of universe, the beginning of life on the earth, meanings of great religious books, and discovering mysteries of the world;

* The **protective strategy** consists of information which is to secure a person against current dangers and provide peacefulness, safety, and happiness.

Research participants and design

A total of 212 full-time and part-time students were recruited to participate in the experiment in partial fulfilment of a class requirement.

Procedure

All participants were told that the study aimed at measuring different aspects of people's attitudes and opinions. Each group was listening to one message played on a CD player.

Following these introductory remarks, participants were informed or not of the identity of the speaker.

Measures:

- *cognitive responses*,
- *attitudes towards the message*,
- *attitudes towards the speaker*,

Results 1

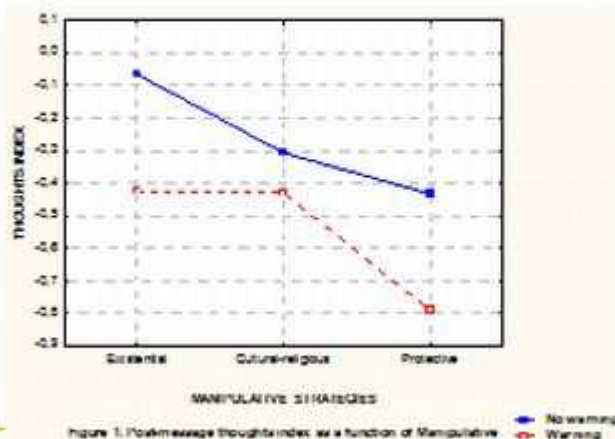


Figure 1. Postmessage thoughts index as a function of Manipulative Strategies and forewarning.

Results 2

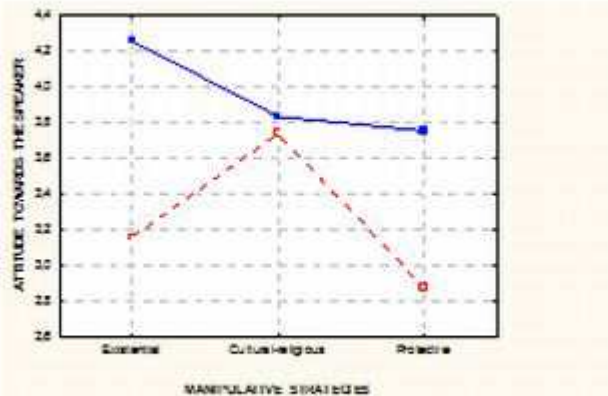


Figure 2. Postmessage attitudes towards the speaker as a function of Manipulative Strategies and forewarning.

Conclusions

- 1) *Manipulative strategies* make a different impact on recipients' cognitive processes and attitudes towards the message and speaker. The most negative effects were found under the protective strategy. The least negative effects were made by using the existential strategy.

It implies that *the existential strategy is most persuasive and dangerous* when it is applied by cultic groups in order to influence people. Why? The existential strategy contains arguments reflecting a universal search for meaning of life and helps people to resolve daily problems and difficulties.

- 2) *Forewarning* used in the form of revealing the group's identity causes recipients to have more negative cognitive processes and attitudes towards the message and speaker.

Hiding one's membership is a clear example of manipulation aimed at deceiving potential recruits.

- 3) *Forewarning* has the strongest effects in the case of the *existential and protective strategies*, but does not make a significant change with the cultural-religious strategy.

It can have *practical implications* for recruitment made by members of cultic groups. If they are asked about their membership they will try to reduce a potential negative impression by applying the cultural-religious strategy and talking about universal aspects of the world. After this initial introduction they can start presenting their proper arguments.

The clinical and legal implications of psychological violence in group contexts

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Whereas physical and sexual abuses have statutory definitions (Auburn, 2003), there is no consensus about which behaviors constitute psychological abuse (PA). It has been asserted, in the different settings where it was studied, that psychological abuse is an elusive concept, of difficult operationalization (e.g., Almendros, Gámez-Guadix, Carrobbles, Rodríguez-Carballeira and Porrúa, 2009). If this is the case in the family (e.g., psychological abuse against the partner, children or the elderly), school or work settings, it is even further in the case of psychologically manipulative groups, a field markedly less investigated than the others. As a result, we found in the available literature a conceptual ambiguity and lack of consensus concerning how to assess psychological abuse in ways that would assist researchers and practitioners in mental health and legal settings. Only recently have researchers become aware of the importance of studying psychological abuse as an independent dimension of physical violence and of conceptually defining psychological abuse in specific contexts.

This presentation has a focus on measurement – what has been done, what have we learned, where do we go. It has been stated that the ability to reliably measure is a key indicator of a developing field's health and maturity (Hill, 2005). Concern for measurement in the cultic studies field is still recent. We reviewed the psychometric properties and conceptual dimensions of a variety of instruments measuring PA both in the intimate partner violence (IPV) (Almendros *et al.*, 2009) and abusive groups (AG) (Almendros, Gámez-Guadix, Carrobbles & Rodríguez-Carballeira, 2011) contexts. In respect to the measurement of PA in the IPV field we found a wider number and variety of instruments developed. We found up to 30 instruments including at least a subscale related to PA. Research in this field (e.g., Marshall, 1999) suggests that psychological abuse may not only have a deleterious impact on subjects, but sometimes have a greater and more enduring impact than physical abuse. PA in IPV settings has been found to precede most cases of subsequent physical violence, which doesn't mean that PA will necessarily escalate to that extent. Also, while physical abuse tends to decrease in its frequency in the long term, as people grow older, the PA is more resistant to change. Some argued that, in contrast with physical and sexual abuses, PA may lead to the woman's maintaining the relationship

In contrast, in the cultic studies field we found only three instruments designed for the measurement of dimensions related to more or less extent to Psychological Abuse: *Group Psychological Abuse Scale* (GPA; Chambers, Langone, Dole, & Grice, 1994; Spanish version: Almendros, Carrobbles, Rodríguez-Carballeira, & Jansà, 2004); *Individual Cult Experience Index* (ICE; Winocur, Whitney, Sorensen, Vaughn, & Foy, 1997); and *Across Groups Psychological Abuse and Control Scale* (AGPAC; Wolfson, 2002). The GPA has been the most widely used instrument, revealing adequate internal and test-retest reliability. The GPA scale has shown consistently its ability to distinguish between different samples of former members: those who identify themselves as former members of abusive groups and of non-abusive groups (Almendros, Carrobbles *et al.*, 2009; Langone, 1996; Mascareñas, 2002). No evidence has been found to relate the information provided by the victims with negative attitudes (Lewis, 1986; Solomon, 1981) resulting from their status as former members of these groups or them having been counseled—upon leaving the group or at any time after it—by expert professionals or associations educating/alerting about cults (Almendros, Carrobbles *et al.*, 2009). In general, very similar response patterns and very few differences have been found between the GPA scores of former members of AG from various cultural environments—US, Spanish, Mexican & Japanese (Almendros *et al.*, 2004; Almendros, Carrobbles &

Gámez-Guadix, 2009; Almendros, Carrobles & Rodríguez-Carballeira, 2009; Mascareñas, 2002).

Two parallel studies are being carried out investigating abusive behaviors both in partner and group violence contexts. Several authors noted the similarity between controlling systems and the experience of people who have been taken hostage, prisoners of war and concentration camps, people who are members of cults, and victims of domestic violence (e.g. Andersen, Boulette y Schwartz, 1991), but there is little empirical precedence in the available literature (Wolfson, 2002). Two groups of self-identified former members of abusive groups participated in our study. One was composed of 128 people from originally English-speaking countries (71.1% women) and the second included 118 Japanese (55.4% women). Beside these, a group of 72 Spanish women victim of intimate partner violence participated so far in a study that included parallel forms, adapted to the language and to the intimate context, of the instruments used with the AG former members. Several instruments for the measurement of psychological abuse, influence and involvement in the abusive relationship were used. Overall, the IPV group reported suffering more physical abuse than the FMG groups, whereas the last showed more degree of involvement, and a higher level of psychological abuse and influence strategies. Results should be taken with caution regarding the developmental stage of the measures employed for the present work.

It is much what we have learnt and know about cults over the past years. However, scientific publications are yet few and our knowledge is little spread among professionals (Psychology and Law practitioners). Reliable and valid assessment tools are a first step that should inform prevention and intervention efforts.

Finally, specific conclusions are drawn, some research gaps are identified, and guidelines are suggested on future investigation lines that would be interesting to study more in depth. Clinical and legal implications will be discussed underlying that the difficulties at assessing psychological abuse are similar in other fields apart from cultic studies.

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Returning To Reality: Some Observations About The Journey Back

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I would like to thank FECRIS for this opportunity to speak to you. I am happy to be in Poland at last. The first time I was due to visit Warsaw, Pope John Paul II decided to come the same week, and my visa was cancelled. I have waited a long time to be here.

I suppose all have seen the synopsis of this little presentation, so you know that I will be giving an overview of some ways I have developed to help members and emerging ex-members to reconsider their involvement in an abusive sect and to recover.

One note before I begin. For the sake of brevity, I will use the masculine pronouns throughout, but all aspects of this paper apply equally to members, ex-members and counselors of either gender.

Introduction

The re-evaluation process consists, broadly, of enabling someone involved in an authoritarian movement or sect to reconsider their commitment to the group of which he has been a member, to look at it from a broader perspective that includes facts which may not be available from within the group, and to decide whether or not continued involvement in that group is in his best interest. During this process he also will consider the group's effect on his life in general and on his relationships in particular. It must always be an open question in the mind of

the counselor, whether the member progresses on to leaving their sect and begins rehabilitation, or whether he returns to the group. The primary goal and the priority in the re-evaluation stage must be to enable the member to make a free and informed decision.

With this in view, I believe that informed consent should be gained from the group-member in all cases before the re-evaluation process begins. Where there is any possibility of uncertainty about the individual's willingness or later feelings, I sometimes have gone so far as to ask the member to confirm his consent in writing, in exchange for a written undertaking from me as to my responsibilities towards him. Regardless of the form of consent, I think it is important that the counselee should understand and agree to the nature and approximate duration of the re-evaluation process and to any other necessary arrangements.

If the member lives within the sect's own housing, it may be necessary to arrange suitable accommodation to provide a neutral and unstressful setting where re-evaluation may take place. Often this is best accomplished in the home of a sympathetic family who will be personally supportive but otherwise uninvolved. Such a setting has been found to minimize the disorientation, isolation and vulnerability experienced by people who are re-evaluating their allegiance to a spiritual or other path.

Re-evaluation Procedure: A 10-Stage Analysis of Assisted Activities

Following is a list of ten helpful activities or aspects of re-evaluation and rehabilitation that so often are at the heart of the decision whether to leave their group and then proceed through recovery. I refer to these as "assisted activities" because although some people work through these activities alone either by choice or by necessity, many find that at least some of them can be done more effectively with help, and some activities can prove very difficult to do unassisted.

It should be noted that these are not in a hard and fast order of importance or sequence, but they usually divide into two groups, the first three leading up to a decision to leave the group, the following seven addressing how to follow through with that decision.

1. Talk through the original circumstances and grounds of the ex-member's commitment;
2. Evaluate with him the quality and results of his commitment, including the effects of membership upon his self-image, upon the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of his idealism and his quest for spiritual realization, upon the health of his relationships, and upon the fulfilment of his potential;
3. Let him decide whether he will continue his membership or terminate it; then if he chooses to leave,
4. Consider with him how the sect's teachings may have distorted his self-image and other areas his perception of reality, and plan steps to undo any harm;
5. Help him to re-examine his world view, moral values, spiritual, religious or philosophical concerns and other perceived needs as the ex-member asks about these areas;
6. Point him toward planning for the immediate future; that is, as appropriate, help him to arrange living accommodation, seek interim income from social services or other sources, make job applications, and arrange a family reconciliation where that is possible and desirable;
7. Examine the past with him, including the time he spent in his movement, with a view to extracting lessons for future use; for example, help him to recognize any potential job skills or skills gained which may help him dealing with people, and so on;
8. Encourage him to select and follow through with education or occupational training as appropriate;
9. Discuss other desirable training; for example, driving lessons, sports, hobbies;
10. Help him to carry out progressive stages of personal rehabilitation if needed, including graduated exposure to stress, refining his decision-making skills, pursuing necessary

medical and legal help, helping out in his accommodation where that is relevant, and gradual resumption of personal responsibility in all other areas.

The list has certain limitations. First, the word “stage” is not meant to indicate that the processes involved are separate, with each one ending before the next begins. They are interdependent and often simultaneous. For example, talking about aspects of recruitment, life within the group and the reasons for disillusionment and departure, is likely to be on-going for most of the rehabilitation period. Also, the sequence is flexible: what is listed as number 5 here may occur only much later in any depth, or it may be need to be done immediately. Despite these qualifications, it is useful to distinguish these processes in order to facilitate discussion and understanding of the kinds of needs which the member may have.

Second, not everyone will have needs corresponding to all of these activities. Some of the processes I describe refer to the more extreme cases with which I have been involved over the years, whereas not every individual requires every form of assistance. What I show here is only one pattern, frequently observed, which indicates the ten most basic forms of assistance and how they may interact.

Third, although the assistance processes are being shown in a graphical representation that is reasonably typical of their relationship in time, there is no scale implied, nor any explicit measure of duration indicated either for individual processes or for the whole rehabilitation procedure. Thus, it is not uncommon for ex-members to find that they are still dealing with aspects of their emergence some time after they leave. All of these limitations on describing rehabilitation arise essentially from the fact that each sect-member is unique, and needs to be treated at all times as an individual.

Notes on the 10 “Stages”

Now I would like to consider a few points concerning the application of each of these ten points, for the sake of clarification and perhaps to stimulate further discussion during the conference.

This first step, however it comes about, is the opportunity to find out what the group means to that particular member or ex-member, and how he decided to join. Knowing this makes it possible to talk to the person in front of me, and not to a generic “sect-member”. That will make any help I give more precise.

This second step requires genuine empathy combined with a degree of clinical precision. It is not easy for an active member (or even some ex-members) to admit that his relationships with family members or friends have been broken or that his career options have been damaged because of his allegiance to what he believed would be a panacea for all the troubles in his life. By establishing a wholesome relationship with the member or ex-member and making it clear that whatever he says will not be used against him, it can become safe for him to face any difficulties honestly and openly, allowing him to reconsider the rôle of the sect in his life.

This third stage can be the hardest but it depends upon the first two stages being carried out with integrity and care. If they are, everyone can have confidence in the outcome no matter what the member decides. First, if stages one and two are done well, the member will know that even if he is not ready to leave his group now, there is an open door for him to the outside world if he changes his mind. Second, he may even feel that he has an ongoing contact with a sympathetic outsider. If so, it may be that although he remains in the sect for a time, he will use that person as an outside point of reference if things within the group become dangerous. I indicate this on the graphic with an hour glass.

This step usually relates to those who decide to leave their group, but on some occasions I have found it possible to offer effective counselling and help to an active member con-

cerning this stage, which has later been the beginning of a complete cycle of re-evaluation and rehabilitation.

This is a big topic. It is easy to skip this step and often it is more comfortable to do so. In my opinion it is one of the important services I can offer an emerging ex-member which lies at the heart of taking his autonomy seriously. I cannot be the one to decide if he should continue his “spiritual quest” or take a step back from religion or become an atheist. If I ignore this “elephant in the room”, he may conclude that I consider spiritual and ideological questions a worthless interest on his part and never talk about it with me.

A number of undesirable consequences may result from this. He may go away from the work we do together feeling that a part of himself, that is, his spiritual curiosity, is a “bad” thing, and go on blaming himself for getting involved in the sect. Or he may decide to pursue this interest anyway, but without having any more idea of how to protect himself from abuse than he did the first time. If he does continue to be a “seeker”, he may feel too embarrassed to talk about it with anyone. This will make him more vulnerable to further abuse than if we had talked together about things like testing truth claims, examining evidence and evaluating leaders and their followers. He may also be less willing to discuss other areas of his life where he still needs assistance, or even give up rehabilitating himself altogether. Most important to the rehabilitation process, he may feel uncomfortable about being completely honest in re-evaluating the importance of his beliefs to the time he spent in the sect, lest he appear foolish or naïve.

All things considered, I believe I can serve an ex-member’s needs better by letting him feel that his interest in his spirituality or his antipathy towards it are acceptable topics for conversation.

This is a simple matter of practicality. Not everyone needs the same kind of help here, but for those recruited when very young and for those who were born into their sect, this step can be vital. (Of course, for those born into the sect, reconciliation with the family is usually not possible, and instead the emphasis must fall on learning to live with active disapproval and rejection.)

I have found it helpful to encourage an ex-member to realize that despite what was done to him in the sect, he was able to adapt and learn things that now he will be able to use to build his future on the outside. It can be difficult where some sects are concerned, but I find it usually is worth talking it through with an ex-member and helping him to “take back” aspects of his past.

It is painfully easy for someone who leaves a sect to become stuck in the rôle of the eternal ex-member. Sometimes we ourselves are responsible for encouraging this! But if we are to guide someone to walk away from his time in a sect and to build a fulfilling future, we must encourage him to pursue whatever education or other training appeals to him.

Most of the destructive groups we all deal with have a tendency to “swallow up” their members in everlasting work for the leader and the sect. It may not be obvious to an emerging ex-member that since he has rejected the teacher and the teaching, he is now free to reject the group’s priorities too. Hobbies are no longer a “waste of time”, sports are no longer “distractions from God’s work”. It usually takes little prompting to get a newly emerging member to recall or discover leisure interests and pursue them.

This tends to be important mainly for the most damaged, the most institutionalized ex-members. I have had cases where emerging members were so frightened of even the most ordinary tasks that it was necessary to provide strong encouragement and support in order to enable them to do simple things, such as doing their own shopping, making an appointment with a doctor or sitting at a meal with the people providing their accommodation. Of course it would have been possible simply to leave them to struggle through these things on their own, but I have found such occasions to be useful opportunities to help ex-members to see for themselves that once they rejected the teachings of their sect, the implications of those teach-

ings, including induced phobias and other disabling reactions to the outside world, were invalid.

That is an outline of voluntary re-evaluation and rehabilitation as I have offered it since the 1980s. I share it here not because it is unusual or new or different but because it lists some signposts along the journey back to reality from the world of totalitarian and abusive groups.

Thank you.

Preventing another Waco – my efforts to dismantle the dangerous destructive Rajavi cult in Camp Ashraf, Iraq

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Background

My husband and I met fifteen years ago as we were both leaving the Iranian opposition group that we had been involved in for half our lives up to that point. Although our experiences of membership had been completely different, the process of our recovery from being with the group was remarkably similar and equally as dark and disturbing. So much so that we researched further into the phenomenon that we had just survived and concluded that the Mojahedin-e Khalq is a mind control cult. This gave rise to a profound but controlled anger directed at the leader of the cult which has not left me, and which acts as my motivation to rescue as many victims of this cult as I can. As ex-members my husband and I established an English language website called iran-interlink.org in 2000 as part of our campaign to expose the MEK for what it really is and to find ways to rescue its members. I wrote a book called 'Saddam's Private Army', and am now writing another about the current situation which I want to talk about. I am a campaigner and activist rather than an academic.

The Mojahedin-e Khalq - known also as the MEK or MKO or PMOI - is usually described in the media as the 'main Iranian opposition group' and presents itself as a democratic, feminist, pro human rights group. But every former member will tell you that it operates internally as a classic cult – it not only uses psychological manipulation to control its members, but as reported by Human Rights Watch in 2005 inflicts extreme punishments on dissenting members – Massoud Rajavi sent around 200 of these to Abu Ghraib prison under Saddam Hussein's regime. So we are basically dealing with a dangerous, destructive cult. But there are several additional complications for those dealing with and confronting this group.

One is that it was founded on the principle of armed resistance to the Shah of Iran in the 1960s and has continued as a violent group since then. So, the MEK's main currency is martyrdom and murder. It is classed as a terrorist group and remains on the US terrorism list. The MEK has killed thousands upon thousands of Iranians and Iraqis and has martyred many of its own members for the leaders' personal goals. It deliberately makes you feel as though you can't go near it for fear of someone else dying.

The other complication is that because its stated aim is to overthrow the Iranian regime, it has many, many powerful and wealthy backers in the west among the 'regime change pundits' generally found under the umbrella terms 'neoconservatives and Zionists'. For thirty years it has been sustained both politically and financially by powerful western interests.

However although its stated aim is to overthrow the Iranian regime, its actual ideological beliefs are based on the unquestioning worship of its leaders Massoud Rajavi and his wife Maryam.

Our efforts to expose and eventually close down this cult so that its members are freed from enforced membership of a terrorist group, are hampered by these interests who not only have their own political agendas but also have control over much of the media.

A further complication when dealing with this cult is that it has two main bases - the one in France is where the public relations focus is. But the leader - Massoud Rajavi - and the majority of the members live in an isolated camp in the Iraqi desert, a military base of fifty square kilometres called Camp Ashraf. It is this isolation which allowed the leader to deprive the members of every single one of their basic human rights.

We had made progress in exposing the MEK as a cult and many former members took part in activities to challenge the political support for the group and remind everyone that it is a human rights issue – that the members are not there of their own free will and deserve to be acknowledged as victims rather than terrorists.

Then in 2003 there was what we thought a breakthrough. During Operation Iraq Freedom, the MEK was targeted as an enemy force and its bases were initially bombed to force it to surrender. Unfortunately Massoud Rajavi launched a charm offensive and using typical cult deception, persuaded the US forces on the ground, who had no training or experience to deal with such a group, to agree a ceasefire and disarmament instead of forcing the group to surrender. So the group was mistakenly allowed to continue its activities at its headquarters at Camp Ashraf under US military protection for six years even though it is on the US terrorism list and this protection led to the deaths of fourteen US service personnel. An investigation by the American RAND Corporation (the National Defense Research Institute) published in 2009 exposed the many errors and failures of the US military in dealing with this group.

What was interesting for us here in Europe was that almost as soon as the Mojahedin were disarmed and contained in Camp Ashraf in 2003, the families of members started turning up at the camp gate looking for their loved ones. It is remarkable and a true testimony to the strength of family ties that these people – often elderly parents who had sometimes not seen their children for twenty or more years, braved the journey through Iraq at a time of war when thousands of bombs were indiscriminately killing soldiers and civilians.

What was not surprising was that the Mojahedin leaders tried everything they could do to prevent these family reunions. They even persuaded the American soldiers guarding the camp that these families were coming to destroy the camp and to kill the residents and had to be sent away at all costs.

Still the families kept coming – sometimes every year they made the difficult journey. All they were demanding was to meet their loved ones outside the camp, away from the supervision of the MEK leaders. It seems that every human rights body in the world turned a blind eye to this injustice and did nothing to intervene. Most did not even acknowledge that this situation existed.

The MEK continued to deceptively describe its situation in a political context – they were victims of Iranian efforts to get the Iraqi government to destroy the camp. It is true that Iran, Iraq, America, Europe, all have their own political agendas in relation to this group. They all want to use it for their own benefits. Not one single one of them will admit that these are peoples' lives they are dealing with. Not one single one will admit that these people are trapped in the camp and are not there of their own free will and that we need to reach inside the camp and help rescue them.

Then in January 2009 it seemed another breakthrough was on the horizon. In January 2009 the American military handed over control of Camp Ashraf to the Government of Iraq as a result of the Status of Forces Agreement.

It was hoped the MEK could now be made to open its doors to the families and we could help rescue some of the victims trapped there.

It was not that simple. The MEK closed in on itself and met every effort of the Iraqis to impose Iraqi law on the camp with violent resistance. Unsurprisingly, the Iraqi military

finds itself no more trained and experienced than the American military in dealing with a violent cult. In July 2009 eleven MEK were reported killed during violent clashes with Iraqi soldiers. In April this year – only four weeks ago – a further thirty four members were killed. Even though there is evidence that the MEK killed some of its own people it was a disaster for the members and a disaster for the Iraqi government – which is now accused of massacring the residents of Camp Ashraf.

Now the government of Iraq has given the MEK until the end of this year to leave the country. This presents a huge challenge to people like myself who want to find a humanitarian solution to this issue.

Fortunately, however, there are many people in Iraq who actually do understand that this is a cult and who understand the challenges involved in confrontation and disbandment. In my view, the main issue which needs to take priority in dealing with any cult is that, above all else, it is a human rights issue rather than a political or social, religious or security issue. For this reason it is not desirable to have untrained and unprepared agencies taking lead roles without the guidance of experts – particularly experts in the cult in question.

People like myself not only have the experience of being former members, but have interviewed and campaigned for and supported tens of hundreds of other former members and families of current members. It is on the basis of this expertise that we claim to speak on behalf of the victims of this cult; that is the rank and file members who are currently voiceless and powerless, locked behind the barbed wire fence erected by the cult leaders to prevent their escape and to prevent the world looking in.

We must be part of the process to dismantle the camp. We – the representatives of the victims - are the solution, not the problem. And any solution to this problem will not be possible as long as the camp remains under the control of the cult leader and its western backers.

But what Massoud Rajavi considers the major strength of his cult is the clue to its weakness. Like all cult leaders he has manipulated the relationships of his members. Unlike other cults which dictate who people marry and how many children they have, Rajavi has forced all the members to remain celibate and not to have children. It is forbidden to have a relationship with anyone else but himself. All members must devote themselves totally to him alone. But that means that the members are isolated from absolutely everyone, including one another. And that means that families are the key to unlocking the prison in which they exist. We know that when cult members are reunited with their families in a free atmosphere it is a key factor in their understanding and escape from the cult.

Since Rajavi's control of the members is based on their lack of normal family relationships it is clear that the way to break the atmosphere inside the camp is to exactly bring the families of members to the gate to reach in to their loved ones.

Then in February 2010 after the Iraqi government had been in control of the camp for a year, a group of families decided spontaneously not to go home. They decided to stay at the camp for as long as it takes to rescue their children.

At first the Iraqis were really displeased. As though they didn't have enough problems to deal with, now they had a bunch of old men and women – not even Iraqis – who refused to go away. In the end they relented and helped with some containers for the families to set up some basic sleeping and cooking facilities. And there they stayed.

They have been there for over a year now. Different families come and go, but some have been there for a year. They have sat in the Iraqi desert in summer and winter with one simple demand – let us have access to our children.

These families have established their own camp outside the gate of the cult's headquarters and have appealed in vain for international help. The MEK refuse to allow the cult members to meet them. The cult views the families as its most dangerous existential threat. The MEK leaders are threatening mass suicide if anyone should try to enter the camp without

their permission. The difficulty is how to open the gates of the camp to free the residents without the MEK provoking violence and bloodshed. How do we prevent another Waco?

Plan

It is obvious to anyone who has any knowledge about cults and how they operate that it is not possible to negotiate the dissolution of a cult with its leading members. Any negotiations directly with the MEK only reflect interests of the leader Massoud Rajavi.

The members are not sitting in the camp wondering which third country they will be sent to, or what their future holds. Their only thought at this time is 'Make it stop!' That is, take the unrelenting pressure off and let them breathe again. As I said before, this must be treated as a human rights issue and the only legitimate human rights stance to take is to demand the immediate and unconditional disbandment of the organisational structure of the cult. In simple terms, the leaders of the cult must be separated from the rank and file and each member must be brought back to the real world so that they can determine their own future free from the influence of the cult. This is certainly not the job of the Iraqi military.

Two weeks ago I travelled to Iraq to speak to officials there in order to establish the steps which need to be taken to avoid a situation like Jonestown or Waco in which the cult members commit mass suicide or provoke the Iraqi soldiers to kill them. It is not going to be an easy task and it is possible that more lives are lost in the effort to free the majority. This unfortunately is the nature of this cult and this is the difficulty in trying to dismantle any cult. What is clear again is that the families of members will be crucial to this plan. The leadership has no weapon no insult not anything which will deter them and force them to go away.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other consequences of cult-involvement

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Introduction

PTSD and other consequences of cult-involvement is not a topic that can be comprehensively covered in twenty minutes. Therefore, I have chosen to discuss some lesser known perhaps, and more current information about trauma, specifically the neurobiological aspects which, I believe, add explanatory power to the symptom picture.

PTSD, I believe, is in essence a disorder of affect regulation. Many mental health professionals have come to believe that affect regulation is the cornerstone of good mental health while affect dysregulation is the basis for mental illness. First, let me set the stage with a description of PTSD.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

According to the Harvard Mental Health Letter (2007) PTSD has become the default diagnosis for all kinds of symptom pictures. This is unfortunate since it dilutes the meaning and seriousness of the diagnosis. In the U.S. and elsewhere, our mental health "bible" is the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM-IV) which, although it has its flaws, specifies criteria for an identifiable diagnosis. According to the DSM, the definition for PTSD is: "Exposure to an event that is out of the range of normal human experience." To qualify for this diagnosis, the symptomatology of the client must include three aspects:

Re-experiencing of unwanted recollections resulting in intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, and/or nightmares. Because the person has not integrated the experience into his/her personality, it remains unmetabolized and is re-experienced in its original form.

Avoidance: the person avoids stimuli that might trigger the memories and result in re-experiencing and hyperarousal. He also isolates socially to avoid any possibility of further betrayal from people he trusts. Constriction of one's emotions is also considered part of the avoidance category.

Hyperarousal, the third prong of this tripartite picture, refers to a lack of ability to regulate one's affect/emotions. Sudden activation of the sympathetic branch of the ANS results in outbursts of anger, an overactive startle response, insomnia and lack of concentration.

Complex PTSD has been distinguished from Simple PTSD by the degree of impact on the victim. Being born and raised in a cult, or spending years in one, qualifies for the Complex PTSD diagnosis as the effects of growing up in this stressful environment has far reaching implications for development. Bessel van der Kolk, a traumatologist from Boston, has a fairly inclusive description:

Affect Dysregulation as a consequence of cult involvement

Affect Regulation is the ability to calm oneself down when one is agitated/anxious and to enliven oneself when one is depressed. We acquire this ability first through a secure attachment with our earliest caregiver, usually mother, who initially provides these psychobiological functions, picking the baby up when it is distressed and playing with him for optimal stimulation. If these emotional needs have been met, the child will have a secure attachment. His brain will sprout the necessary axons and dendrites to wire the brain for optimal functioning in the world. She will be able to take on the soothing and enlivening functions for herself and not always have to depend on others for affect regulation.

So, let us look at optimal brain development.

For a brain to work optimally, there must be strong synaptic connections between the lower, more primitive and emotional regions of the brain (brain stem and limbic system) and the higher cortical regions (frontal lobes) that enable us to think, reason, and make good judgments. A well-functioning brain has robust connections up and down, so that thinking and feeling are integrated. Otherwise, people either "live in their heads," where they are cut off from their feelings (as in alexythymia) or, on the flip side, they are continually flooded with affect.

Affect attunement on the part of the mother is the essential ingredient for the baby's brain to develop affect regulation. As she responds contingently, and in a timely fashion, the baby's body is flooded with endorphins, those 'feel good' chemicals that enable him to attach to mother.

On the other hand, children who are born or raised in a highly stressful environment, such as a cult, are robbed of their birthright to have parents whose prime directive is to attend to these physical and emotional needs. Overwhelmed with the cult demands on their time and energy, and exposed to the shaming practices well-documented in the literature, parents are neither emotionally nor physically available to provide the secure attachment needed for optimal neurobiological development. Over-involved in cult-related activities (e.g. proselytizing, fund raising) parents often consider children a hindrance to their personal goals of reaching enlightenment (in Eastern-based cults), attaining salvation (in Bible-based cults), or becoming mentally healthy and self actualized (in therapy cults). The attachment bond between parent and child is purposely diluted because, to the degree that any one member is attached to an-

other, to that degree she is less attached and dependent upon the leader. His control is thereby diminished.

Being in a childlike position vis a vis the cult leader, parents relate more like siblings. They have abdicated their role as the executive branch of the family and given over decision making authority to the cult leader who is often given the title of “father” or “mother.” Parents function as “middle management” (Markowitz and Halperin, 1984) who channel the leader’s ideas of child rearing and their loyalty is tested by how obediently they carry out his orders. Angry and frustrated, parents often displace their feelings onto their children.

Under such stressful conditions forming a secure attachment is challenging if not impossible, and there are consequences. EEGs have shown that the infants of depressed mothers exhibit excessive activity in the right frontal lobe which is biased for negative emotions and psychopathology. Researchers at Baylor Medical Center also found that babies of depressed mothers had 20% - 30% smaller brains than babies of non-depressed mothers. The famous studies of Romanian orphans who had not been held and played with in infancy showed little or no activity in the parts of their brains dedicated to emotions. Thus, they were unable to attach because they could not feel.

Neural Networks

Another important aspect related to brain development for our purposes is that neural networks formed in childhood continue to influence us throughout life. Although we are born with 100 billion neurons (brain cells), the connections, or synapses, between these neurons are not developed yet. They depend upon the environment to inform them which ones should get activated. Neurons that are needed for a person to live and adapt in that environment will get stimulated; those that are not needed will die off.

Now, if a particular set of neurons get stimulated at the same time, they tend to fire together. The more often they do so, the more likely they are to continue to fire together. So, if a child is punished for questioning his elders, “punishment” neurons will get activated every time he questions the leader and soon he will stop questioning. As Donald Hebb, a neuroscientist put it, “Neurons that fire together wire together.” In this way, people learn what is acceptable in a particular environment.

The problem, of course, comes in when a child has grown up in a toxic environment, such as a cult. Shaped by that environment, his feelings about himself (bad, shameful), others (undependable, untrustworthy), and the world (a dangerous place) form a negative template that get projected onto the outside world, making adjustment difficult.

The Stress Response

Living in a chronically high stress environment damages the ability to deal with stress.

To better understand this, we need to understand the physiology of the normal stress response. Faced with immediate danger, the body pumps out the adrenaline hormones known as cortisol and epinephrine. These hormones go to our heart which begins beating faster, and to our muscles, to prepare the body either to fight or to flee when we don’t think we have a chance of winning the fight.

In a wonderful feedback loop known as the HPA axis (Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal axis) cortisol levels reach a certain height which tells the body the danger is over, that it’s ok to return to baseline, adrenaline is no longer needed. In this way, we have extra “warp speed” when we need it to cope with an emergency but we don’t live there. This feedback loop is important because while cortisol is essential in the short-run, it is toxic in the long run. If left in the bloodstream too long, cortisol burns out synaptic connections in the brain and wears out bodily organs leading to ulcers, G.I. problems, heart disease, etc.

Children who live in cults do, in fact, live in this chronic state of alarm. Their bodies continue to be “at the ready” to fight or flee. When Dr. Bruce Perry worked with the Waco children, he found that even at rest the heart rates of the children were higher than normal. While the average HR for children is 80 HBM, the resting heart rate of the Branch Davidian children 6 weeks after the Waco disaster was still above 100 (conference presentation). Having a secure attachment in childhood has been found to mediate the stress response. Michael Meany at McGill University in Montreal demonstrated that when baby rats were licked and groomed a lot they were less anxious and fearful as adults; that is, they were able to be calm in the face of stress. Although it is never clear how generalizable animal research is to human behavior, studies from the field of attachment appear to confirm these findings.

Hippocampal Damage

Another robust finding from the trauma literature is that people who get PTSD have less hippocampal volume. The hippocampus is responsible for putting events into their proper time folders and thereby consolidating memory accurately. If the hippocampus is functioning suboptimally the person will not have an accurate time perspective on his life history. During a traumatic event, the hippocampus is flooded with cortisol, the stress hormone, and goes off-line. The event is therefore not placed into its appropriate temporal folder. When the event gets triggered in the present, the body will react as it did in the past manifesting the hyperarousal characteristic noted in PTSD. The same research study of Vietnam Vets mentioned above showed reduced hippocampal volume in the PTSD group.

Dissociation

A talk on the consequences of cult-involvement would not be complete without a discussion of dissociation as it is so pervasive in this disorder. As we know, when faced with a danger, a person will either fight or flee and when neither of these strategies are possible, he will “freeze.” A freeze state is a dissociated state. It provides a means of psychological escape when physical escape is not possible. This is the case for children who live in chaotic, fearful, and often abusive families. Unable to either fight or flee, they dissociate. Assisting dissociation is the fact that norepinephrine is another hormone released when faced with a person is facing a traumatic event. Norepinephrine is responsible for narrowing attention, so that the person doesn’t get distracted but is able to bring all his/her mental faculties to bear on the present danger. However, this often results in remembering only parts of an event while other details are blocked out.

From the trauma literature we have learned that only about 15% of people exposed to the same event will develop PTSD and that the people most at risk are those dissociated during the event. We also know that people most likely to dissociate as adults are people who learned to “tune out” as children. Dissociation had become the default coping mechanism in all stressful situations.

Cult practices are notorious for inducing dissociative states: chanting, repetition of mantras, rote recital of bible verses, long lectures w/t breaks, and long periods of meditation are just a sample. Many cults teach people techniques for ignoring doubts and negative feelings such as to laugh when one is sad. A child I once interviewed because her mother who was not in the cult was worried about her bizarre behavior, started barking like a dog whenever she got anxious. She did this quite often. After years of such training the brain gets hard wired in such a way as to disconnect when stimuli are too dangerous, much like a train that gets uncoupled from its intended destination.

Other consequences

Spiritual Consequences

Different symptoms have been noted to be associated with different types of groups. In Bible-based groups for example, the former member often reports “hearing” the critical voice of the pastor/minister admonishing him/her. In Eastern meditation groups the attack appears to come more from within. Because the boundaries between outside and inside were more blurred in these groups where members were taught that God is one with the Universe, they believe the guru can hear their thoughts.

Emotional consequences: Guilt and Shame

Guilt and shame are two very powerful emotional residuals of cult involvement, guilt over behaviors one did to others, especially children, in order to conform and survive in the cult, and shame about having been so vulnerable to mind manipulation. We hear heartbreaking stories of children who did not visit their parents when they were dying or attend weddings and funerals. Tales of physical abuse and verbal assault on other members is also quite common. But the shame about who one is and who one became is worse. Shame goes to the very core of a person. And unlike guilt, for which one can make amends, there is no antidote for shame. Forgiveness, from others and oneself, comes the closest to salving those wounds.

Morality

Another consequence is in terms of morality. The cult leader’s conscience, with all its flaws, becomes the standard of morality for the group. All aspects of life are affected, especially sexuality which is also used to control the members. Sex is either encouraged, but often in prescribed ways, or it is prohibited (except of course for the leader).. Most cults are male dominated (there are a few headed by women), men are taught they are entitled to sex, and marital rape is not uncommon.

The self-fulfilling prophecy

Another effect of cult involvement is what I call the self-fulfilling prophesy effect. In cults, members are told that if they should leave, terrible things will happen to them. For example, in one case I had, children were told that if they left they would get into drugs, live on the streets, and become prostitutes. This is exactly what happened to a client I saw. Having been home-schooled by the group, with no formal education, degrees, or skills she lived on the streets for a number of years, engaging in exactly the behaviors that were predicted. This confirmed the prophetic powers of the cult leader in her mind. Fortunately, she got into therapy before returning to the group.

Consequences to the spousal relationship

Intimacy between couples was also inhibited in the cult, so that when couples emerge their intimacy skills are rusty or non-existent. Showing affection was dangerous because it would call attention to the pair bond which would threaten the leader’s omnipotent control. He would then find a way to come between them, often seducing one of the partners into a sexual relationship with him. After all, having sex with “God” can be a powerful aphrodisiac. Love and sex were not connected and often the leader would choose partners for members who

were not suited for one another so that true intimacy could not develop. In therapy, then, couples need help in reaffirming their commitment.

Identifications and risks for couples

Another consequence of cult involvement is an identification with the aggressor. Members often take on the leader's characteristics in an effort to change trauma to triumph; they may become arrogant, sexist, and even paranoid, and project these attitudes onto the partner.

Couples in which both partners were in the cult are especially at risk for various projections and projective identifications as they were both subjected to similar dynamics and don't have the benefit of outside influences.

Conclusion

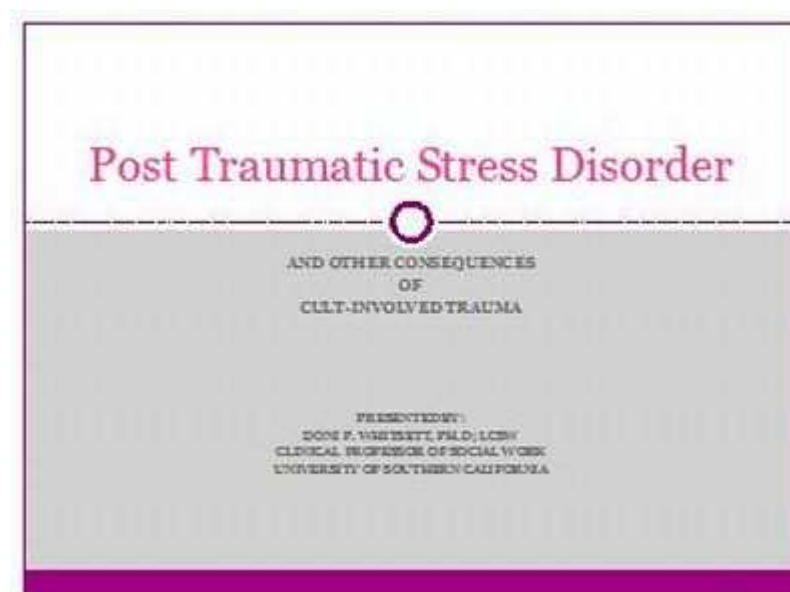
In conclusion, cult involvement has many consequences. In an effort to better understand cult survivors I have tried to explain some of the ways neurobiology contributes to PTSD and its consequences. To quote M. Teicher:

Our brains are sculpted by our early experiences. Maltreatment is a chisel that shapes a brain to contend with strife, but at the cost of deep, enduring wounds.

Nevertheless, the good news is that the brain remains plastic throughout life and new neural networks can be formed in the context of a nurturing, empathically attuned environment. There is hope for us all!

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Affect Regulation

- PTSD as a disorder of affect (emotional) regulation
- Cornerstone of good mental health
- Affect dysregulation the basis of mental illness

Re-experiencing

Avoidance

Hyperarousal

Reminders
Hyperarousal

Intrusive thoughts
Nightmares
Flashbacks



Angry outbursts
Startle response
Lacks concentration
Insomnia

THREE PRONGS OF PTSD

Complex PTSD

- “The overwhelming stress of maltreatment in childhood is associated with adverse influences on not just behavior but also on brain development.”
SCHORE, A. (2009)
- “Early experiences are built into our bodies, creating biological “memories” that shape development, for better or for worse.” (www.developingchild.harvard.edu/home)

Complex PTSD

Alteration in regulation of affect and impulses

- a. affect regulation
- b. modulation of anger
- c. self-destructive
- d. suicidal preoccupation
- e. difficulty modulating sexual involvement
- f. excessive risk taking

Alteration in attention or consciousness

- a. amnesia
- b. depersonalisation
- c. transient dissociative episodes

Somatisation

- a. digestive system
- b. chronic pain
- c. cardiopulmonary symptoms
- d. conversion symptoms
- e. sexual symptoms

• *Source: van der Kolk, B. & Finkelhor, D. (2004). Childhood sexual and physical abuse and loss of self-regulation. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 43(1), 11-21.*

Alteration in self-perception

- a. ineffectiveness
- b. permanent damage
- c. guilt and responsibility
- d. shame
- e. nobody can understand
- f. minimising

Alterations in perception of perpetrator

- a. adopting distorted beliefs
- b. preoccupation with hurting perpetrator
- c. idealisation of the perpetrator

Alterations in relationships with others

- a. inability to trust
- b. victimising others
- c. victimisation

Alterations in systems of meaning

- a. despair and hopelessness
- b. loss of previously sustaining beliefs

Affect Regulation

- Ability to calm oneself down
- Ability to enliven oneself
- Mother first acts as psychobiological regulator
- Brain sprouts axons and dendrites within a secure attachment
- Baby takes on the self
- soothing and enlivening
- functions for herself



Brain Development



Optimal Brain Development

- Strong connections up and down between higher and lower cortical regions
- Thinking + feeling = good judgment



The Cult Parent

- Pre-occupied with cult activities
- Children hinder their cult-defined goal
- In child-like position vis a vis cult leader
- Parents as "middle management"



Hebbian Axiom

Neurons that fire together wire together.

Donald Hebb

The Stress Response

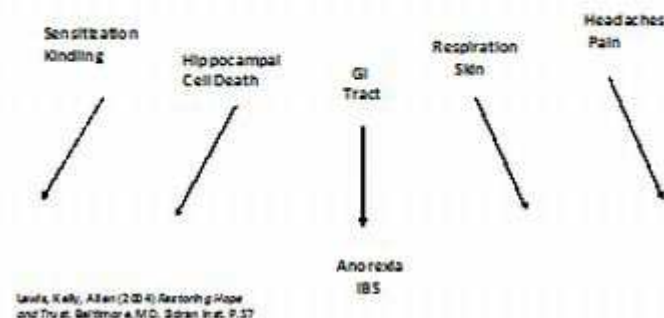
- Faced with immediate danger
 - Cortisol and Epinephrine are released
- HPA Axis
 - Feedback loop
 - Danger is over – return to baseline

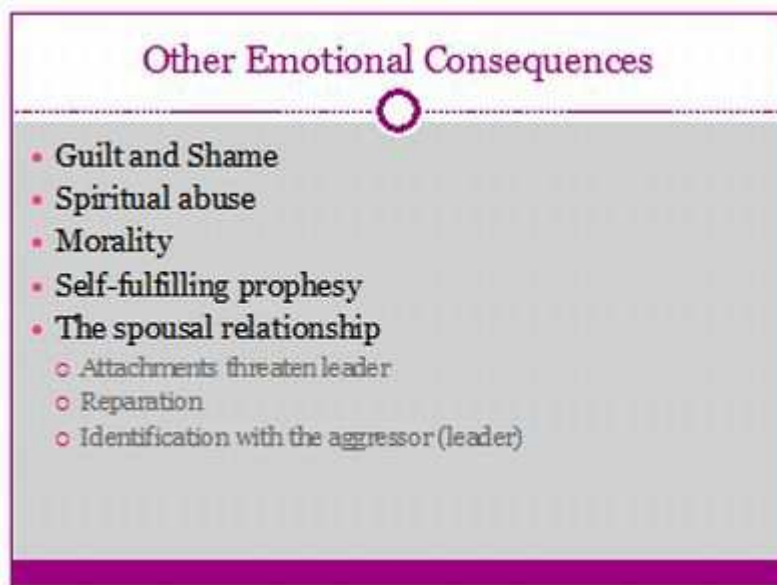
"Toxic stress caused by significant adversity can produce physiological disruptions that undermine the development of the body stress response systems and affect the architecture of the developing brain" (www.developmentalpsychology.harvard.edu/library)

Effects of Chronic Stress

- Impaired stress response
- Hippocampal damage
- Dissociation
 - Cults practice dissociative techniques

Chronic Sympathetic Arousal





Difficulties of testimony and the obstacles on the path for those seeking legal recourse

Daniel Picotin, barrister at the Bordeaux Bar, CCMM (France)

Dominique and Isabelle LORENZATO are going to testify on the terrible experience which they had under the influence of the Guru, Robert DINH alias TANG who was their guide for 22½ years.

Robert Le DINH was the Guru a community which had settled in two French Departments: first in Lot-et-Garonne and then in Ariège over a time span of 20 years.

He was condemned by the Court of Assizes of Ariège on September 18, 2010 for rape, sexual assaults on a 15-year old minor and for abuse of weakness.

This lawsuit took place after 2½ years of instruction, 5 other civil parties were constituted in this case as well as UNADFI.

TANG, who claimed that Jesus had appeared to him, gave his followers mystical teachings practically every evening until late at night.

During teaching sessions which lasted from 11 p.m. to 3 o'clock in the morning or even later, followers were subjected to what was called “positioning”, a kind of public confession above all destined to induce a feeling of guilt for wrongdoings which they had supposedly happened during the day.

Worse still, the application of the “law of return” which says we harvest what you sow, could go as far as threatening great misfortune or death for those who might be tempted to leave the group or not respect TANG's teachings! This was further exacerbated by periods of fasting, intensive work, daily control, previous authorization to go out or to meet friends or family and to have permission to see a doctor.

Le DINH created couples, chose the first names of their children, gave vocational guidance to his followers, if possible he pushed them toward trade or the public service, thus Mrs LORENZATO is a clerk in the Registry of a Court of Appeal, whilst Dominique LORENZATO, is a customs officer.

He directed his adepts daily lives.

This is a true academic case presenting a multitude of the receipts the gurus use to attract their prey: at the beginning, a benevolent and gravitational speech within the framework of an accessible group like one big family.

The charismatic guru, throwing words around with great facility and playing on the emotions of the members of his group.

This business constitutes a rich personal cocktail of what can be done by a cult leader in present day France.

It is interesting to note that in spite the judgment in first instance, he still hold fifteen people under influence outside the prison.

TANG had already spent two years in prison in 1986 in AGEN (Lot-et-Garonne) and one of his associations had been pin pointed by the French parliamentary report on cults of 1995 (ADLEIF - Association de Défense des Libertés d'Expression dans l'Institution Française).

What was at stake with this procedure ? In particular, to see if a popular jury of a Court of Assizes could recognize the state of mental subjugation which made it impossible for the victims to refuse the orders of the guru, whether they be financial or of a sexual character, i.e. rape.

My clients remained under undue influence during 22 years and 7 months. It was not, therefore, so easy to make the Court understand the state of dependence in which they were plunged for so long.

Indeed, in the absence of physical violence, if undue influence was not recognized, one could consider that there was consent and TANG would have been discharged.

Moreover, the thesis of the guru consisted in saying that the minors were liars while the other civil parties had been instigated by the couple LORENZATO to foment a plot to take revenge.

Fortunately, the 7 days of debate before the Court of Assizes made it possible for a large number of victims, who, for the majority, had not constituted themselves as civil parties, to make their specific and well argued testimony.

Their presence put pay to any plot theory.

The psychiatrist as a legal expert clarified the perverse character of the guru and especially the psychological visible state of subjection in which the followers were.

Finally, Robert the DINH was condemned to 15 years' imprisonment, the popular jury going beyond the requisitions of the Prosecutor's Office which had asked for 10 to 12 years. TANG, who arrived free at the audience, was the subject of an immediate arrest warrant and left for prison, given that he nevertheless appealed and that the business will have to pass in judgment again soon before the Court of Assizes of Haute Garonne.

Isabelle and Dominique Lorenzato, ex-members of the Group of Robert Dinh (France) Their experience

We belonged to a cult for 22 years. At first we were attracted by the guru's teachings of Christianity, the group's contribution in local charitable activities and the family atmosphere. Very quickly, he announced that he had revelations which placed him at the top the divine hierarchy and gave him the power of saving souls.

His teaching related to:

- his revelations
- the recognition of his authority and power
- total self-denial as a proof of faith

- acceptance of suffering, surpass one's limits
- carry on mystical missions in order to work on the world's evil and to purify its sins
- detachment from material goods and property
- destruction of the ego
- reincarnation and the responsibility of the soul
- the law of return (if the followers go against the guru's precepts misfortune will befall them, going as far as the death threat for them, their family and relations)

He lavished his teachings during lengthy and obligatory, daily meetings until late into the night. These meetings and the fact that it was forbidden to rest during the day caused a manifest lack of sleep. One was obliged to take part even when ill.

Fasting, prayers until late at night, daily work in the guru's houses wore out the body.

The followers lived in fear. The guru held them in his power: life and death, marriage and separation. He decided who could give birth, the choice of the children's names, of professions (for "the outside image"), the vehicles, the houses... All was subjected to authorisation even the possibility of seeing one's family insofar as it was not opposed to the group. The outside world being evil, it was not possible to have friends. Only the guru and his teachings incarnated goodness.

The followers had no free will. The meetings were the occasion of severely warning those who had disobeyed his teaching and his will by long public meetings of "verbal abuse", the follower had to admit his errors. The guru encouraged competition within the group so that the followers watched each other and denounced evil doings. Certain mystical missions and revelations were given in an individual capacity and were to remain strictly secret.

The guru did not work. The followers maintained him completely. He needed a 4x4 car, furniture, luxury clothes to work on the money. The followers were to complete this work by giving all they had.

This destruction of the individual by daily body and mental abuse prevented them from realising that they were prisoners of this illusory world. Total submission to the guru was required going as far as accepting sexual relationships as means of purifying faults. To disobey involved death of the soul, madness and misfortune for the children and the family.

Ostracism – harsh practice of systematic abuse

Achille Aveta – Italian freelance journalist and author)

Translation by Roberto di Stefano – Observer and Critic of the Jehovah's Witnesses Movement

*"What worries me is not the outcry of those who do evil.
It is the silence of good people."
(Martin Luther King)*

Introduction

One of the assumptions of Democracy is the absence of a single system of thought and the presence and protection of the right to a difference of opinion⁵. Well, if a legal system has to

⁵ The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, in particular *article 18*, states: «Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom,

protect a religious group, it must equally protect the rights of those who are its members, allowing them to voice even their blunt criticism, especially when it comes from those who used to be firm believers within their former religious group. The type of right referred to here should be understood as the expression of a democratic principle, inseparable from the expression of both cultural and the religious pluralism.

The protection of a religious group's reputation should be balanced with human rights and the Constitutional values cherished by all, especially by members of the same religious group – such as the freedom of thought, the right to change religion without suffering pressures and intimidations, the right to the critique and the protection of inviolable human rights.

This implies that, given an equal recognition of dignity among religious groups, the same must be true within the aforesaid groups, granting its members the right to criticize the ideology of their group, even if it enters into the public domain⁶.

The right to critique should be considered, in fact, as the manifestation of the freedom to determine one's individual philosophical and religious course, even within the social environments in which that course takes form. *Therefore, there must be a counter right of protection to the recognition of the dignity and honor granted to a religious group, viz. the protection of the human rights of the members of the same group who are in search of the meaning of existence.*

Ostracism among Jehovah's Witnesses

One of the characteristics of the religious Movement⁷ of the Jehovah's Witnesses is the pervasive conditioning of the social and private life of each one of its members. In fact, the sophisticated judicial process followed by the Jehovah's Witnesses extending to the trial to intentions of its members, are well known (see the confidential handbook KS⁸, 1991, p. 140). The

either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance».

⁶ See: Giudice per l'udienza preliminare – 39^a Sect. Criminal Court in Rome (ordinance 14 June – 29 July 2002); 4^a Criminal Sect. Court of Appeal in Rome - sentence n°108/04 of December 9th 2004; Giudice per l'udienza preliminare of Venice Court - ordinance of October 1st 2002.

⁷ The use of the term “movement” fits best when referred to the Jehovah's Witnesses religion, considering the many ideological changes and the consequential members' sensitivity changes throughout their history. This religious sensitivity is due to the leadership back and fore policies on doctrinal and organizational issues. See: R.V. Franz, *Crisis of Conscience – The struggle between loyalty to God and loyalty to one's religion*, Commentary Press, Atlanta, 2002; R.V. Franz, *In Search of Christian Freedom*, Commentary Press, Atlanta 2007; M.J. Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed*, University of Toronto Press 1999; A. Aveta – S. Pollina, *Movimenti religiosi alternativi: effetti dell'adesione e motivi dell'abbandono*, Vatican City 1998; Jerry R. Bergman, *Jehovah's Witnesses and the Problem of Mental Illness*, 1992; S. Pollina, *I nostri “amici” Testimoni di Geova*, Cinisello Balsamo 1996; H. Bloom, *La Religione Americana*, Milan 1994; A. Aveta, *Storia e dottrina dei Testimoni di Geova*, Rome 1994; A. Aveta, *I Testimoni di Geova: un'ideologia che logora*, Rome 1990; B. Blandre, *La storia dei Testimoni di Geova*, Cinisello Balsamo 1989; H. Botting – G. Botting, *The Orwellian World of Jehovah's Witnesses*, University of Toronto Press 1984; M. Castiglione, *I Testimoni di Geova: ideologia religiosa e consenso sociale*, Bari 1981; B. Grizzuti Harrison, *Visions of Glory: A History and a Memory of Jehovah's Witnesses*, New York 1978; J. Beckford, *The Trumpet of Prophecy: A Sociological Study of Jehovah's Witnesses*, New York 1975; T. White, *A People for His Name: A History of Jehovah's Witnesses and an Evaluation*, New York 1968; G. Hébert, *Les Témoins de Jéhovah*, Montreal 1960.

⁸ This abbreviation (KS) refers to the Kingdom Ministry School textbook published by the Watchtower in 1991. In its introductory note it states: “A copy of this textbook is issued to each appointed elder, and he may retain it as long as he continues to serve as an elder in any congregation. At such time as he should cease to serve in that capacity, his copy of the book must be handed over to the Congregation Service Committee, since this publication is congregation property. No copies are to be made of any part of this publication”. The 1981 KS textbook edition said: «Both this Kingdom Ministry School textbook (KS81) and the previous ones (KS77 and KS79) are

Watchtower's publications systematically attribute negative qualities, such as pride and rebellion, to the dissident members of the Movement. Rank and file members are expected to accept the fundamental assumption that "if someone is disfellowshipped [*expelled*], he must at the time have had a truly bad heart and/or been determined to pursue a God-dishonoring course."⁹

To fully appreciate the Movement's leadership attitude towards its members who factually dissent from the group's ideology, for which they are subject to disciplinary action, it is sufficient and enlightening to recall the Movement's official publication – "*The Watchtower*,"¹⁰ statement which says: "We are not living today among theocratic nations where such members of our fleshly family relationship could be exterminated for apostasy from God and his theocratic organization, as was possible and was ordered in the nation of Israel ... we can take action against apostates only to a certain extent, ... The law of the land and God's law through Christ forbid us to kill apostates, even though they be members of our own flesh-and-blood family relationship."¹¹

It is clear, therefore, that the responsibility for such a harsh position falls, not on the rank and file members who *must abide* by the rules set forth by their religious leadership but on the latter, whose directives are the cause of the separation of families. The consequential emotional sufferings are countless.

Sifting through Jehovah's Witnesses Annual Reports in the period 2000-2010, we discover that 1,335,139 members left the Movement or became inactive (in Italy, this number was 37,128)¹²; this is a dramatic situation considering the reported number of members – 7,224,930¹³ on average for the year 2010. It is clear that their annual high turnover rate is due to the large number of them leaving the movement.

Each and every Witness who leaves the Movement for reasons of conscience does so painfully, knowing they will be labeled a heretic with whom Witnesses in good standing, even family members, will stop mixing being considered an outcast. The Movement policies do not contemplate an honorable exit¹⁴. Only in absence of natural human feelings and sensibility can one pretend that these shunning treatments are not the cause of any emotional damages.

Disfellowshipping (i.e. expulsion) *can be* a very effective social control instrument, but the Movement obviously makes a gross abuse of it. In spite of the fact that we can recognize it as an effective way to guarantee conformity for beneficial purposes, such as the ban on the use of drugs, sexual promiscuity, practicing fraud or lying, disfellowshipping can be harmful when it is used in the way taught by Jehovah's Witnesses. In this context, the disfellowshipping disciplinary system adopted by the Movement, more than a proper disciplinary process, appears as an *instrument of power* over its members. Resorting to the threat of ostracism implied by the disfellowshipping provision, to intimidate the members and force them to conform to a behavior in contrast with their own conscience, or exercising pressure so that they accept doctrines which, for reasons of conscience, they regard as contrary to the Bible, is a form of *spiritual extortion*, a *spiritual blackmail*. It may be difficult to identify these behav-

designed for use by the travelling overseers and elders only. They should not be lent or given to anyone else, not even members of your family».

⁹ WT January 1st 1983, p. 31.

¹⁰ Known since March 1939 as *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom* was originally *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (1879 – 1908), and later as *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (1909 – 1931), *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence* (1931 – 1938), *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Kingdom* (1938 – 1939), Simply referred as "WT" in this paper.

¹¹ WT November 15th 1952, p.703-704

¹² The Movement keeps a large amount of personal records on the expelled: in 1985 36,638 were disfellowshipped (see WT January 1st 1986, p. 13), in 1986 these were 37,426 (WT September 15th 1987, p. 13).

¹³ 2011 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* p. 51

¹⁴ Official documentary evidence of such harsh shunning and discriminatory instructions against those who abandon the Movement is found in the *Appendix*.

iors, single them out and expose them the way we do, for example, with theft and literal homicide, fraud or material extortion, but they are, however, equally immoral and, sometimes perhaps, even worse.

It is therefore not uncommon to read about depictions of the Movement as an entity characterized by dogmatism, inflexibility and conditioning techniques aiming at pervading the private and social lives of its members. One may doubt that these strict and intolerant policies are actively practiced within the Jehovah's Witnesses community; however, a quick look at some cases available online¹⁵ will give a view, even if only limited, of the extent to which this hard line discriminatory and alarming practice occurs.

To mention just one striking case, the national TV channel RAI DUE aired in 2004, in its TV series "TG2 / Dossier storie," a number of programs on the Jehovah's Witnesses religious Movement. One of them featured a 30 years active Jehovah's Witness Elder who, because of his blunt criticism against the Movement's leadership, had to disguise his face in order not to be recognized, which would have meant taking the risk of being expelled and, consequently, ostracized by his Witnesses relatives and friends¹⁶.

The worse sin: disagreement with the Movement's Leadership

Jehovah's Witnesses rank and file members who are not "Elders" [appointed male ministers overseeing the flock], are not allowed to have any association or communication with those who are in a disfellowshipped "state." While some exceptions are allowed when the expelled member still lives with his family, contact with every other relative not sharing the same home is seriously restricted to only necessary family urgencies – see *Appendix*.

Contrary to what could be assumed, these situations are not due to the bigotry of some local "Elders," but are specifically the result of the instructions spelled out by the Movement's Leadership.

The case¹⁷ of a young Witness, whose father had been expelled on the charge of rejecting some of the Movement's teachings as non-biblical, clearly shows the responsibilities.

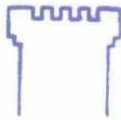
The young man had written a letter to the Movement's Worldwide Headquarters in Brooklyn, questioning the fact that his sister and brother-in-law had since stopped seeing his father, which he deemed to be disrespectful.

The attached Brooklyn Service Department answer is self-explanatory (for privacy reasons, the person's name and address have been blanked out).

¹⁵ See <http://www.freeminds.org/search.html?q=shunning>

¹⁶ Can be watched on Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgkdOcNyLpQ>

¹⁷ Reported by R.V. Franz, *In Search of Christian Freedom*, Atlanta 2007, pp. 350-351



WATCHTOWER

BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF NEW YORK, INC.

CABLE WATCHTOWER

25 COLUMBIA HEIGHTS, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11201, U.S.A. PHONE (212) 825-3400
SCE:SSH July 14, 1983

Dear Brother [REDACTED]

We have your letter in which you say that you are troubled by a problem that the elders seem unable to resolve. Your father has been disfellowshipped and as a result of this your sister and her husband do not have any association with your father. You seem to feel that this is disrespectful to your parents.

It is most unfortunate to hear that your father has been disfellowshipped. His taking action that resulted in his being disfellowshipped has brought about a Scriptural barrier between him and those loyal members of the family who continue to faithfully serve Jehovah. The loyal ones have not been the creators of the problem but, rather, the one who is disfellowshipped has caused it. Therefore, it would not be appropriate on your part to find fault with your sister if she respectfully obeys the Scriptural command at 1 Corinthians 5:11.

A person who is disfellowshipped has been spiritually cut off from the congregation; the former spiritual ties have been completely severed. This is true even with respect to relatives, including those within his immediate family circle. Thus, family members—while acknowledging family ties, will no longer have any spiritual fellowship with the disfellowshipped relative. (1 Sam. 28:6; Prov. 15:8, 9) While you and your sister may find it necessary from time to time to care for necessary family matters in regard to your parents, the direction at 1 Corinthians 5:11 would prohibit any association on a regular basis. We can appreciate that sentiment and family ties are particularly strong between parents and children but, in the final analysis, we will not benefit anyone or please God if we allow emotion to lead us into ignoring his wise counsel and guidance. We need to display our complete confidence in His perfect righteousness and ways, including his provision to disfellowshipped unrepentant wrongdoers. If we remain loyal to God and the congregation, the wrongdoer in time may take a lesson from that, repent and be reinstated into the congregation. It is our hope that will be the case with your father.

Faithfully yours,

CC: [REDACTED]

Watchtower B.T.S. Society
OF NEW YORK, INC.

As it can be seen, simply because of disagreeing with the Movement's teachings due to reasons of conscience, this father has been considered a 'wicked man,' similar to people condemned by Paul in 1 Corinthian 5:11 as 'immoral,' 'greedy,' 'extortioner' or 'idolater.' The responsibility for the separation of the family was laid exclusively on him.

He that is labeled by the Watchtower's Movement, through its "Elders," with the mark of "disfellowshipped" is considered as "dead." The specific reason behind the mark is utterly meaningless. The important aspect behind the discriminatory treatment is not the reason for the disfellowshipping but the "label." The case of Raymond Victor Franz, former member of the Movement's Governing Body, is paramount in this respect. He was disfellowshipped because he had lunch in a restaurant together with his employer who himself, had been disfellowshipped from the Movement¹⁸.

¹⁸ See R.V. Franz, *Crisis of Conscience*, pp. 355-377.

Another emblematic case was that of Edward Dunlap¹⁹ who, after 50 years of militancy, most of which while working in different roles for the Worldwide Headquarters in Brooklyn (one of which as President of the Missionary School of the Movement, Galaad), then aged 72, was literally thrown out into the street, after having been disfellowshipped only for having discussed with some of his friends a few of his opinions not in line with the Movement's teachings. Edward returned to Oklahoma City, his native hometown, where he joined his brother Marion, hanging wallpaper, the trade he practiced before moving to the Movement's Headquarters. What happened next?

Marion Dunlap was, at that time, "town overseer" of the Oklahoma City congregations. He also was a Jehovah's Witness since about fifty years, and had always been very active in the propaganda activity of the Movement and the attendance and participation to the group's meetings. Well, only for hosting his elderly brother and providing him with a decent job, he was investigated and eventually disfellowshipped. In the same period, in the course of a single year, five other members of the Dunlap family were disfellowshipped. These were not sinful bad people, nor did they promote any demonstration of protest; they simply felt obliged to follow their conscience, based on the Bible, rather than the word of fallible men or of an authoritarian religious group.

Another Witness, professor at the State University of Oklahoma, convinced of Edward Dunlap teaching qualifications, gave him the possibility to teach at his faculty. He was soon called up by the "Elders" and rapidly disfellowshipped.

In reality, expulsion by the Movement occurs for many disparate reasons; perhaps for disagreeing with the leaders doctrinal interpretations on the question of birthday celebrations, or for accepting a blood transfusion, smoking, criticizing the Movement's history revisionist strategy or questioning some of the changing "revelations," of which the worldwide Leadership believes to be the elected recipient. It is, therefore, quite clear that *the right to criticize* what is promoted by the Movement's Leaders *is not allowed to its members*.

In reality, the objective of the Movement's Leadership is to stamp in the minds of all the Witnesses that "no one can disobey organizational instructions with impunity."

Turning in offenders

The cases just described are all but exceptional. They are, instead, the worldwide norm within the Movement. Jehovah's Witnesses cannot refrain from the obligation to turn in their fellow believers to the Movement representatives if they detect in the former any behavior that seems not to conform to the latter's teachings and expectations.

An article titled "A Time to Speak – When?" which appeared in *The Watchtower*²⁰ magazine, set forth the official position that a Witness has the responsibility to reveal infringement of the Movement's rules by another member if these involve what are often called "disfellowshipping offenses," even where it means violating existing standards, even an oath of confidentiality – as in the case of a doctor, nurse, lawyer, or other person privy to confidential records or information. The wrongdoer should be encouraged to confess his sin to the "Elders," but if he does not do so, the counselor would feel an obligation, due to his oath of loyalty to God, to go to the elders himself.

The purpose of the aforesaid article is to convince each and every Jehovah's Witness that hiding from the "Elders" other fellow believers' sins constitutes a serious guilt in front of God. "Purity of the congregation" is the claimed justification for such a behavior. The problem, though, is that the definition of the term "purity" depends upon the organizational rules, regardless of what the Bible says or not on the matter. Consequently, it is always the Move-

¹⁹ See R.V. Franz, *Crisis of Conscience*, pp. 334-338.

²⁰ WT of September 1st 1987, p. 13.

ment which establishes the procedures to be followed in order to “help others to remain clean.” The fact that, based on those assumptions, all members feel bound by oath to “keep the purity of the congregation,” is of real concern.

Because of this multitude of organizational norms and rules, the possible variety of wrongdoings runs in the hundreds. For example, if a Witness, working as accountant, happens to deal with an invoice issued by a firm owned by another Witness for works on a church roof or installation of its alarm system, he would feel obliged to refer the matter to the “Elders.” Another consequence of these rules and regulations would be the need to bring accusations against a Witness for having done some work on a building inside a military base or proceeding with disinfestations of the same, or to question a woman whose life-sustaining activity is working as maid in military barracks. The “oath” requires giving up those who dissent from or reject the doctrine according to which Christ “is invisibly present” since the year 1914, or that He is the mediator only of the “anointed” class.

The end result of such a harsh line, in the final analysis, is of no help to the wrongdoer. Those committing a serious sin may have the need to speak to someone in order to receive help. A Jehovah’s Witness, however, cannot even speak about it to a fellow believer with the assurance that the matter will remain confidential between the two of them. Jehovah’s Witnesses are taught that it is not showing love not to give in their fellow believers who have not spontaneously confessed their sins to the Movement authorities.

Violation of Privacy

In observance of existing complex judicial procedures²¹ established by Jehovah’s Witness Leadership, the Movement has kept, for years, secret archives containing classified records of members’ private lives (personal habits, sexual activity and possible crimes of a secular judiciary nature). The Watchtower Movement keeps with great care voluminous archives containing large amounts of embarrassing information. Records of disfellowshipping cases are kept at the Worldwide Headquarters in Brooklyn, as well as in other national branches. Usually, what is being kept goes beyond the name of the expelled members, to include, based on the procedure, details and narratives related to the individual case. This information can be kept for many years, even after “reinstatement” of the repentant wrongdoer. Even in the event of death of the expelled member, its records continue to be kept by the Headquarters or other branches! According to the disclosures of R.V. Franz, Jon Mitchell, who worked for the Service Department and the Governing Body offices at the Worldwide Headquarters of the Movement, expelled members records, with the “death” stamp, are kept on file even after their death. Once Lee Waters, one of his fellow workers, said “We are probably the only organization keeping such private records even after the death of those concerned.” It is, therefore, no wonder that the Danish branch of the Movement was found in 1992 by the Danish authorities to have systematically violated the privacy regulations in force in that country, keeping for decades secret archives containing “crimes” committed by its members.

An Italian data protection act²² guarantees the privacy of the citizens’ personal data and prevents intrusion in their personal sphere, from a political, religious or sexual orientation standpoint. These guarantees and protections are frequently disregarded by the Orwellian so-

²¹ The aforesaid Kingdom Ministry School textbook (see note n°4) can be viewed, in some of its content, as a sort of “criminal code” of the Movement; in fact, in the KS edition 2010, chapters 5 and 9 contain lists of offenses that may require review by a judicial committee. It must be also noted that, in the Movement’s judicial matters, the “two witnesses rule” is strictly applied: in essence, with reference to 1 Timothy 5:19, it is asserted that no one can be accused of any sin (including children sexual abuse) unless proven by at least two eyewitnesses. Because of this “rule” the Watchtower has been tainted by the plague of children abuse. For a comprehensive understanding of the subject see the site www.silentlambs.org

²² Law n° 675 of 1996

ciety of Jehovah's Witnesses; maybe some well documented cases can serve illustrating this point:

As far as Italy is concerned, a letter from the "Congregazione Cristiana dei Testimoni di Geova," the Movement's Italian branch, dated March 14th 1997 and addressed to the Body of Elders of all Italian congregations, instructs them to report on any sexual misconduct known to them by any member of the community, even behind the back of the latter.

A shattered Witness woman, after an investigation of a couple of hours by a Witnesses' "Judicial Committee," was tailed and caught up with on her way home by two members of the "Committee" and body searched, in spite of her complaints. This case happened in the second week of July 1985 in Michelina's Street, town of Catania (Sicily)²³.

In a different case, in Greece this time, a group of 50 people gathered on April 6th 1987, in Athens, in the house of former Jehovah's Witnesses Nick and Efisia Bozartzis, for a Bible discussion. From his terrace, Nick noticed that, on the other side of the street, a couple of men were spying people's back and forth from his house, some of whom had not yet formally abandoned the Movement. As he recognized one of the men as a Jehovah's Witness, Nick went down to talk to him but, as soon as he showed up on the street, the two men literally ran off. A few days after the event, three Jehovah's Witnesses who participated in the Bible discussion at Nick's house were disfellowshipped by the "Elders," after a Judicial Committee hearing.

A second case in Greece, involves a group who used to meet every Friday at Voula Kalokerinou's house, another former Athens' Witness, to discuss the Bible. Because of the planned Witnesses celebration of the "Lord Evening Meal," which that year happened to fall on Sunday, for the convenience of the guests, the discussion meeting planned for the previous Friday Bible was cancelled. That same Friday, however, Voula noticed a car with five people on board stationed for several hours in front of his house. The same happened the following night.

If someone would assume that these Greeks were suffering from a kind of collective paranoia who wanted to see at all costs in these events an arrogant attempt to fabricate evidence in order to expel dissidents, the rest of the story will prove the absolute sanity of their suspicions.

The following Sunday, April 11th, a number of people gathered at Voula's house to celebrate the "Lord Evening Meal." Voula noticed again an unfamiliar car stationed at the corner of the street, while a little camper van was stationed on the opposite corner. The view from the camper's back window was concealed all over with paper, with the exception of a hole in the middle of the window. Several times that evening, people from the car crossed the street to talk to the people inside the van. Voula asked one of her guests to see why these cars were stationed just there. When the guest approached the car, the driver started the car to drive it away. Then, the guest decided to look through the hole in the paper stuck on the van's rear window. He saw two Jehovah's Witnesses he obviously knew, equipped with complete video cameras; one of them, Nikolas Antoniou, was a local "Elder," the second, Dimetre Zerdes, a member of the branch office of the Watchtower in Athens. More of Voula's guests joined the first one and surrounded the camper while a policeman, stationed nearby approached the group to question them. At this very moment the Witnesses in the van, wanting to escape, drove to a nearby park where they tried to free themselves of the video equipment but were stopped by two police cars, arrested and charged with violation of people's privacy. The recorded video in the camera showed Mrs. Kolokerinou's house with close-ups of people going through the main entrance.

The case ended up in a court trial. In the public prosecutor's closing speech, the public attorney said "I don't believe that there is one single Christian organization that teaches its

²³ The case is reported in Conti, Meli, Trovato, *Incatenati alla Torre di Guardia o buttati giù dal muraglione*, Catania 1988, p. 19

members to lie, however, as the defendant and his organization do so, they should stand up to their responsibility and state aloud: ‘Yes, we have spied’. If an organization is capable of doing this, what can we expect from its members? They have used special video recording equipment and have been caught in *fragrante delicto* by some eyewitnesses while shooting the video, but they insist that they were not spying but only shooting videos. All of this does not honor neither the defendants nor the organization they represent. We are all free to associate with the organization of our choice but we are also free to abandon it and to act as it pleases us within the limit of the law ... Does the fact that someone leaves and abandons this organization give a person the right to spy on him? The law forbids the use of any recording equipment, from simple sound recorders to video recorders, to poke one’s nose into the life and habits of another person. Our private life can in no way be subject to any type of control, and this is also true for our personal convictions. It is a very serious matter. Instead, the defendants have been found using video recording equipment and this, not by chance. The Watchtower, seeing itself as an Arch and teaching that salvation can be found only by joining them, as they are God’s channel, creates in its members a state of dependency, which forces them to behave in ways which represent a threat to the human rights.”

The court case ended with a guilty verdict²⁴.

Stirring up Hate

Once the authors of motivated criticism are labeled “apostates,” the Movement’s warmongering against them explicitly stirs up hate: “When a person persists in a way of badness [*therefore including motivated criticism without “repenting”*] after knowing what is right, when the bad becomes so ingrained that it is an inseparable part of his make-up, then in order to hate what is bad a Christian [*meaning a Jehovah’s Witness*] must hate the person with whom the badness is inseparably linked.”²⁵

Therefore, no member can express any thoughtful evaluation of the quality of the “spiritual food” provided by the Movement’s Leadership; this is how this thought is conveyed: “Some apostates profess to know and serve God, but they reject teachings or requirements set out in his Word. Others claim to believe the Bible, but they reject Jehovah’s organization and actively try to hinder its work. When they deliberately choose such badness after knowing what is right, when the bad becomes so ingrained that it is an inseparable part of their make-up, then a Christian must hate (in the Biblical sense of the word) those who have inseparably attached themselves to the badness.”²⁶

Disfellowshipping becomes an effective means of conscience control; in fact, *The Watchtower* magazine of July 15th 1992 states: “The obligation to hate lawlessness also applies to all activity by apostates” (page 12) and defining what hate is, it pinpoints “the meaning of the word “hate” ... has the thought of having such an intense feeling of dislike for or strong aversion to someone or something that we avoid having anything to do with such a person or thing” (page 9). It is therefore clear that in the social world of Jehovah’s Witnesses, love and hate do not assume their common meaning.

Therefore, there is no country in the world where Jehovah’s Witnesses who disagree with the teachings and practices of their Movement do not live in a state of continual anxiety and fear, because they know that whatever they may say, do or read is constantly controlled, the same as with whom they associate with. I have, myself, received telephone calls from people who preferred to use a so as not to run the risk of being recognized in their contacts with me or with other former Jehovah’s Witnesses. They are just like hostages due to the

²⁴ For more details see R.V. Franz, *In Search of Christian Freedom*, pp. 380-385.

²⁵ WT July 15th 1961, p. 419; *italic* text between squared brackets added for understanding.

²⁶ WT October 1st 1993, pp. 18-19.

Movement's power to inhibit any communication with their family and friends, who themselves are subject to the same power.

Expressing any disagreement, no matter how respectfully, discussing any subject supporting opinions contrary to the ones promoted by the Movement, even in private conversations with close friends, means giving the green light to an immediate investigation and summoning in front of a "Judicial Committee." Why? Because, in so doing, the individual who questions the Movement's history or doctrines finds himself off-limits, separated from all the other members. In this way, there is no danger that other members discuss with him subjects silenced by the Movement.

Men and women who sincerely love God and who, in good conscience, do not agree with some of the Movement's teachings, have been "robbed" of the place they deserve among their friends and acquaintances, *they have been deprived of their good name and their reputation, of the respect and affection they earned during their whole life* and have been driven apart from their family. Sadly enough, however, all this has been justified by the Movement's "rules."²⁷ Sincere and harmless men and women who only wanted to follow their good conscience have actually been "*stabbed in the back*" with unjustified, sometimes malicious accusations, undergoing a "*moral lynching*," and leaving them as *spiritually dead* in front of those who knew them.

Is all this an exaggeration? Far too many cases depict what happens within a Movement which resorts to "mind control" to "protect" its members from external "contamination." Such an environment is not suitable to hold thinking and teachings built on solid basis. Truth does not fear confrontation with error. Because of its dignity and validity, truth can only benefit from such a confrontation. On the other hand, fragile arguments and inconsistent teachings have no foundation and therefore have to be protected against those who want to prove their validity.

Italian State and Watchtower Society Agreement (Intesa) issue

Article 8 of the Italian Constitution²⁸ grants the State the right to undersign an Agreement (Intesa) with all those religious confessions that make a request for it. This type of Agreement is more than just a simple protection of rights; it offers increased freedom of action and wider potential of dissemination, and represents a kind of trustworthiness license in front of the citizen's conscience. At the very least, it is a kind of State guarantee against any danger that a given group might represent for the collectivity.

The Jehovah's Witness Movement has also made a request to the Italian State to subscribe to such an Agreement. At this moment, the 1st Permanent Commission for the Constitutional Affairs of the Italian Republic Senate is examining the bill proposal Number 2237²⁹, charting the "Norms for the regulation of the relationships between the State and the Congregazione Cristiana dei Testimoni di Geova in Italia (Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Italy)."

Just imagine, now, what would happen if this proposal becomes the law of the State; what kind of exception could be claimed to stop the overflow of ostracism promoted by Jehovah's Witnesses against those who, within the Movement, are not in line with the same and dissent from its views and ideology? This concern was the main reason why, on December 1st 2010, a demonstration was held in front of the Italian Parliament, to alert publicly the State

²⁷ See the *Appendix* for documental evidences about Movement's shunning severity.

²⁸ «All religious confessions are equally free before the law. Religious Confessions other than Catholic have the right to organize in accordance with their own charters, in so far as they are not in conflict with Italian laws. Their relations with the State are regulated by law on the basis of an agreement between the respective representatives».

²⁹ See <http://www.senato.it/leg/16/BGT/Schede/Ddliter/35521.htm>

Institutions and ask them to evaluate more thoroughly, with care and judgment, the conditioning designed by the “Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses” Italian branch, before stipulating an Agreement with this religious organization. The demonstration was *not aimed at denying the freedom of religion of a religious group*; instead, the demonstration aimed at drawing the attention of the Institutions and public opinion to the possibility of *denying a state of special favors* to the “Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses” which uses a system of harsh discrimination and ostracism. This disgraceful practice, subsequent to the disfellowshipping disciplinary measures, in fact limits the freedom to relinquish membership from the Movement. This forces many people to remain in the Movement for fear of losing all their emotional bonds should they abandon it.

This kind of psychological pressure is different from their proclaimed religious freedom, which obviously has to be granted to all. In the past, some political leaders have shown their concern about the problem of ostracism; in fact, one member of the Parliament stated that “given how the Agreement between the State and the Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses, contrary to similar Agreements with other religious groups, has engendered serious contrasts, it is appropriate that the Government cautiously stays attuned to the historical and cultural evolution of the country. Such a precaution is more than necessary with respect to a reality which, according to some aspects, is worrying, in particular under the interpersonal relationships aspect between the members of the religious group, especially when the membership bonds are broken. Later, the same member of the Parliament added: “the Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses displays very peculiar characteristics; this is what stems from the very large number of reports received on account of the ostracism practiced against those who come to the decision to abandon the Movement, frequently with dramatic consequences within the family units.”

Let’s be clear: Jehovah’s Witnesses are free to expel anyone they want; they assume the total responsibility; but one could ask oneself: is it normal for the State to offer a special license to a Movement which forces its members to comply with these policies which are disrespectful of fundamental human rights?

Unfortunately, in some religious groups, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, the exercise of the right to criticism by its own members suffers a harsh *vulnus* through the practice of systematic ostracism, frequently inducing radicalization of the family conflicts, when a member of the family decides to abandon the religious group because he no longer shares the same ever changing ideology and positions³⁰.

This procedure alone justifies the social alarm created by adhesion to the Jehovah’s Witnesses Movement. The problem is not if a person is free to stop greeting a relative, a friend or a co-worker; the true question is should the State legitimize a Movement which uses the discriminatory practices just described.

It should therefore be reasonable, before engaging in such an Agreement, that the State makes a serious evaluation of the case. This does not mean denying the freedom granted to all. Perhaps, what would be denied is a state of special favor, which is quite different from the exercise of religious freedom.

Appendix: The rules of Jehovah’s Witnesses ostracism

It’s interesting to note that, when the Movement literature speaks about the ostracism practiced by other religious groups against dissenters, it refers to “intimidation,”³¹ whereas,

³⁰ See for examples of that situation <http://www.freeminds.org/psychology/shunning/>

³¹ See WT February 1st 1967, p. 93. As the magazine known since March 1939 as *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah’s Kingdom* was originally *Zion’s Watch Tower and Herald of Christ’s Presence* (1879 – 1908), then *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ’s Presence* (1909 – 1931), *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ’s Pres-*

when the ostracism is practiced by the Movement, it becomes a proof of *loyalty to God*. In fact, this is how ostracism is described by Jehovah's Witnesses when they are induced, by their leaders, to practice it against those who have nothing against God, but simply dissent with the changeable teachings of their worldwide leadership.

What does it mean to Jehovah's Witnesses to "observe the disfellowshipping order" issued by the Judicial Committee among them?

A concise review of quotations from the Movement literature, referring to the systematic practice of ostracism also – indeed mostly – against the critics of the ideology, will offer a significant base for the countless stories which periodically attract the public opinion.

Note that "the one who deliberately does not abide by the congregation's decision puts himself in line to be disfellowshipped."³² Therefore, whoever, in his own conscience, would decide to maintain social and family relationships with an expelled former member may put himself at risk of being sanctioned. In fact, the WT of May 15th 1963, p. 299 par. 19, states that "any attachments to the disfellowshipped person, whether these be ties of personal friendship, blood relation or otherwise, must take second place to the theocratic disciplinary action that has been taken."

How should the loyal members in the family behave in relation to a parent or a son who is expelled from the Movement? Replying this question, the WT of October 1st 1961, p. 591 par. 21-22, states: «What, then, if the son of a family that is within God's visible organization should oppose this prophesying concerning the Kingdom? ... What should the dedicated, baptized father and mother do? They dare not let their affections run wild; they dare not spare even this dear one whose natural birth they caused. ... They must pierce him through because of his false prophesying. They must consider him as spiritually dead to themselves, as one with whom to have no religious association and fellowship and whose prophesying are to be rejected».

Furthermore, the WT of November 15th 1952, p. 703 legislated: «Of course, if the children are of age, then there can be a departing and breaking of family ties in a physical way, because the spiritual ties have already snapped».

What if the expelled relative isn't of the immediate family's circle? Well, the rule is: «The excommunicated relative should be made to realize that his visits are not now welcomed as they were previously»³³.

In addition, the Movement orders: «What if a disfellowshipped person and a member of the congregation both work at the same place of secular employment? ... While it is permissible to converse to the extent necessary for carrying out the functions of the work, it would not be proper to associate in the sense of communicating freely, without regard for his status. Only the necessary business would be discussed, never spiritual matters or any other matter that does not come under the category of necessary business related to the secular employment. If the contact required is too frequent and intimate, the Christian could consider changing his employment so as not to violate his conscience»³⁴.

And what if a man and a woman, both Witnesses, are fiancé and one of them is expelled before their marriage? The loyal Witness "should sever the tie with the disfellowshipped one. ... If the Christian disregards this by marrying the disfellowshipped one, he too can be disfellowshipped."³⁵

ence (1931 – 1938), *The Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Kingdom* (1938 – 1939), it is cited simply as WT in all instances.

³² See WT July 1st 1963, p. 409.

³³ See WT July 15th 1963 p. 443 ff.

³⁴ See WT July 1st 1963, pp.409-414.

³⁵ See WT July 15th 1963, p. 443.

What if the expelled one is not a relative? The rule of the movement is very simple: «All association with him is severed»³⁶. Doggedness against the expelled ones is astonishing: «Those in the congregation will not extend the hand of fellowship to this one, nor will they so much as say “Hello” or “Good-bye” to him. ... Therefore the members of the congregation will not associate with the disfellowshipped one, either in the Kingdom Hall or elsewhere. They will not converse with such one or show him recognition in any way»³⁷.

It is undeniable that these cruel attitudes often do not manifest themselves because the relatives feel strong dislike for the expelled one, but only because it is the Movement that so decided. To prove this, simply observe the sudden change of attitude shown by the Witnesses worldwide, after the publication of the articles which appeared in the WT of August 1st 1974, which modified drastically the family ties between loyal Witnesses and expelled relatives. That change was accepted with relief by Jehovah's Witnesses³⁸. For example, for years, a policy of the Movement barred funeral ceremonies in favor of expelled ones: no exception was allowed³⁹.

The WT of June 1st 1976, pp. 344-348, however, ruled that each case was different from another and had to be judged on its own by the elders, stating that: «if the elders felt that it would not disturb the peace and harmony of the congregation nor bring reproach upon God's people, there would be no objection to an elder's giving a talk». Later, however, in 1979, the Movement leadership changed their mind back – in fact, within a few years, they restored their previous hard-line policy, shunning again the expelled members of a family, isolating them at the border of social life, deserving to be dealt with as perfect strangers.

Probably the situation changed owing to what had happened at the worldwide headquarters in Brooklyn in the Eighties. In fact, after some authoritative officers of the Movement, who disagreed on some of the group's teachings, were expelled⁴⁰, the new direction taken by the leadership was evidenced in a letter, dated September 1st 1980, sent to travelling overseers.⁴¹ The letter said that continuing to believe – not promoting, but simply believing – something different from the teachings of the Movement was grounds for taking judicial action for apostasy. Asking questions entailing sound and deep reflection relating to the Movement's teachings means troubles: the questioner is reduced to a sudden silence and, instead of answering his questions, his own intellectual honesty is questioned.

In fact, the embitterment of the shunning rules is manifest throughout the literature of the Movement from the Eighties onward: «if the disfellowshipped or disassociated one is a relative living outside the immediate family circle and home, it might be possible to have almost no contact at all with the relative. Even if there were some family matters requiring contact, this certainly would be kept to a minimum»⁴².

In the summer 2002 the Movement reiterated its intolerant policy against former members as follows: «Hence, we also avoid social fellowship with an expelled person. This would rule out joining him in a picnic, party, ball game, or trip to the mall or theater or sitting down to a meal with him either in the home or at a restaurant»⁴³.

Most recently, in the WT of February 15th 2011, once again the Movement tries to convince rank and file Jehovah's Witnesses not to associate with allegedly "lawless" expelled ones. On p. 31, paragraph 15, it states: «Do we share Jesus' view of those who have become

³⁶ See WT July 15th 1963 p. 443 ff.

³⁷ See WT July 1st 1963 p. 409.

³⁸ These 1974 articles were written by Raymond V. Franz on behalf of the worldwide leadership (Governing Body).

³⁹ See *La Torre di Guardia* 15 April 1963, p. 255.

⁴⁰ In that period Raymond V. Franz resigned from the membership of the worldwide Governing Body and other authoritative Witnesses – as Edward Dunlap – were disfellowshipped.

⁴¹ You can find the text of this letter in R.V. Franz, *Crisis of Conscience*, pp. 341-342.

⁴² See WT April 15th 1988, p. 28.

⁴³ See the monthly *Kingdom Ministry* (a periodic paper for publishers only) August 2002, pp. 3-4, par. n°3.

set in their lawless course? We need to give thought to these questions: “Would I choose to associate regularly with someone who has been disfellowshipped or who has disassociated himself from the Christian congregation? What if that one is a close relative who no longer lives at home?” Such a situation can be a real test of our love of righteousness and of our loyalty to God». The Movement has its own definition of what it considers a "lawless" course – it is any disfellowshipping offense.

Paragraph 18 of the aforesaid article drives the point home; it states, «By cutting off contact with the disfellowshipped or disassociated one, you are showing that you hate the attitudes and actions that led to that outcome. However, you are also showing that you love the wrongdoer enough to do what is best for him or her. Your loyalty to Jehovah [read: “the Movement”] may increase the likelihood that the disciplined one will repent and return to Jehovah». In other words: If you shun a person enough letting them down and without friends – they will have no other alternative but to reintegrate into the Movement and submit again to its control!

With this concise review of the official literature of the Movement we hope to have offered sufficient evidence of the questionable rules enforced by the Movement and subscribed to by the Legal Entity with which the Italian Parliament is contemplating signing-up the “Intesa” [“Agreement”], i.e. the “Congregazione cristiana dei testimoni di Geova” in Rome.

To bring back to life: the fate of a young man and the harm caused by his membership in Chaitanya Mission (Testimony)

Anna Lobaczewska, President of Ruch Obrony Rodzinki I Jednosti (Poland)

Summary

My Son was recruited to the Caytanya Mission cult at the age of 18. The cult is related to The International Society for Krishna Consciousness. Jagad Guru/Chris Butler is the leader. In Poland the Caytanya Mission began operations in 1991 with modest rented premises, inviting recruits for yoga courses. After a year of complete involvement in the cult my son moved out of the house, dropped out of college and completely broke off contact with his family. At that time, I made contact with other families whose relatives were involved in a variety of destructive cults, while I took part in the intense media campaign by presenting the true face of the Caytanya Mission hoping that my son would hear me and understand that he has been cheated in a devious way. Unfortunately, my actions have not yielded the expected results, moreover I was twice accused by Caytanya Mission of infringement of personal rights: once in Gdansk in 1994 and then in 1996 in Lublin. The process that began in Lublin was a kind of demonstration to which members of the cult came from across the country. My son has been called as a witness against me twice. Each of the witnesses of Caytanya Mission was very well prepared, recited before the Court. Even the testimony of parents and experts did not convince my son and he continued to be hostile against me and the family. In the first instance, I lost the case. The Court ordered me to apologize for wording in my article. However the Court found that Caytanya Mission was a destructive cult. In the second instance (the Court of Appeal) Caytanya Mission abruptly withdrew the lawsuit. Members of the cult and my son were convinced that the process had been won by the Caytanya Mission and my pleas against them were false. After eight years, my son unexpectedly arrived in Lublin as a sunglass street vendor. The whole family had to convince him to stay in the apartment where we had lived be-

fore we moved to the suburbs. It took him a long time to accept the offer. Unfortunately, he was manipulated so deeply that it brought confusion to his world of values. Now he seems to be lost and can not find his way of life. His re-entry into normal life is very difficult.

"Bring back to life..." – A mother's testimony

I am a mother, whose son was recruited into the cult Caytanya Mission at the age of 18. The cult is a branch of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. At the head stands Jagad Guru / Chris Butler / Brahpupady known in Poland as a student founder of the Society for Krishna Consciousness. There is no significant difference between Caytanya Mission and the Society for Krishna Consciousness' teachings. In Poland, the Caytanya Mission began operations in 1991 with renting modest premises for its activities. My son Peter, on the first attendance at the cult meeting was convinced that this is only a yoga course. At one point his behavior, manner of speaking, nutrition, perception of reality and attitude to life, education, family, changed radically and become worrisome. I asked him what had happened that had made him change so quickly but received no reply. He saw demons: it was as if he was in a trance, constantly reciting mantra and became obsessed about body purity. He was losing weight. He often disappeared for days from home, hiding his whereabouts. After graduating from high school, when the time limit came to submit documents to enter university, he hesitated. He decided not to go to college, as he argued that science does not give happiness. My family and I tried to convince him to study. I knew that the cult would prevent him from submitting the documents. For the cult studying was a useless idea, they were bombarding Peter with arguments to dissuade him from studying. As he had already been subjected to intensive indoctrination, he saw no sense in science nor in acquiring education. Before that he was a good pupil, he had plans for his life, he liked to hike, he was a scout, and enjoyed a game of chess. He was responsible and reliable.

I decided to go to an open meeting and talk with the guru. I was ready to ask guru for permission to study for Peter. I thought that if I did not deny their assumptions, or criticize actions avoiding sensitive issues, and would show a far-reaching tolerance, maybe then I could convince the guru to allow my son to study.

At the meeting 70 people were present, mostly young people but among them there was a large group of adults demonstrating commitment to the lecture and group singing. When the meeting ended, there were only the members of the Mission Caytanya left. I went to the guru and presented the problem peacefully. I said that I was worried that Peter did not want to study although he had such plans before. The Guru called Peter and asked how old he was. He replied that he was over 18. He was a little confused. The Guru told me: "You see, he is an adult, he's already decided." A middle-aged woman listened to that conversation. At some point, she spoke to me: "You are not his mother, he has a different mother." My composure vanished and I exclaimed, "You are a cult". Then Waldemar Kociuba - Guru - found himself in a situation where in front of the members he could demonstrate his absolute power over my son and commanded Peter: "take her out". My son took me by the hand, but did it lamely, the guru seeing his indecision pointed to one of the young people and said to him: "help him." They managed to pull me toward the exit. I saw to what extent my son was subordinated to the guru, and was ready to obey to his every command. At home, Peter threatened me to send me to jail because I offended his guru. How important his guru was to him, if he was ready to send me to jail just for saying that the organisation was a cult. Then I realized that nothing mattered to him any more except for the guru and the cult. He was totally devoted and obedient to them. However, in spite all this he submitted the documents for university to study.

During the summer I hardly saw my son as he was constantly away from home, sometimes coming for a few days, but not talking to us, not replying to questions. I tried to find out

where and with whom he was staying, with no result – he always managed to disappear. During the semester, he had no time to study, and was busy with meetings of the cult. He could not keep up with the increasing demands of the cult and study at the same time. At some point he began to pack his things. It was in winter. I did not know or did not want to know that he was preparing to leave home. This happened in late January. He said that he was leaving to study at the Institute for Studies of Identity - known as the Caytanya Mission, registered as a religious association. I asked him to leave me his address to keep contact with him. He did not answer. The cult people were waiting for him in the street .

I did not lose hope because I did not believe that one could live in absurdity all one's life, and one cannot change all that was part of you - for the family and for a society. Nobody was prepared for it. Peter has not contacted us, we did not know his whereabouts.

But one evening he came. He looked strange, he was very aggressive and on the door step he was screaming that I should apologize to the guru. I tried to calm him down, but unfortunately he did not hear me. It was impossible to talk to him. He was yelling at me all the time, repeating the same thing. He sat in front of the glazed cupboard and with all his strength struck his head on the window. He did not care that he was injured, and still furiously demanded that I apologized to the guru. The row ended late at night. He did not go to the Caytanya Mission, but slept in his room. The next day he was completely different and had lost his previous aggression. I asked him whether, before coming to the house he was in the Caytanya Mission and what had happened him there. He nodded and blushed. I guess he realized that he was given something that had such an influence on him. Soon he went and did not return.

I was brought before the Court by Caytanya Mission twice for infringement of personal rights. In the first trial, which took place in Gdansk, the editor of the "Educational Review" who printed the article "Intercontinental sectarianism" was accused along with me. At one of the last hearings Caytanya Mission withdrew its claim which I accepted with relief.

After two years, I was called back to Court in Lublin. The trial was a peculiar show attended by members of the cult from all over the country. Members were reimbursed their travel expenses. In support of the indictment all my appearances: radio, press and television had been collected and sentences quoted, when I had accused Caytanya Mission of manipulation, changing personality and warning about addiction. Witnesses that testified before the Court did not confess belonging to Caytanya Mission but they spoke of how happy they were and the positive impact that it had on their lives. These were well-prepared and learned beforehand testimonials. The Court received a stack of documents, that contained thanks proving the cult charitable activities in Poland and abroad, and lists of Catholics supporting the education of Caytanya Mission and even presented a letter of prominent politicians who supported their activities. The Court never checked the authenticity of these documents. The cult called men of science of religion to witness . They pointed to the diversity of the religion but did not see the negative impact it had. They relied on documents and interviews with members of the Caytanya Mission. They heard an unusual witness, David Muncie spiritual master from Thailand. His presence was meant to be a very important event in this case for members of the cult and the Court. Between the designated Court hearings, an emergency hearing was called. A spiritual master, with an interpreter, in a Court room full of Caytanya Mission believers lectured for 4 hours on the philosophical base of the cult. The lecture was an example of a sophisticated manipulation of various elements drawn from the philosophy of Hinduism and Christianity. He had to convince Catholic members and also the Court that the Caytanya Mission doctrine does not contradict Christianity, and allowed to get rid of doubts, if they had any. One had to be confirmed theologian to make a careful study and find a distortion and falsification. Unprepared persons could not notice such differences. And such an assumption gave the leaders of the organization courage to appear in Court.

My witnesses were parents whose children had been recruited by the cult and subject to its destructive influence. Witnesses were also people who were acquainted with the cult: they spoke of the unhealthy relationships prevailing there and those who frequented their meetings showed up the manipulation, trance states, and hypnosis used during the lectures. Scientists and clergy also testified.

The hearings were a kind of conversation, attend by my son. He was in the courtroom and listened as ex-members were telling about the trauma they suffered at the time of commitment to the cult, and their parents described their experiences. I was hoping that the testimony of the victims' families would stimulate him into independent reflection, which would allow him to see the harm caused to its members. I could not talk to him during breaks because he was strictly isolated from me.

From the very beginning, I was accused of being an overprotective mother of a mature adult, able and conscious to make choices. Mission Caytanya applied psychological terror to me. They presented my family as pathological, citing drastic scenes that never took place, indicating that this was the reason why my son left home. They sent me letters that were supposed to cause a feeling of guilt. Crown evidence was to be Peter's testimony. He recited, like the others adepts the well learned lessons, trying to prove that he had taken the decision and said he didn't like the way of our home was run. That it included alcohol, cigarettes and meat. But when I asked him directly whether there was something he wanted to criticize about us as parents, he spontaneously replied that he accused us of nothing. This was in sharp contrast to that what he so widely described. It was as if the two different personalities were fighting inside his mind. He was not frightened, but subdued and sometimes criticized reality. I felt that he was not completely lost. That what happened in his life before Caytanya Mission has not been completely buried, and certainly Caytanya Mission is not the only power that can plan and direct Peter's life.

I decided to call my son as a witness for a second time. It was a way of keeping in touch with him but also to stop the Caytanya Mission from sending my son abroad (as they had such plans). When my agent asked my son how much money he was giving for Caytanya Mission, he answered without hesitation, 200 dollars a month. Everyone in the room burst out laughing. I do not know until today, what that laugh was about.

In first instance, the verdict was not in my favour. The Court made a selection of certain phrases from my appearances and ordered me to apologize to Caytanya Mission in the mainstream press. The Court however admitted that this organization was a cult.

After an appeal the case began right from the start before another court. When the Caytanya Mission realized that the trial was going in a negative direction for them, it decided to withdraw the lawsuit. I did not want to have anything to do with them, and waived their financial claims. But that did not worry the leaders of the Mission Caytanya, they broadcast in the media and above all persuaded their members to date, that they had won a case against me and that my charges against them were completely unfounded.

Suddenly, after seven years, my son appeared in Lublin as a street trader. Surprisingly, we were able to meet him on neutral ground. Family and many people who knew Peter, as if by chance, started talking. Inquired about his life lessons. Certainly this did not leave him indifferent. It gave him a chance to return to a time before the cult, recall memories and forced him to reflect on his situation. At that time my family had moved house and we suggested that he could live in the flat that we had left. Initially, he did not want to hear about it saying it was useless to him. However, after a long persuasion he accepted. The flat needed renovation, so he had to stay with us in our new house. I was able to observe closely the devastation which the cult had caused in Peter's mental state. Perhaps by then he was not so fully engaged in the activities of the cult, but it was easy to see how the cult had brought confusion into his life, guided by the principles that have been taught to him there. The greatest evil, according to him was eating meat. He abided with the principles of vegetarianism, not be-

cause of taste or health, but because of the belief in reincarnation. He believed that even a dish that has come into contact with meat could result that in a future life his soul would return on earth in the shape of a swine and thus of spiritual degradation.

He stopped intellectual development when he joined the cult. Long periods in trance states and meditation, isolation from science, destruction of his personality and the street trade, which was to the cult benefit had resulted in a lack of further educational ambitions. Depression and emotional swings which I could observe, were the consequences of staying in the cult. His entry into normal life was very difficult. He was still hostile to the family and especially towards me.

One time we talked about the Court case. He was convinced that the cult won the case. When we proved that this was not the case, having no other arguments, already desperate, he accused me of calling false witnesses. I never went back to that conversation. I tried to engage my son in the small domestic operations to enter the world of normal duties and responsibilities. Currently, he is very slowly rebuilding relationships with the family and re-reentering life with his past cult ballast. His long stay in the cult, cast a shadow over his life. He is not the last victim of this cult.

Caytanya Mission ceased to use his name on the posters inviting to its lectures. It uses different names, so that no one can associate them with the compromising process. Its main activities moved to the coast, where there are many benefit from members trading on beaches. They developed the production of dietary supplements. They employ many people who are drawn into to the cult often breaking up family bonds and exploit them as their employees.

The History of Credibility Attacks Against Former Cult Members

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Abstract

Former members of various high-demand, ideologically driven groups have proven enormously helpful to researchers in the cult information field. By providing first-hand accounts and hard-to-obtain documents, former members have made themselves indispensable in many research projects and in many anti-cult-education organizations. Occasionally, however, significant problems have arisen from relying on a few of them. Drawing upon thirty-five years of anti-cult history in North America, I identify and discuss briefly seven types of former members and alleged former members who caused difficulties for various organizations. These types are: 1) forced deconverts; 2) returnees; 3) delusional alleged former members; 4) con artists; 5) spies; 6) ex-members with 'histories;' 7) professional former member anti-cultists; 8) former members who become professionals; and former members who become professionals. I conclude by praising the contributions that former members make to the anti-cult movement, but caution that for some of them, things differ from appearances.

THE HISTORY OF CREDIBILITY ATTACKS AGAINST FORMER CULT MEMBERS

Few academics writing critically about cult abuses today have benefited more from former members than me. I have interviewed countless numbers of people who have departed high-demand groups; they have fact-checked various pieces before I publish; and they have provided me with literally millions of pages of documents. My career, and my scholarship, would have been greatly diminished without them.

For thirty years, I have utilized the insights and materials that former members provided, and have watched with some amazement as others refused to do so. Problems, however, have arisen with cult critics attempting to work with some former members, or at least people claiming to have left various groups. A brief history of those problems, therefore, provides a cautionary tale worth telling in anti-cult or counter-cult circles. These problems likely will recur in Europe, if they have not appeared already. In North America, these problems first began in the early 1970s.

1) Forced Deconverts:⁴⁴

In North America, cults tore into public awareness in the early 1970s, with groups like the Hare Krishnas, the Tony and Susan Alamo Foundation, the Children of God, and the Unification Church. Certainly controversial groups such as Scientology existed before this time, but the early 1970s saw numerous spiritual claimants attracting youth who had grown alienated from a range of societal values (see Kent, 2001). As youth joined any one of numerous groups during that period, they often cut ties with their families and personal histories. Parents feared, often quite legitimately (see Patrick with Dulack, 1976: 260-264), for their loved ones' safety. By 1971, a number of them in North America turned to a man, Ted Patrick, who claimed that he could deprogram (see Patrick with Dulack, 1976: 61) these youth out of their new commitments and back to a healthier state of mind. No figures exist about how many deprogrammings Patrick performed over the years, but they numbered at least in the high-hundreds. Others also became deprogrammers on either full-time or part-time basis (see Kent and Szimhart, 2002).

Patrick's extraction of youth from these groups took many forms, from violent (see Patrick with Dulack, 1976: 67, 100, 207-208) to relatively non-coercive. If and when, however, he "convinced" someone to deconvert, then part of his strategy to further cement the person's renunciation was to get the person to sign a statement denouncing his or her former group (see Patrick and Dulack, 1976: 176; 230-230-236), and (if possible) call a press conference in which the new deconvert continued the denunciation. Patrick's assumption was that youth were tricked or manipulated into joining and highly pressured into remaining, and the recent deconverts often would reproduce these perspectives in their own stories.

In reaction, however, to deconverts' stories of negativity and manipulation, sociologists reacted in two ways. One way had a positive impact upon the study of new religions. Sociologists developed a number of conversion models, only one of which involved coercion and deception. Among the most popular was a six-fold model by John Lofland and L. Norman Skonovd, in which "coercive" conversions were only one of the types Lofland and Skonovd, (1981). All of the five others had converts playing varying degrees of active involvement in the conversion process itself.⁴⁵ These new models, therefore, represented some of the complexities around the conversion process, which was not captured in most of the deconversion stories being told by recent deprogrammees.

The other reaction that some academics took was to turn around Patrick's assumptions about trauma. In Patrick's model, one's involvement in a high-demand group was exceedingly stressful, and the deprogramming freed the person from that stressful environment. A couple

⁴⁴ One of my PhD students, Terra Manca, raised the interesting question about whether people unwillingly kicked out of groups also belong in the category of 'forced deconverts.' The question is a good one, although I suspect that, initially, these expelled former members still will maintain a significant level of commitment to either the group or its teachings.

⁴⁵ The six types of conversion that Lofland and Skonovd identified were: intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist, and coercive. Each of these types differed according to five variables: degree of social pressure; temporal duration; level of affective arousal; affective content; and the belief-participation sequence. One also might wish to add hypnotist as a conversion motif, but the literature on that type never appears on sociological discussions.

of academics, however, argued that the deprogramings were the causes of stress in the accounts of former members, not the involvement with the groups themselves. Deprogramming, therefore, and not the groups themselves were the problem. The stories that they told always and only focused on negative aspects of their former group; hence, they were “atrocities tales” that completely neglected to discuss positive aspects of the group. As biased stories, therefore, these so-called atrocities tales were not acceptable as accurate renditions.

2) Returnees:

The issue about the accuracy of these obligatory public denunciations after deprogramings was even more problematic after a few deconverts criticized their former groups, thanked the deprogrammers, but then some time later rejoined the groups they had denounced (see Patrick with Dulack, 1976: 176-178). Cult defenders, and other observers, had to ask, “If things were as bad inside the groups as they said, then why did they return?” The assumption, therefore, was that deconverts had made their initial denunciations under duress, and that (at the very least) their former involvement actually had positive aspects.

An early, and dramatic, example of this pattern—of a deconverted person rejoining a group that he or she had denounced—took place in Toronto, Canada in 1975 and 1976. In March 1975, Canadian newspapers carried stories about how Ted Patrick worked with the parents of nineteen-year-old Linda Epstein to trick her into entering a hotel room so that he and his associates could ‘deprogram’ her from the Hare Krishnas. As she recounted later, her father did not use force to lure her into the room: “‘My father isn’t yanking me or touching me or anything, he just takes me by the shoulder and we go into the room. There’s nothing there, just the two beds’” (Epstein, quoted in Blatchford, 1975: 1). Immediately thereafter, she saw the deprogrammers, and soon they began to work on her.

After three nights, she signed a prepared statement, which read (in part):

‘I was taught to hate my church, and that education was the Devil and was to be scorned. In fact, my mind was so controlled by the leaders of the Hare Krishna movement that if they ordered me to KILL my own parents, I would have done so. Under their pressure, I became totally unable to rationalize’ (quoted in Schachter, 1975 [capitalization in original]). The prepared statement continued:

‘I once again feel like a useful member of society. If, in any event, the Hare Krishna movement or any other sect or cult psychologically or physically kidnaps me back, I am requesting immediate action by the authorities; to come and physically remove me from this, because, in such case, regardless of what I may say or do at the time, I will not be acting under my free will’ (quoted in Blatchford, 1975: 2).

Copies of this statement went to the American Federal Bureau of Investigation and Canadian Attorney General’s Department in Ottawa (Blatchford, 1975:1). At the subsequent press conference, Epstein’s father and two of Patrick’s associates “railed against the movement” (Schachter, 1975).

In late December 1975, however, Linda Epstein rejoined the Krishnas, subsequently swearing an affidavit that she rejoined “‘through my own volition’” (quoted in Harpur, 1976). At a press conference in early 1976, she indicated “‘she was never happy at home and ‘wanted more than anything’ to devote her life to finding God” (Epstein, quoted in Harpur, 1976). Reflecting back upon the denunciation of the group that she had signed, she now claimed that she had done so “‘under duress,’” and that “‘it in no way reflected my true feelings’” (Epstein quoted in Harpur, 1976).

By no means should the Epstein case be taken as indicative that all statements made after deprogramings are inaccurate, but certainly one can see how Epstein could say that she gave her initial statement under coercion. In any case, around this same period some academics began treating all former members’ statements as unreliable. We can see this drift in aca-

demia toward the *a priori* rejection of former members' accounts by examining one article by James Lewis, followed by his misrepresentation of it.

James R. Lewis's 1989 article on "Apostates and the Legitimation of Repression" is one representation of this approach. In a study of 154 former members of a number of groups, he tested their attitudes towards the groups to which they had belonged. Lewis concluded:

Ex-members who had experienced coercive deprogramming tended to express negative, stereotypical attitudes; voluntary defectors who had no links with anti-cultists tended to feel ambivalent or positive about their former movements; and the attitudes of respondents who were not kidnapped but who had experienced some form of voluntary counseling at the hands of the anti-cultists tended to lie somewhere in between (Lewis 1989: 390).

The study did not distinguish differing experiences *among* different groups, nor factor in participants' levels of involvement within the groups' respective hierarchies. In addition, it did not evaluate the various levels of stress within each of the ways that people departed (i.e. violent versus nonviolent deprogrammings), or the specific information that people were exposed to during their deconversion, regardless of how they obtained it. Nevertheless, Lewis remained sufficiently convinced of the definitive nature of his study that he used it to justify support for blocking a publication of mine on the Children of God in 1993.

Without having read the article, he mistakenly assumed that I had built my case primarily upon former members' accounts (Lewis, 1993). Lewis wrote to one of the journal's editors, "Research on former members of controversial religious groups (e.g., my 'Apostates and the Legitimation of Repression,' *Sociological Analysis*, winter 1989) has, however, demonstrated that such limited subsamples are non-representative, which calls into question the objectivity of his entire study" (Lewis, 1993).⁴⁶ Remarkably, of course, his own summary of research findings misrepresented his own study, since that study only concluded that deprogramming and (to a lesser extent, exit counseling) influenced the degree of negativity with which people looked back on their former groups. As this intervention against the publication of my article suggests, by the early 1990s many academics had concluded that former member accounts, regardless of how these people had exited, called into question the information that they provided. The very source of the information—former members—contaminated the contents.

We will never know if the esteemed sociologist of religion, the late Bryan Wilson (1926-2004), knew either of the Epstein case or had read Lewis's article when he wrote about his total rejection of former members' accounts:

Neither the objective sociological researcher nor the court of law can readily regard the apostate as a creditable or reliable source of evidence.

He must always be seen as one whose personal history predisposes him to bias with respect to both his previous religious commitment and affiliations, [and] the suspicion must arise that he acts from a personal motivation to vindicate himself and to regain his self-esteem, by showing himself to have been first a victim but subsequently to have become a redeemed crusader. As various instances have indicated, he is likely to be suggestible and ready to enlarge or embellish his grievances to satisfy that species of journalist whose interest is more in sensational copy than in a[n] objective statement of the truth (Wilson, 19994: 4).

Not surprisingly, Scientology published Wilson's statement and makes it available on the Internet. Moreover, Scientology continues to use it whenever former members put forward critical information about it.

⁴⁶ I find it interesting that Lewis criticized the objectivity of former members' accounts, but in 2010 published an account of a schism within a group that he had lead, based primarily upon his own account and information. Before forming his own group, he had defected from 3HO, so he expects readers to believe and accept his own 'former member' account (Lewis, 2010)!

Academics other than Wilson have adopted a similar position, as I know far too well. In an article first published in a journal dedicated to the study of new religions called *Nova Religio* and subsequently reprinted in a book, Canadian religious studies professor Irving Hexham and anthropologist Karla Poewe singled me out among Canadian academics for my supposedly critical position toward “the cults:”

The one exception to the generally neutral tone of most Canadian academics and their rejection of anticult rhetoric is Stephen Kent. Kent has been outspoken in his criticism of many new religions, particularly Scientology, and works closely with various anticult groups. Although Kent’s views are widely known, few Canadian academics agree with his findings and most disagree quite strongly because of his tendency to use the testimony of ex-members (Hexham and Poewe, 2004: 247).

Undoubtedly, others within the academic community shared this criticism, yet its sharing was by no means universal (see Ayella, 1993: 114).

3) Delusional Alleged Former Members:

Critical analyses of claims, in contrast, not only may verify former members’ accounts but also may uncover poor if not fraudulent research. Moreover, the problem with delusional people believing themselves to have been cult members has not occurred (as far as I can recall) in the general North American anti-cult movement, but it did occur in a controversial subset of it—the anti-satanic movement. A few documented cases exist of people believing that they had been abused, usually as children, in satanic groups when in fact they were suffering from mental illnesses. For example, I remember vividly two interviews with satanic abuse claimants that I conducted with police in the early 1990s who almost certainly were paranoid schizophrenic. A few years prior to those interviews, two authors wrote books about their alleged experiences, only to be revealed later as suffering from psychological and/or psychiatric problems.

One fraudulent satanic book was Rebecca Brown (M.D.)’s 1986 volume, *He Came to Set the Captives Free*. It discussed a woman’s reputed rise in the satanic hierarchy, as reported by a medical doctor (i.e., Brown, born in 1948 as Ruth Irene Bailey but changed in 1986) who supposedly treated her. The woman, Elaine, was modeled after a patient, Edna Elaine Moses (born Edna Elaine Knost), whom Brown actually treated. Brown’s treatment of Elaine, however, was so irresponsible that she lost her license, since it involved high doses of Demerol (including doses to herself). Side effects include hallucinations and psychotic-like behavior, and Brown had become convinced that satanic demons were everywhere, which were her responsibility to fight. Brown’s fantastical book, therefore, is likely little more than the result of drug-fueled, paranoid hallucinations (Fisher, Blizard, and Goedelman, 1989).

A second fraudulent author was Lauren Stratford (b. 1941 as Laurel Wilson). Her 1988 book, *Satan’s Underground: The Extraordinary Story of One Woman’s Escape*, was a gruesome account of childhood sexual abuse, adult pornography, sadomasochism, child sacrifice, and Satanism, all subsequently proven to have been the creation of a very troubled mind (Passantino, Passantino, and Trott, 1999). After Christian researchers discovered the fraud, the publisher ceased publication of the book, but 130,000 copies already had been sold (Sidey, 1990: 34).

It is instructive to see how the publisher, Harvest House, got duped, especially since members of cult monitoring organizations could make similar mistakes when attempting to assess the accounts of former members:

Harvest House explained what they [sic] felt constituted proof of her testimony. They had a three-part test: (1) several staff members talked with Laurel at different times and got the same stories from her, and all of the staff members were impressed with her sincerity; (2) they talked with ‘experts’ who confirmed that such things have hap-

pened to others; and (3) they gathered character references for her from her supporters (Passantino, Passantino, and Trott: 1990: 28).

As the authors to this critical piece explained, “[t]hese tests can establish consistency and plausibility, but they are not tests to establish the validity of actual historical events” (Passantino, Passantino, and Trott, 1990: 28). In short, consistency regarding one’s story concerning prior cult involvement, and a convincing personality, are not sufficient grounds to judge whether former members’ accounts are true and accurate.

A more complicated set of examples came from people, usually women, who had recovered memories of satanic cult involvement after having undergone therapy. In backlash, a wave of opposition grew among people who said that they so-called memories were false ones, implanted by zealous but poorly trained therapists and that in fact no such satanic involvement had occurred (for example, Brainerd and Reyna, 2005). As the 1990s progressed, a number of lawsuits by former clients against therapists worked through the courts, causing chaos within the therapeutic community (and causing great concern among those persons who continued to believe that their memories were real [see Pendergrast, 1995]). The false memory debates always circled around the anti-cult movement in North America, but never became part of its central concern. The implications from it, however, were clear: if therapists unintentionally could create false memories of ritual satanic abuse, then so too could deprogrammers and exit counselors implant negative memories (or at least interpretations) of one’s former cult involvement.

4) Con Artists:

People caught up in the false memory debate were sincere in their allegations, whether or not they were accurate. Con artists, by contrast, made claims about having been Satanists while knowing that they were false, doing so only so that they could bilk Christians and the public out of money. These cons share a characteristic with the delusional former members: both groups of people were “apostates who never were” who they claimed to be (see Johnson, 1998). The best-documented example of a con artist following this pattern was Michael Warnke, author of *The Satan Seller* (Warnke with Balsiger and Jones, 1972), which was a Christian book best seller. It told of Warnke’s alleged sex-driven, drug-fueled, leadership reign over a 1,500 member satanic group during the late 1960s, prior to his conversion to Christianity. He capitalized upon his past through his Christian ministry and (among other activities) occasional police consultation (even in Australia) about satanic activities. In 1992, however, a lengthy investigative piece, in the Christian magazine, *Cornerstone*, exposed extensive fraud in his ministry, including the lie about his former satanic priesthood past (Trott and Hertenstein, 1992; see Maxwell 1992). In simple terms, Warnke was a con artist.

Note that these con artists targeted Christian communities, probably because they knew that Christians would donate money to fight what they believed to be Satan. In another instance, a person pretending to be a sixteen-year-old girl escaping from the Unification Church lived with Christians for a month until they discovered that she was thirty and had never been a follower of Reverend Moon. Subsequently, she appeared on the Oprah Winfrey Show as a person suffering from Multiple Personality disorder, and later got exposed trying to convince Christians that she was a satanic abuse survivor (Passantino, Passantino, and Trott, 1999: 90 n. 68). The point of these stories about con artists may be that people of faith and goodwill are especially susceptible to fraudsters who claim to have left groups that many people oppose (e.g., Satanism, the Moonies/Unification church, etc.).

5) Spies:

By far the most serious problem involving alleged former members involves spies, who have much in common with con artists. Con artists deceive for their own gain, while spies deceive for the gain of an opposing organization. Spies still are members of a controversial group, and the group directs them to infiltrate a countercult organization or befriend cult critics (often legitimate former members themselves). Very many of the early North American countercult figures—Kurt and Henrietta Crampton, Nan Mclean, Priscilla Coates, etc.--had spies visit them with fake stories about their own defections and queries for cult-recovery help.

Of course, the obvious purpose behind these spies was to gain information about opponents—what they were planning; who was in their networks; etc. Other reasons were more sinister—to steal documents or to get the critic to engage in some form of illegal activity (i.e., entrapment). Two now-defunct, California-based anti-cult groups, the Freedom counseling Center and Spiritual Counterfeits Project, had a husband-and-wife-team of Scientologists (Andrea and Ford Schwartz) infiltrate it. After this couple defected from Scientology, they spoke about the preparations that they had undergone prior to their secret assignment:

To prepare himself as a counter-intelligence agent for Scientology, Ford received 400 hours of auditing and read up on other spy agencies, such as the CIA and the KGB. He performed national and international work, but took most of his orders from the Guardians Office in San Francisco. He met his 'operative' at least once a week, in bars, restaurants, or parked cars. All calls to his operative were from pay telephones.

Andrea also became a counter-intelligence agent, infiltrating a Berkeley cult-awareness group called the Spiritual Counterfeits Project. 'Our friends and family all believed we were out of Scientology,' she says. 'We started living our cover as real as we could—we had to remember that anyone contacting us might be checking our cover' (Wheeler, 1982).

They maintained their covers within the two organizations for over a year, and managed to feed Scientology some useful intelligence.

America's largest anti-cult group, the Cult Awareness Network, also had plants. One worked within it during the period immediately prior to Scientology's take-over of its material, when officials of the group were strategizing (ultimately with no success) how to keep its files out of Scientology's hands. Presumably, the plant kept Scientology officials informed until Scientology finally was able to obtain them through bankruptcy. An earlier Scientology plant, Garry Scharff, infiltrated the Cult Awareness Network for nine years in a clever manner—he claimed to have been a member of Jim Jones's People's Temple, so almost anyone who could have disproven him was dead in the 1987 murder/suicides in Guyana (Scarff, 1992: 1). Apparently, he worked closely with a Scientology law firm that was working in part to destroy the Cult Awareness Network (see Scarff, 1991: 3, 6), but he eventually defected from Scientology itself and began feeding information to the Cult Awareness Network instead. The information that Scarff fed back to the Cult Awareness network included disturbing allegations that Scientology attorneys were plotting the murder of the Cult Awareness Network's director, Cynthia Kissner (see Scarff, [undated]). Largely because of Scarff's years of deception, however, his credibility was non-existent, so no one could or did act upon the allegations that he made.

Spies worked so effectively against some anti-cult groups in North America that I must assume some groups have tried to plant them in Europe. Scrutiny regarding new, enthusiastic volunteers early on is exceedingly wise, since discovery after-the-fact leaves everyone in an organization with a sense of violation and vulnerability. If a group discovers one, however, I recommend kindness as the group withdraws its privileges and access. I do so because

sometimes spies turn against their handlers, and seeing their targets react with decency after uncovering them might have an impact.

6) Ex-Members with 'Histories:'

Con artists become spokespersons built upon fraudulent claims, but quite a few former members become spokespersons against their former groups based upon quite legitimate claims. Sometimes these former members were high-profile spokespersons, appearing in the media to dispel negative information about the group and defend its image. In other cases, the defecting members had been active in their respective groups for a number of years. These people know a great deal, but—as group members—they also may have done a great deal that the group can throw back at them. Public statements, for example, by spokespersons can come back to haunt people in their new, cult-critical lives. Perjured court testimonies, violations of civil or criminal law, and interpersonal relationships with other group members or their families may have involved actions that defecting members now regret, but which have the possibility of blowing up in their faces through negative public relations campaigns that groups may run in their own defense.

Anti-cult organizations and personnel have an obligation to help a defecting or defected member weigh all the pros and cons associated with speaking out. An important role for anti-cult organizations to play is the assist former members in efforts to integrate into mainstream society, and sometimes this integration is best accomplished quietly and outside a public spotlight. Besides, in a few years these people may be in different social, legal, and/or emotional conditions that will allow a more public stance. No one likes to be used, and a danger exists that anti-cult groups may use some former members to heighten criticism of various groups but at the expense of former-member critics.

7) Professional Former Member Anti-Cultists:

What I am calling professional former member anti-cultists are people who exit a group and then attempt to make a living by battling it and probably others like it. In the past these people have become expert witnesses, authors, deprogrammers, exit counselors, officials in anti-cult organizations, etc. This road, however, is a tough one. Very little money circulates in the counter-cult movement and eventually court cases dry up and one's information (based upon one's experiences in a group) becomes dated. Consequently, only a very few people who have exited cults have been able to make a living fighting them. One of the few examples of someone who has succeeded is Michael Kropveld of Montreal Canada's InfoSect/InfoCulte, and Ian Haworth of the United Kingdom's Cult Information Centre. Others have failed. For a number of years, for example, Stacey Brooks Young worked as a consultant and then as an organizational staff member in a Florida anti-Scientology organization. Apparently, pressures to maintain the viability of the organization for which she worked led her to commit perjury, thereby destroying her credibility (see Brooks, 2002).

8) Former Members Who Become Professionals:

The most effective former members of groups are persons who acquire advanced degrees in any number of fields (mental health, social sciences, law, medicine, etc.) and who then either speak about their former cult experiences and/or assist others who have difficulties with these groups. Having undergone professional training, these people cannot be so easily dismissed as biased, non-credible former members. Moreover, they write and speak with an authority that comes from firsthand experience. Growing numbers of people with PhDs and professional training now exist in sociology, psychology, mental health, law, etc. Some of the work that

they produce on cults is exceptionally good, because they can see readily the gaps or mistakes that exist in current scholarship. They have cult experiences, and they know the academic and professional language and decorum to use when expressing those experiences. Alas, higher education is no necessary indicator that the holder of an advanced degree will write critically but objectively (James R. Lewis, for example, was a member of 3HO, but has a reputation of downplaying abuses in various groups [Lewis 2010]), yet the numbers of former-members-turned-professionals is growing rapidly.

Conclusion:

The total rejection of the ‘testimonies’ of former members is not social science, and future generations of scholars will look back on this rejection with incredulity. What should matter in the social sciences is that researchers obtain accurate information under ethical circumstances. Regardless of who provides it, social scientists simply should attempt to verify its content by comparing it to information that others provide or that the researchers obtained in other ways—a process called triangulation. The more that independent sources point to the same facts, the higher the likelihood of the facts being accurate. Rejecting former members’ accounts, therefore, without checking them is more than simply bad social science, it actually is ideology. It is a refusal to question one’s basic assumptions that privileges the controversial groups—the cults—themselves. It privileges these groups by categorically excluding from research the wealth of information that people have who have seen these groups from the inside. Scientology, therefore, published Bryan Wilson’s statement in an attempt to discredit former members’ accounts of life within that group. It is astonishing that so many social scientists bought into this uncritical, exclusionary process.

My primary reason for writing this paper was to remind Europeans to be vigilant concerning who it admits to its important information. Undoubtedly, former members of controversial groups will want to assist them in various ways, and they bring with them a wealth of information and material that is difficult to obtain elsewhere. Because of their values, however, the groups themselves can exploit their valuable role by creating espionage or spy rings that take advantage of the apostate or former member role. Moreover, some people may leave controversial groups only to return some time afterward, and it is at least feasible that a few people may concoct stories about former cult membership in order to receive material and emotional attention. For their own good sometimes, former members should focus on building or rebuilding their lives and not opening themselves up to counterattacks by persons (including family) whom they once considered friends. All that said, former members continue to enrich our understanding of many controversial groups, and we are wise to welcome them in our midst and grow from the information that they impart.

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CREDIBILITY ATTACKS AGAINST FORMER CULT MEMBERS

**by Stephen A. Kent
FECRIS 2011, WARSAW**



1. FORCED DECONVERTS:

- a. Began with 1970s deprogrammings.**
- b. group denunciations at the end of the deprogramming as signed statements or press conferences.**

Sociologists' reactions:

- a. developed non-coercive conversion models**
- b. asserted that deprogrammings caused trauma, not cult involvement**

2. RETURNEES:

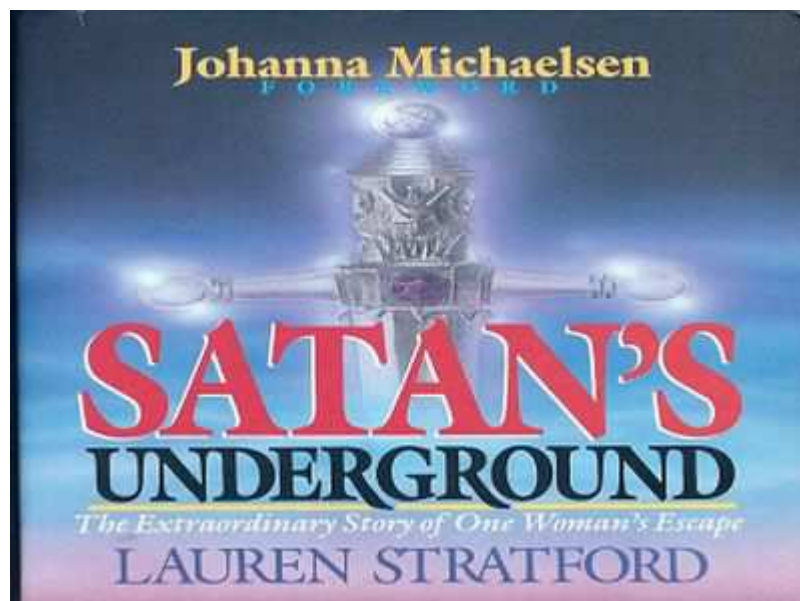
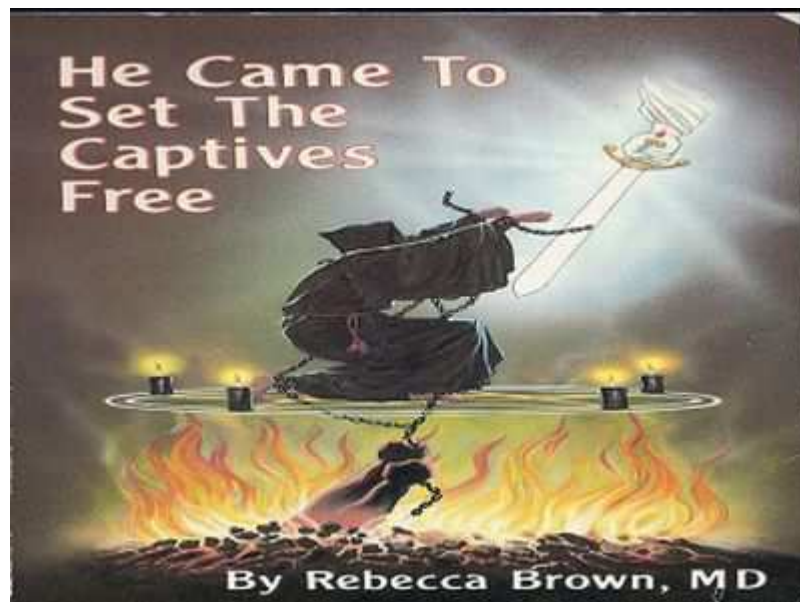
- a. deprogrammed/exit counseled; denounced group; then rejoined**
- b. called into question the integrity of the denunciations**

Academics' reactions:

- a. deprogrammed—most critical
exit counseled—somewhat critical
voluntary—least critical**
- b. all former member accounts are untrustworthy 'atrocious tales'**

3. **DELUSIONAL ALLEGED FORMER MEMBERS**

Mentally ill; never belonged, but probably believed that they had.



3-PART (INADEQUATE) TEST

A) told the same story consistently

B) Experts confirmed that such things did happen

C.) Had good character references

PROBLEM:

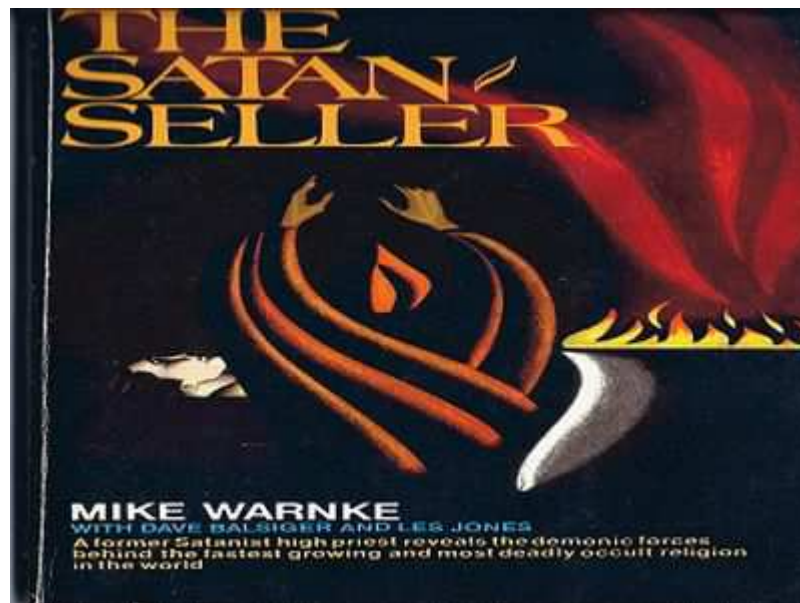
**CONSISTENCY,
PLAUSIBILITY, AND A
CONVINCING CHARACTER
DO NOT PROVE THE
VALIDITY OF HISTORICAL
EVENTS.**

4. CON ARTISTS

a. Never belonged, and know it.

b. Lie for money/power/fame

c. Religious, well-intentioned people most vulnerable



5. SPIES:

- a. Still belong, but pretend that they don't.**
- b. Espionage, theft, possibly subversion**
- c. Be kind to a caught spy—some do deconvert**

6. EX-MEMBERS WITH 'HISTORIES':

- a. Want to become spokespersons against their former groups**
- b. May have done/said things that groups will throw back at them**
- c. Anti-cult groups must help these people make best decisions for themselves**

7. PROFESSIONAL FORMER MEMBER ANTI-CULTISTS:

- a. Become expert witnesses, authors, exit counselors, anti-cult organizational staff, etc.**
- b. Tough positions to maintain: little money; one's information likely becomes dated**
- c. Must resist the impulse to embellish/overstate/perjure**

8. FORMER MEMBERS WHO BECOME PROFESSIONALS:

- a. Can be very effective critics because they have professional credentials**
- b. Credentials, however, are no necessary guarantee of producing, objective, critical work**

9. CONCLUSION:

- a. Blanket rejection of former members' testimony is ideological—worse than bad science**
- b. **Triangulate**—try to get similar information from multiple sources**
- c. What happened to anti-cult groups in North America likely will repeat (is repeating) in Europe**
- d. Bottom line—former members are valuable assets; just be careful**