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Combined psychological, physical and spiritual approaches leading
to deviant practices.

A preventive campaign against undue influence in the health field was launched by the Centre against Mental Manipulation (Centre Contre les Manipulations Mentales, CCMM) on the 3rd of November 2014. The scheme aims to raise awareness among health professionals and patients of “self-development” or “well-being” medical therapies increasingly used in Europe.

“We are witnessing a multitude of small bodies”, reports Laure Telo, Ile de France CCMM president.

As a physiotherapist, in practice for 36 years, I can confirm this statement. I have seen the proliferation of new therapies with holistic pretensions i.e. offering to heal the whole body, everybody, from any kind of illness. Training courses varying from a few hours to whole week-ends supposedly allow participants to master these methods, or even to teach them to others.

Main principles that these “therapies” rely on to attract customers

A New-Age assumption states that: “*No human being has ever used more than 10% of the neurones in his brain.*”¹

What we would need to do then, is to exercise or initiate ourselves so as to reach complete fulfilment.

Some of these new therapies have grown from a mix of scientific or pseudo-knowledge with a perception of the world inspired by Buddhism, Hinduism, or even occultism.

Initiation to these new therapies call on notions of spiritual energy which are difficult to define: *ki*, *prana*, cosmic energy, divine light vehicle, spirit of love, etc. The world here is perceived as a large system of energy. The individual is criss-crossed by fields of energy physically, psychologically and spiritually, which influence organs and body systems. The spirit must not follow any goal, but free itself from all ties to reach a state of disembodied ecstasy.

Energetic therapies mix up notions and categories: thus Christ or Buddha, whatever the name which has been given to the highest perfection’s incarnation.

The patient or disciple is told: “*You are realising that you are your own master and the master of your own life, and that you can reach self-healing or self-redemption with your own investigations, as all initiates did before you; but for this, you must follow the path we teach you, without thinking, by developing your intuition*”.

Three progressive steps can be noted in this initiation.

- The first step, very practical, mainly concerns the body, with body awareness and breathing exercises which can allow a better knowledge of the self. At this level there are only signs of the risk of deviance.
- The second step more subtle and intuitive relates to the psycho-somatic dimension, also called spiritual, with mental induction or suggestion exercises.
- On reaching the third step the initiated person enters a new dimension where time and space seem to no longer have limits. Thus one can penetrate the other’s memory, his past, his present

¹ Aldous Huxley (one of the New Age spiritual leaders), Conference “Human Potentialities, University of California, 1960.
http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mouvement_du_potentiel#cite_ref-2

and even his future. This is possible even at a distance, by communicating with “*entities*” from the invisible world.

These introductions can be given with the help of secret methods revealed at each step of the process or by simple contact with the guru or the initiated. Some introductions would supposedly give access to more and more extended “*powers*”: power of healing, of control of relatives, power to obtain what one wished for, power to know the past present and future. In other words, some of these therapies give access to mediumship and magnetism.

We can cite among other therapies: Reiki, various kinds of chakra liberation, some martial arts with initiation rituals, neo-shamanic initiations, kinesiology, trans-personal psychology, some kind of fluidic osteology, *psychophanie* also known as facilitated communication.

What to think of all this?

Diagnosis does not rely on any objective data. Herein lies the risk to declare healthy people as ill and ill people as healthy; to prescribe useless exercises, diets or ineffective medication and to prevent indispensable treatments. The initiated or the therapist is subjectively testing the patient’s perception, but also their own perception by inducing what they want to test. There are no clinical signs defined or verifiable.

The virtually magic symptom(s)’ suppression in functional pathology with no lesion for which the patient is consulting can be dramatic, that is why these methods can be so appealing. But symptoms are only buried and reappear as anxiety, mental distress or more serious concealed illness.

Indeed, suggestion leads to an important *placebo* effect which is apparently efficient but has no effect in the long term.

There is a risk of the patient becoming addicted to the therapy or therapist.

The attractiveness of the invisible, of the mystery

The Christian credo states the faith in God, Creator of the invisible and visible world. The Catholic Church has been timid, since the Vatican II Council, when it came to mention the invisible world. Yet New Age, occult or esoteric movements reinvested this world of the invisible, as well as movements coming from Tibetan Buddhism. The number of books published relating to *channelling*, spirits and angels is constantly rising, not to mention Satan, his services and works, who re-emerges thanks to gothic movements and Satanism, music, cloth, tattoos and scarification.

The attractiveness of secrets and mysteries living through history and explaining its secret resources relies on credulity and a complete lack of a frame of reference.

Worldwide successful books and films for children and teenagers convey ambiguous symbolic concepts. *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini tells the story of a child who finds a dragon named *Saphira*. An old dragon breeder will teach him how to live with his female dragon, with which he will be able to communicate by telepathy and benefit from all her powers. He will even be able to heal her, with the help of magnetic tricks and magic words, when she will be mortally wounded. The child is in harmony, fused with the dragon, symbol of the four elemental powers: air, fire, earth and water. What we see here is an initiatory process dear to the New Age. Many cartoons, comic books or "manga" are bathed in these representations of the world. Formerly, in traditional fairy tales, the Prince charming on the contrary had to fight the dragon to meet his beloved... witches were really mean...

It is important to notice that in a few years we have changed our frame of reference and archetypes have changed their meaning. New Age announced a shift in paradigms. Here it is.

Abuse in the Catholic Church.

This search for the immediate healing of all wounds, of our minds, the will of fulfilment, well-being and self-knowledge affects the Christians too. As a permanent deacon of the Catholic Church for 20 years, I was saddened to witness much undue influence with tragic consequences to many families.

When I became a member of the national board of the Pastoral on new beliefs and undue influence of the French Conference of Bishops in 2006, deviance in new therapies and self-development techniques had held all my attention. Today, I also pay close attention to these deviances at the heart of the Catholic Church.

Some Christians looked for, and are still looking for, healing or pathways to knowledge and self-development among charismatic leaders, organisations or communities aligning themselves with the Catholic Church.

Healing.

The Beatitudes' community, and in particular Ephraim, Philippe Madre, Fernand Sanchez and Bernard Dubois are at the origin of sessions or retreats known as "*psycho-spiritual healing*." The name has been changed after some scrutiny from the authorities and a few comments from the ecclesial authorities, but after cosmetically tidying up the look, these sessions continued along to the same concepts. At this stage the "*Anne Péguy Agapé*" sessions, which took place in Le Puy-en-Velay and received the blessing of Bishop Brincard, now deceased, will be considered.

The very well documented book "*Le Renouveau charismatique, une église dans l'Eglise*" (*The Charismatic Renewal: a Church in the Church*) makes an inventory of the leaders of these sessions. It rightly analyses the stakes of what it considers as very serious deviances.

Numerous families have been the victims of this kind of retreat, leading sometimes to the breaking up of relationships between spouses or between parents and children, some of them irreversible. Most of those attending these retreats were from privileged families. Sessions were expensive!

People wishing to take part in such retreats had to explain their motivations for wanting to participate in writing thus from the start exposing the origin of their unease. Some sessions could have up to 80 attendees. In less than a week they are encouraged to revisit, with the help of a leaflet mixing biblical quotations and inductive or intrusive questions (all of which are negative), the history of the attendees and their remembrance: conception, in utero life, birth (they will be asked to model in clay the baby they were!), early years, relationship with their parents, brothers and sisters, hidden, buried and painful memories, incest, abortion, divorce, things unspoken of in the family, ... and to present all these secret wounds for the Lord to heal to set them free of their sufferings which are harming their inner and personal lives. In the first instance, many attendees feel that they have finally found the origin of their unease that they finally understand the difficulties they have in their relation to themselves, to others, to their father, mother, brothers, sisters, to the superiors in their community, to God... Then emotional response takes the advantage over analysis and reason: wouldn't it be better to let go, to tell everything? In this system approved by the Church, the attendees drop all their defences. They confide everything to a "*guide*" who is often incompetent on a psychological or spiritual level.

These "discoveries" can lead to the person's reconstruction based on memories hurriedly retrieved and revealed before God. False or partial memories can be confirmed by the guide. How far can this be considered as a free interpretation of his souvenirs by the attendee?

This process has been analysed by Elisabeth Loftus² under the name of *induced false memories*. After a few days or a few months the impression of improved well-being, the humble everyday existence in the family or the community can become too much to bear. The father, the mother, the spouse, the brother, the sister, the superior, who did not attend these sessions leading to this “healing” would need to be set free from un-confessed wounds as well! From contaminated one becomes contaminator. This kind of psycho-spiritual interpretation can gradually obsess those who went through this process. After the retreat, whilst pretending that they have forgiven everything, a callousness with respect to relatives follows, even more cruel because these relatives are abandoned. Most of the time these relatives go through this abrupt or progressive abandon in silence, always suffering and without understanding why.

The Black book of psycho-spiritual domination was published by the CCMM (Centre against mental manipulation) in July 2012. I personally know almost every victim testifying in this book. Following the trauma they suffered themselves or their relatives during retreats or sessions, these victims looked for support and comfort among members of the clergy. Their statement was not recognised at the height of their suffering. Worse, after collecting some of these testimonies and promising a response and appropriate reparation, the members of the clergy failed to continue the process, interrupting contact with the victims. This happened despite a commission initiated by the French Bishops' Conference to hear victims and analyse the facts of the cases³. All the specialists in this commission, clerical or lay, each according to their field of competence, had given an adverse opinion regarding the healing sessions mixing psychology and spirituality. They submitted their report to every French Bishop. No effect followed. Sessions went on. The leaders have never been asked to stop their activities. Bishop Aillet recently prefaced one of these sessions' main leader's book: “*Ways to heal childhood wounds following the path of Thérèse de Lisieux*”⁴ by Bernard Dubois.

The CCMM's psycho-spiritual victims' group has been created. Its goal is and will be to appeal to the Catholic authorities as long as the truth is concealed and justice is not achieved regarding these practices, which the ecclesial authorities have, at best, avoided seeing or, at worst, explicitly supported.

A self-knowledge and self-development tool: the Enneagram.

First, I wish pay tribute to Daniel Lafargue who, for years, has completed a remarkable body of research work, of analysis and synthesis on the enneagram, its creator Gurdjieff, its disciples and its current developments. I can only recommend to read his book: “*La face cachée de l'ennéagramme*” (The dark side of the enneagram)⁵.

Practitioners and adepts of the enneagram do not like to be reminded of Gurdjieff's - its promoter in the West - scandalous history. However, the start of a story often explains its development and its end... Gurdjieff was probably illiterate, but he was a clever man and an opportunist able to subjugate and charm his entourage. He was beyond good and evil, manipulating, without remorse, the men and women who fell under his influence.

He arrived in France in 1922 and settled in Avon's priory in Fontainebleau. Renowned French intellectuals followed him, at least for a while, then some of them distanced themselves from him, among them: Louis Pauwels, Jean-François Revel, René Daumal, René Barjavel, and English speakers as well: Katherine Mansfield, Peter Brook, Aldous Huxley and Jodorowsky.

²Elisabeth Loftus, *Le syndrome des faux souvenirs et le mythe des souvenirs refoulés*, Ed Exergue 2001.
See also Brigitte Axelrad, *le ravage des faux souvenirs*, 2010, book-e-book.

³ « Agapé's sessions » then named « Anne-Péguy Agapé” and their founder's writing, Bernard Dubois member of the Beatitudes' community, were at the center of these analyses.

⁴ Ed. des Béatitudes, novembre 2014, Nouan-le-Fuzelier (Loir-et-Cher).

⁵ Daniel Lafargue, *La face cachée de l'ennéagramme*. Ed book-e-book. 2014.

Gurdjieff fed himself on all his adepts' esoteric dogma and "occult sciences", and concocted a synthesis in his own way which he would serve again with persuasive loquacity. He offered his student permanent introspective efforts to know themselves better by cutting themselves off from everything they thought, knew, believed, or what they had thought before. No scientific validation according to any rigorous protocol can confirm the relevance of the enneagram affirmations regarding the nine types or bases, which can evolve or regress according to the very criteria of this system. However, experts of enneagrams suggest psychological or spiritual practical orientations based on this system to their student.

We hear of the enneagram again in Esalen, on the West coast of the United States, in the 1960's and the 1970's, driven by the hippy movement's spiritual leader Aldous Huxley, a follower of Gurdjieff and the enneagram. Ichazo, a multifaceted wizard, Gurdjieff's disciple, born in Bolivia, close to the theosophical movements, gave nine character types to the enneagram's nine figures. Naranjo, a Colombian psychiatrist, while staying very close to the initial Gurdjieff's structure and use, conceptualised and normalised the enneagram's nine types as it is reintroduced in Europe today. Father Robert Ochs, a Jesuit, teacher at the Loyola's University in Chicago, reworked the enneagram "tool" to integrate Catholic dogma, including the concept of sin. Helen Palmer, by turning the enneagram into a so-called non-confessional and non-religious "tool", has had a considerable impact. Among others, Erik Salmon allowed the penetration into France of the revisited enneagram.

A fulfilled man, according to the Gurdjieffian perspective, is a man who is conscious and has suppressed the good and bad dualism in himself, becoming indulgent on everything, indifferent on moral ground and mild on religious ground. Everything has to fit into the preliminary enneagram's logic understood as the highest point of self-knowledge and knowledge of the world. Only faith in the concept can save and make everything coincide. Which, for that matter, is very efficient, thanks to a virtually hypnotic inductive or suggestive effect. Magic works the same way, doesn't it?

In society.

The enneagram is offered in the frame of professional courses, sometimes associated to other techniques such as NLP - neuro-linguistic programming, transactional analysis or Ericksonian hypnosis. These training courses do not aim to improve professional skills, but to allow a better self-knowledge and understanding of others. That is where the ambiguity of the courses lies, promising self-development to employees in a professional environment.

In the Catholic Church.

Father Pacwa⁶, a Jesuit, after having been initiated to the enneagram, saw its dangers on theological and pastoral grounds, denouncing them through remarkable articles. People entering this system accept to adjust their spiritual and psychological life to these principles. What is wanted is an adherence without questions. It is dangerous to consider that our acts are not free but the result of hidden compulsions revealed by the enneagram.

The Beatitudes' community lived under the influence of the enneagram, driven by its founder Ephraim. The community's executives, called "shepherds", received an introduction. Today, despite numerous warnings, the enneagram is offered in Catholic spiritual centres, training centres like the CIER⁷, or inside religious communities.

⁶ In particular the Father Pacwa's analysis of the enneagram <http://www.equip.org/PDF/DN067.pdf> 1994 and "Tell me who I am, Ô enneagram", Christian Research Institute periodical, autumn 1991.

⁷ Le CLER Love and Family, association recognised as public interest, work on the affective and familial blossoming of anybody, young or adult, in couple or not, organism recognized and recommended by the French Catholic Church.

“This has not prevented the Saint-Etienne’s diocese from organising, in partnership with the Eric Salmon’s Centre for the study of the Enneagram (Centre d’Etudes de l’Ennéagramme, CEE)⁸, the first Christian enneagram congress, where working groups, round tables on Gurdjieff’s sacred dances, Christian enneagram tutors, former Beatitudes’ shepherds and Free University of Samadeva’s teachers all came together.”⁹

Simply enter the word enneagram in the official French Catholic search engine, directly dependant of the Bishop’s Conference of France, to find information on most of these training courses or sessions.

Conclusive reflection.

The manifest narcissism of post-modern western man, focused on his own well-being, his self-sufficiency and his performances makes it necessary, to attract particular attention on the dangers of the New Age, new therapies and self-development techniques by the actors of society and Church. Without such warnings undue influence cannot be detected, whilst is consciously or unconsciously introduced, in a determined manner, by manipulators. Failing this, the leaders of society and the Church would be even more seriously involved and could be held responsible and considered as accomplices.

⁸ The CEE presents itself as: The Centre for initiation and improvement to enneagram open to all. A professional training center offering a certificating program. A research center on the enneagram. A network of consultants offering team cohesion interventions.

⁹ Daniel Lafargue, La face cachée de l’ennéagramme, p. 64. Ed book-e-book, 2014.