

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN EUROPE

Prof. Massimo Introvigne

Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR)

Turin, Italy

December 1, 1997

When, in the United States, it is suggested that religious liberty should become an issue in foreign relations, immediate references are to Asian or African countries such as China, North Korea, or Sudan. Former Soviet bloc countries in Eastern Europe, including Russia, have been added to the list. Scholars of minority religions, however, know that serious problems also exist in some countries of Western Europe. Some cases are becoming very well known. There are, among others: the inclusion of Reverend Sun Myung Moon, the founder of the Unification Church, in the so-called Schengen list (preventing persons allegedly dangerous to the public order from entering a number of European countries), and the extreme measures advocated in Germany against the Church of Scientology.

These cases, unfortunately, are not simply exceptions to a general rule of religious tolerance. Pentecostal Churches, Roman Catholic organizations, Jewish groups and many other religious minorities face discrimination in a number of Western European countries, including France, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland. Greece, meanwhile, by keeping in its constitution a provision that outlaws proselytism on behalf of any religion other than the Greek Orthodox Church, has apparently not yet decided whether, in religious liberty matters, it really wants to belong to the West.

It is clearly true that serious crimes have been perpetrated by certain religious movements guilty of common crimes should not be vigorously prosecuted. However, the Solar Temple incidents have been used as a catalyst in number of countries to propose actions against literally hundreds of groups lumped together under the label of "cults." In the minorities in general, seems to be making inroads in political and administrative circles. As scholars, we believe that it is important to understand the main tenets of this ideology (Part I). We then detail some of the results of the ideology in Western Europe, mostly in the form of parliamentary commissions and reports (Part II). After the examination of some examples (Part III), we offer some final suggestions (Part IV). It is important that--while the European Parliament prepares to vote its own resolution on "cults" --an international dialogue on religious minorities involve all the interested parties and those who care about religious liberty.

I. The Rise of an Intolerant World view

1. Redefining "Religion"

Virtually no one in present-day Western Europe, and certainly not governments or parliamentary commissions, would admit to being against religious liberty. The technique used to discriminate against unpopular groups is to redefine the notion of "religion."

While most scholars favor a broad definition of religion (for example, as a system of answers to the basic human question about the origins and destiny of humans), institutional definitions by political and judicial actors are often result-oriented. For instance, in ruling to deny to the Church of Scientology the status of a religion, the Appeals Court of Milan, Italy (December 2, 1996) defined religion as "a system of doctrines centered on the presupposition of the existence of a Supreme Being, who has a relation with humans, the later having towards him a duty of obedience and reverence." On October 8, 1997 the Italian Supreme Court annulled this decision, castigating its theistic definition of religion as "unacceptable" and "mistake," because it is "based only on the paradigm of biblical religions" and would exclude a number of longtime religions, including Buddhism.

It is true that theologians, sociologists and historians have proposed different definitions of religion. It is however, difficult to avoid the impression that in some European countries today the selection of a set of criteria among many available is governed by preliminary feeling whether an organization deserves protection or punishment. Only broad definitions of religion appear to be consistent with the aims of religious liberty embodied in a number of national constitutions and international declarations and conventions.

2. The Myth of Brainwashing and Mind Control

One of the older and most effective rhetorical tools used to claim that a number of groups are not "genuine" religions is that they are not joined willingly. The anti-Mormon writer Maria Ward claimed in 1855 (*Female Life Among the Mormons*, London: Roulledge, 1855: 38, 240) that Mormon conversations were obtained only through "a mystical magical influence... a sort of sorcery that deprived me of the unrestricted exercise of free will." In fact, Ward argued, Mormons used the secret of "Mesmerism," taught to their founder Joseph Smith by "a German peddler." The reference to "magical influence," "sorcery" and a nonexistent German Mesmerist allowed anti-Mormons such as Ward to deny Mormonism the status of a religion. Since religion is, by rhetorical definition, an exercise of free will, a non-religion many only be jointed under some sort of coercion.

The same hypnotic paradigm has been applied, more recently, to distinguish between "religions," joined voluntarily, and "cults," joined only because of what was once called brainwashing and now--since the label has been discredited by mental manipulation, or mental destabilization. In the United States, theories of brainwashing and mind control as applied to religious minorities have been debunked from at least ten years. The American Psychological Association (APA) in 1984 allowed Margaret Singer, the main proponent of anti-cult mind control theories, to create a working group called Task Force on Deceptive and Indirect Methods of Persuasion and Control (DIMPAC). In 1987 the final report of the DIMPAC Committee was submitted to the Board of Social and Ethical Responsibility for Psychology of the APA. On May 11, 1987 the Board rejected another report and concluded that the mind control theories, used in order to distinguish "cults" from religions, are not part of accepted psychological science. The results of this document were devastating for mind control theories.

Beginning with the Fishman case (1990)--in which a defendant who was accused of commercial fraud defended himself on the basis that he was not fully responsible because he was under the mind control of Scientology--American courts have consistently rejected testimonies about mind control and manipulation, stating that they are not part of accepted mainline science. Brainwashing and mind control theories are indeed, not part of psychological or social science. They lack empirical evidence, and are a mere tool used in order to deny the status of religion to group perceived as deviant or subversive. In Western Europe, on the other hand, these American developments are not well known. Although with different nuances, and dismissing the word "brainwashing" as inadequate and old-fashioned, even official documents by parliamentary commissions rely on the faulty model distinguishing between religions and "cults" on the basis of manipulation and mind control.

3. Apostates

Mind control theories are part of a rejected knowledge consistently repudiated by the academia, professional association, and courts of law. It is however, argued that scholarly objections are less relevant than the "testimony" of "former members" who claim "cults" are

indeed joined because of manipulation and mind control. It is unclear why the accounts of one or another "former member" should be accepted by official political bodies, including parliamentary commissions, as more relevant by definition than scholarly research. Additionally, a misunderstanding about the very notion of "former members" is perpetuated, and plays a key role in the public stigmatization of minority religious movements. While parliamentary reports and sensationalized media accounts claim to rely on the "testimony of former members," we learn invariably that, for each religious group, only a very limited number of "former members" have been heard by the parliamentary commissions, the courts, or the press.

Sociological research suggests that, among thousands of former members of any large organization (no matter how controversial) only a small minority become "apostates" (a technical, not a derogatory term). Not all former members are apostates. The apostate is the former member who reverses loyalties dramatically, and becomes a professional enemy of the organization he or she has left. Most former members do not become apostates. They remain-- in sociological terms suggested by David Bromley and others--"defectors" (members who somewhat regret having left an organization they still perceive in largely positive terms), or "ordinary leave takers" with mixed feeling about their former affiliation. However ordinary leave takers (and, to some extent, defectors) remain socially invisible, insofar as they do not like or care to discuss their genuine representatives of the former members. In fact, quantitative research shows that even in extremely controversial groups, apostates normally represent less than 15% of former members.

4. Anti-cult Movements

If apostates are only a minority of former members, why are only apostates interviewed by parliamentary commissions or the media? The logical answer is that they either volunteer to be heard, or are directed to testify by an opposition coalition. This is, in fact, the role of the so-called anti-cult movement. Modern anti-cult movements (distinct from older Christian counter-cult coalitions) are defined as primarily secular organizations fighting "cults" based on the brainwashing or mind control paradigm.

The recent lack of institutional and academic support for mind control theories has caused a serious crisis of the American anti-cult movement. In 1996 the largest American anti-cult organization, the Cult Awareness Network (CAN), filed for bankruptcy. An anti-cult movement, however, does continue to exist in the United States, and in fact claims that its accounts, although rejected by scholars, are validated by "former members" (i.e. apostates). Currently in Western Europe anti-cult movements (particularly ADFI in France, whose offices also serve as European headquarters for FECRIS, a European-wide federation of anti-cult movements) experience a degree of institutional support unknown in the United States. These well-organized anti-cult movements--particularly in France, Germany and Belgium--have successfully introduced the mind control model has been discredited in the United States. When scholarly criticism of the mind control model is brought to bear against the anti-cult movements have considerable resources and operate with the help of taxpayers' money. They are responsible for spreading misleading information about a number of religious minorities.

Not composed of scholars, the anti-cult organizations often--perhaps in good faith--offer information that is simply not updated. The consequences, however, may be catastrophic. To mention only some examples, in the early 1990s the international anti-cult coalition instigated police raids in a number of countries against the Family (formerly known as the Children of

God), based on practices The Family had in fact discontinued for a number of years. Based on this false information, children were separated from their mothers, and adults and children were kept in custody (inter alia in France and Spain) for weeks and even for months. Later, courts dismissed the charges, recognizing that the information was either inaccurate or not up to date, and castigated the anti-cultists. In Barcelona, Spain, Judge Adolfo Fernando Ounina in his decision of May 22, 1992, went so far to compare the actions against The Family to "the Inquisition: and "the concentration camps." These legal decisions, although important, do not compensate either the adults or the children for what was unnecessary nightmare.

Another example of how outdated information may easily mislead authorities concerns Tabitha's Place, the French branch of the Messianic Communities (a communal group originating from the Jesus Movement and headquartered in Island Pond, Vermont). The mother community in Vermont, the Northeast Kingdom Community Church, was raided in 1984, based on rumors of child abuse spread by local anti-cultists. However, no evidence of child abuse was found and the case was dismissed. By 1994, the Vermont community, although maintaining a strict Christian fundamentalist lifestyle, enjoyed a peaceful coexistence with neighbors and authorities.

Unaware that similar charges were dismissed in the U.S. ten years previously, the anti-cult movement in South-Western France started a campaign against Tabitha's Place (a community that, in turn, had existed peacefully near Pau for more than ten years with no incidents). Charges of child abuse were carelessly repeated and the community, continuously harassed by the police and tax authorities, struggles for its very existence. In April 1997 a twelvemonth old infant child died for congenital heart problems. Its parents have been arrested for possible abuse, although a team of twelve doctors who has examined the community's children has concluded that there is no evidence of any abuse. It is possible that the infant's parents were not fully aware of the possibility of a surgery to remedy their child's condition. However, the criminal case against them is being prosecuted within the framework of a general climate poisoned by rumors spread by anti-cultists on the basis of claims raised and dismissed in the U.S. one decade before the French facts. They also rely on the testimony of only one apostate, who spent just a few days at Tabitha's Place (compare the scholarly study of the Messianic Communities by John M. Bozeman - Susan J. Palmer, "The Northeast Kingdom Community Church of Island Pond. Vermont: Raising Up a People for Yahshua's Return." *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 12:2, May 1997: 181-190, with the report of attorney Pierre Pecastaing at CESNUR's 1997 conference in Amsterdam, Holland).

II. The Results

In the United States, the Jonestown tragedy of 1978 was the catalyst for an increase of anti-cult activity. The anti-cult world view (described in Part I above) became widespread, but the activities of the anti-cult movement were ultimately kept in jeopardy by the reactions of the academia, mainline churches, and some of the religious minorities themselves. In Europe, as mentioned earlier, the suicides-homicides of the Order of the Solar Temple, repeated twice in the 1994 and 1995 (and a third time in 1997--but only in Quebec), played a similar role to that played by Jonestown in the United States. The anti-cult movements were energized, and authorities started considering them more seriously. Discredited theories such as mind control surfaced again. Parliamentary commissions with a mandate to study the "danger of cults" were established in a number of countries. While not attempting to examine all the results of this activity, we have selected some relevant examples.

1. France

A parliamentary commission, composed of Members of Parliament only, issued after a number of secret hearings (not including any scholar as a witness) a report called "Cults in France" on January 10, 1996. It included a laundry list of 172 "dangerous cults." It did not recommend new legislation, but suggested a number of administrative actions and the establishment of a national Observatory of Cults (in fact established in 1996, with two extreme anti-cultists as its only "experts").

Although not technically a source of law, the report has already been quoted in court decisions and has led to discrimination against a number of groups. Teachers have been fired from public schools after years of honorable service only because they were members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, one of the most dangerous "cults" according to the report. A Roman Catholic theatrical group, the Office Culturel de Cluny, included in the report as a "dangerous cult" despite letters of protest of a number of French Catholic bishops, is nearly bankrupted due to the refusal of public theaters to air its shows. The city of Lyons has decided not to allow the use of public facilities to any group listed in the report as a "cult." Each French Department has now a "Mr. Cult" employed by the Ministry of Youth and Sport (often well connected with the anti-cult group ADFI) to speak to cultural and sports organizations about the evils of the cults. The anti-cult element advocates actions by the Observatory against groups mentioned in its literature or in the report but not included in the list (particularly the Mormon Church and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal). Other groups are defined as "cults" by the report (including the Baptists), but nevertheless called "benign cults," a contradiction since the report starts by defining a "cult" as a dangerous organization.

2. Switzerland

Following an intensive anti-cult campaign in the wake of the Solar Temple and the French report, in February 1997 the Canton of Geneva released a report written by four lawyers. While, at least in some chapters, the report is written in a more moderate style than the French one, its substantial proposals are even more dangerous, advocating legislation against "mind control" and against hiring members of "dangerous cults" as government officers.

The Canton of Geneva Commission released on May 24, 1997 its proposals following up the February report. The most significant are:

- to promote an inter-Canton conference in order to persuade other Cantons to follow the example of Geneva
- to enact Canton-level legislation in order to fund the anti-cult organizations, inter alia, and allow them to become parties in cult-related trials.
- to create a Cantonal observatory including among others two representatives of anti-cult organizations, two scholars, and two "representatives of cults" (although it is unclear how the latter will be selected)
- to promote Swiss federal legislation making mind control a federal felony.

3. Belgium

The Belgian parliamentary commission on cults released its report on April 28, 1997. This document is even more extreme than the French report, including bizarre allegations against many groups including five mainline Catholic groups (among them the Catholic Charismatic Renewal) Quakers, the YWCA (but, for some reasons, not the YMCA), Hasidic Jews, and almost all Buddhists. It also proposes legislation making "mind control" a crime.

Reactions by scholars and mainline Churches have determined some turmoil in Belgian Parliament, and in the end it adopted the report itself but not the list of 189 groups included as an Appendix. This was a symbolic victory for the scholars, but most of what is disturbing is not only in the list, but also in the main body of the Report. Following the Catholic religious congregation called The Work (a Belgian group now head quartered in Rome, not to be confused with Opus Dei, also mentioned in the report)--notwithstanding vigorous protests by the Vatican and by Belgian bishops. An action has also been initiated to force the dissolution of Sukyo Mahikari, a Japanese Shinto-based religious minority whose branches in countries such as Italy and United States have existed for decades without any trouble for the public order.

Based on apostates' testimony, extreme allegations have been made against dozens of groups. Serious concern has been expressed by scholars, inter alia about the accusation that Satmar Jews (a Hasidic community, based in New York and regarded as a "cult" by the report) "kidnap children and hid them within the international network of the movement." This seems to be based on the Patsy Heymans case, where a Belgian Catholic woman, having obtained custody of her three children, had to recover them from her Satmar ex-husband who was keeping them illegally in the United States. However, the Heymans case is not specifically mentioned in the report. The parliamentary document rather states that "kidnapping children does not seem to be merely occasional" among this group of Hasidic Jews (Belgian report, Vol. I: 359). The inclusion of these general remarks in a parliamentary document may easily add fuel to the fire of anti-semitism, whose continued presence raises concern in a number of European countries.

4. Germany

A parliamentary commission has been established including MPs and experts appointed by the various political parties. They have conducted hearings with scholars, anti-cultists, and members of a number of religious movements. An interim report was released in June 1997. Although not final (and not including lists) the report raises some serious problems. In the meantime, without consulting the parliamentary commission, the government placed the Church of Scientology under surveillance by the local secret service. Even groups largely critical of Scientology have criticized the decision as a dangerous precedent, while second group that should be watched by the secret service. Police raids independent Pentecostal churches.

5. European Parliament

The Parliament has entrusted its Committee on Civil Liberties and Internal Affairs with the task of preparing a report. Following criticism of the French and Belgian report by scholars (inter alia in a seminar organized by CESNUR at the European Parliament in Strasbourg on May 13, 1997), the Committee initially produced a draft with a number of positive features

(questioning, inter alia, the usefulness of preparing lists of "cults"). However, following anti-cult ideas, initially rejected by the Committee, may re-enter the document.

III. Case Studies

There are literally hundreds of religious minorities discriminated against or persecuted in Western Europe. They belong to all possible religious and spiritual persuasions. We have selected, as examples, two cases, concerning comparatively small French groups, certainly not well known outside France. They could hardly be more different from each other.

The Evangelical Pentecostal Church of Besancon is an example of how a group whose theology is clearly mainline (and that would be regarded as mainline in most Western countries) is marginalized after an encounter with the anti-cult movement. As mentioned earlier, a number of Catholic, Protestant and Jewish groups have suffered the same fate. The second example--the Aumist Religion (not to be confused with the Japanese Group Aum SAhinri-kyo), head quartered at the Mandarom, Southern France--could hardly be less mainline. Its theological ideas are at the very fringe of the French religious scene. It is not difficult to understand why it has been easy to make the Mandarom extremely unpopular. However, constitutional guarantees are aimed, precisely, at protecting unpopular minorities. And even most unpopular defendant should be guaranteed due process and a fair trial.

1. The Evangelical Pentecostal of Besancon

The Protestant scenario in Western Europe is slowly becoming as diversified as the one in the United States. The large liberal denominations, members of the World Council of Churches (WCC), no longer represent the majority of Protestants in a number of European countries. Literally hundreds of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, often with a conservative theology, have flourished. The large number of new churches--and new names--may easily confuse the authorities. As usual, anti-cultists propose very simple solutions. In France CCMM (Center Against Mental manipulation, the second largest anti-cult group after ADFI) explicitly claims that all groups not belonging to the WCC, or to its corresponding French organization, the French Protestant Federation, are suspicious and by be "cults."

Word games are easily played. In fact, the derogatory word in French is not "culte" (the literal translation of "cult") but "secte." The latter word may literally be translated as "sect" but rather plays the same role as the English word "cult." In fact, the French word "secte" has today two very different meanings. Books from sociologists of the late 19th and early 20th century are still republished, where the word "secte" is used, without any derogatory meaning, simply to identify small denominations or groups that are not (or not yet) regarded as part of the mainline by the majority churches. On the other hand, for the general public "secte" is rather used, in the sense of the 1996 parliamentary commission, to identify a dangerous religious (or, rather, "pseudo-religious") movement using mind control techniques. As the noted historian and sociologist Emile Poulat remarked and precisely about the Pentecostal Evangelical Church of Besancon, this church "may be a `secte' in the sense of Weber [the German sociologist of religion]; it is certainly not a `secte' in the popular and parliamentary sense of the term" [E. Poulat, Eglise Evangelique de Pentecoste de Besancon --Eglise ou secte?" Reforme 2:733, August 28, 1997]. Yet, Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches are easily labeled as "sects" in the popular sense of the term, i.e.--in plain contemporary English--"cults."

The Belgian parliamentary report takes quite literally the anti-cult recommendation to target every Christian group not endorsed by the WCC. Its list includes Seventh Day Adventists--defined, apparently without fear or ridicule, as a form of "Biblical fundamentalism" founded in "May 1963" by "William Miller" (Belgian report, Vol. II. p. 228)--the Amish, the Assemblies of God, Calvary Christian Center, Plymouth Brethren, the "Charismatic Renewal" in general, and a number of small independent Pentecostal Churches. The French report limits itself, among hundreds of independent Churches, to a dozen of names, Curiously enough, the French report mentions to the Evangelical Pentecostal Church of Besancon (EEPB) and ignores the Evangelical Missionary Federation, founded on the basis of the success of the Besancon church, and now including more than 30 churches. In fact, not unlike other groups, the EEPB seems to have been included in the report for one simple reason. Based on a family conflict between a pastor and his father-in-law, the EEPB has been targeted as a "cult" by the anti-cult movement CCMM, particularly after 1994. Due to the peculiar status of the anti-cult movement in France, the accusations have been spread by the press (in previous years, quite favorable to EEPB) and up to the parliamentary commission. Among hundreds of independent churches with very similar theologies only those specifically targeted (often for very local or personal reasons) by anti-cult movement have ended up being included in report.

In fact, the EEPB is just another Evangelical Pentecostal church. Its founder, pastor Rene Kennel, studied at Nogent-sur-Marne's Institut Biblique and started his career in 1950 as a Mennonite part-time preacher. Soon, he welcomed on his family farm the Pentecostal Gypsy Movement of Pastor Le Cossec (a member of the mainline French Protestant Federation). Impressed by the gypsies' enthusiasm Kennel starts a Pentecostal ministry and in 1967 becomes a full time pastor. In 1975 Kennel joined with other pastors to establish the Evangelical Free Pentecostal independent church in Besancon, the present-day EEPB. In 1986, Kennel abandoned his position as president of FELP in order to oversee the planting of daughter churches of EEPB in the region. These churches are the basis of the Evangelical Missionary Federation (FEM), incorporated under French Law in 1989. The doctrinal statements of the EEPB are quite typical of hundreds of Evangelical Pentecostal churches.

The accusations raised by the CCMM and the media influenced by it--literal belief in the existence of the Devil, in miracles, speaking in tongues--could be easily used against countless Pentecostal or Evangelical churches. It is possible that church leaders, unfamiliar with legal matters, made some mistakes when preparing the by-laws and the articles of incorporation, thus exposing the church to potential problems with the French tax authorities. On the other hand, it is a fact that the French Revenue Service only took action after the anti-cultists had started targeting EEPB as a "cult." When, in July 1994, an ex-member, visibly drunk, damaged the furniture of the church belonging to the Evangelical Missionary Federation in Langres, anti-cultists (and part of the press) quickly took the side of the apostate, presented as just another "victim" of a "cult." Paradoxically, before and after being labeled a "cult" by the parliamentary commission, EEPB has always been able to maintain its pastors, for health and retirement insurance purposes, in the lists of CAMAC-CAMAVIC. (This is the social fund for pastors in France that is largely controlled by the Roman Catholic Church and includes ministers of all the mainline Christian churches.

In the meantime, however, the fact of being in the parliamentary list of "dangerous cults" threatens the very existence of EEPB and of the whole FEM. Not only does media pressure against the "cult" continue but--following administrative instructions enacted in the wake of the parliamentary report--the federation's churches have been denied the use of public meeting halls by local authorities, and the French Revenue Service is continuously harassing this struggling minority. The saga of EEPB confirms that in the present French scenario it is not

enough to preach a mainline Christian theology in order to avoid the label of a "cult." A minor incident is enough to result in being blacklisted by an anti-cult movement. And, unfortunately, the black lists of the anti-cult movements easily become the black lists of the media and the government.

1. the French Aumist Religion (the Mandarom)

The French Aumist Religion, whose legal structure is called Association of the Triumphant Vajra, head quartered in its holy city of Mandarom (hence the popular nickname of "The Mandarom"), is not only regarded by anti-cultists and by a sizable part of the French media as a cult. It is the cult, particularly in Southern France. This is in itself an interesting phenomenon, taking into account that the Aumist Religion is not a very large group, with less than one thousand members in France and a smaller constituency in Italy, Quebec, Belgium, Switzerland and Africa. The holy city of the Mandarom--described as the very epitome of the "danger of the cults," a base threatening a whole country--does not include more than fifty residing monks.

The Aumist Religion (the name comes from the sacred Eastern sound AUM, the only common element with the Japanese Aum Shinri-kyo) was founded by Mr. Gilbert Bourdin, a native of French Martinique. In the early 1600s he was initiated by the Indian master Stvanada and started gathering followers as an ascetic practicing austerities in Southern France. He also became quite well-known as a Yoga teacher and author. In 1967 he established the Association of the Knights of the Golden Lotus (replaced in 1995 by the current Association of the Triumphant Vajra) and in 1969 he founded the holy city of the Mandarom. Gradually, Bourdin revealed himself as the Messiah: the Lord Hamsah Manarah. In 1990 he was publicly crowned as the messiah at the mandarom; some of the ceremonies were open to the media. At that time the movement hoped to crown the existing constructions at the Mandarom (temples representing all the great religions of the world and huge statues) with a larger Temple-Pyramid, a building of great spiritual and cosmic significance for the Aumists.

The public ceremonies of 1990 were interpreted as an arrogant challenge by the anti-cult movement and the media. The Mandarom with its huge constructions was, simply, too visible. Two TV networks started a campaign exposing the Mandarom as a "cultic concentration camp." Among the anti-cult activists emerged militant psychiatrist Jean-Marie Angrall. He went on record on TV commenting, about Aumism, that "notwithstanding what they claim, cults are not religious movements, but rather criminal movements organized by gurus who use brainwashing to manipulate their victims." a nice summary of the anti-cult ideology. The campaign against the Mandarom was largely organized by ADFI, and from 1992 it was joined by an ad hoc ecologist group lead by Mr. Robert Ferrato. The latter claimed that the Mandarom is an offense to the ecological equilibrium of the mountain where it is built and called for its destruction. As mentioned earlier, anti-cult activists are called for its destruction. As mentioned earlier, anti-cult activists are taken more seriously in France than in other countries, and even an extreme character such as Dr. Abgrall managed to become one of the two "experts" in the national Observatory of Cults established in 1996.

The Mandarom was raided repeatedly between 1992-1995 by tax and police officers in a military style. ADFI, Mr. Ferrato, and a reporter for the TV network TF1, Bernard Nicolas, played a key-role in making an apostate, Florence Roncaglia (whose mother is still with the Mandarom), "remember" that she had been molested and raped by Bourdin in the 1980s. A complaint was filed in 1994, just before the expiration of the legal delay. Later, three other

female apostates also "remembered." Based on Roncaglia's complaint, the mandarom was raided again on June 12, 1995 and Bourdin was arrested. Coincidentally, at the same date the French Council of State should have rendered its final decision on the question of building permission of the Temple-Pyramid. The decision was finally unfavorable to the Aumist Religion. On June 30, 1995, Mr. Bourdin was released and the proceedings against him are still pending. For the Aumists, the fact that the Temple-Pyramid can no longer be built is extremely serious. They are also concerned with the climate surrounding the prosecution of their leader, most recently manifested in October 1997 in media comments about the criminal procedure against a local politician, Pierre Rinaldi, for alleged corruption in connection with the building of the road leading to the Mandarom.

The case of the Mandarom raises important questions. There is little doubt that the claims the Aumists make for their founder are quite extreme. Generally speaking, claiming to be the Messiah does not make any religious leader particularly popular. The Aumist literature combines Eastern themes and Western Esotericism, and it is difficult to distinguish between actual and symbolic claims. (For example, it is argued that the Messiah has destroyed millions of devils threatening Planet Earth. These and similar claims are routinely quoted by anti-cultists to ridicule the Mandarom). In short, Mr. Bourdin is an unpopular religious leader, and Aumism is an unpopular minority. This circumstance makes Aumism an excellent case to test religious liberty in France. When a group is protected by its own popularity, there is no need for constitutional or international guarantees.

The scholars who have taken the time to study the Mandarom (others are simply scared away by controversy) have raised doubts about the possibility for Bourdin to obtain a fair trial. They certainly do not suggest that sexual abuse by pastors or religious leaders should be condoned. They agree that it should be vigorously investigated and prosecuted. Some comments about the Mandarom case are, however, in order. First, the local judges do not seem to be familiar with doubts raised in the United States and elsewhere about belated memories of sexual abuses surfacing after many years in therapy or within the frame of national controversies. In fact, in the last few years, most cases of so-called "recovered memories" have been dismissed by U.S. courts. It is in fact too easy to accuse public figures of sexual abuses allegedly taking place ten or fifteen years ago. Second, it is questionable that the Court of Digne has regarded it as necessary to appoint an expert to investigate "the doctrines and practices of the Mandarom and their connection, if any, with the facts of the case against Mr. Bourdin." A point confirming the dubious objectivity of this proceeding is that the Court of Digne has appointed Dr. Jean-Marie Abgrall as its expert--not only a militant anti-cultist but an author who had written that Bourdin is "a fraud" and "a paranoid," and that Aumism is a "clownesque caricature of a cult" (Abgrall, *La Mecanique des sectes*, 1996, pp. 31, 91). The verdict of a such an "independent expert" has been rendered in advance. Finally, irrespective of the personal problems of Mr. Bourdin, one wanders why, in connection with his prosecution, the Mandarom has been repeatedly raided Waco-style, by paratroopers, and a number of members of the movement other than Mr. Bourdin have been handcuffed and taken into custody (although no charges were ever filed against any of them).

Scholars are often asked whether there is a risk that groups such as the Mandarom may become involved in violent confrontations with the authorities, or commit mass suicides like the Solar Temple. They normally answer that the Aumist doctrine is firmly against violence and suicides. This is, however, only part of the story. Writing on the situation at the Mandarom, Italian scholar Luigi Berzano (a professor of sociology at the University of Turin and Roman Catholic priest) mentioned the sociological theories of amplified deviance (Berzano. "La deviance sopposee dans le `phenomene sectaire': l'exemple de la religion

aumiste." in *Pour en finir avec les sectes. Le debat sur le rapport de la commission parlementaire*, Paris: Dervy, 1996: 315-320). According to these theories, the hostile official responses to a movement regarded as deviant may in fact amplify its deviance. In a sense--as suggested in the U.S. debate by Passas and others--the movement is "deformed" by official and anti-cult harassment. Excessive reaction against a movement, thus, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and may cause the very evil it is supposed to avoid.

IV. Suggestions

While it is not for scholars to recommend specific policy attitudes, some general suggestions seem to be in order.

1. It should be clear from our report that Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe should not be the only areas of concern when religion liberty risks are evaluated. At least three countries in the European Union (France, Belgium and Germany) should be considered at risk (with the addition of Greece, where the problems are, however, more similar to those prevailing in Eastern Europe).

2. A primary cause of concern is the public sponsorship in these countries of private anti-cult movements. It is abundantly clear that these movements are responsible for spreading misleading and often simply false information about religious minorities, and an intolerant world view.

3. It should be clarified that disgruntled apostates, no matter who sponsors their claims, are but a minority of the larger population of ex-members of any given religious minority, and should not, without further investigation, be considered as representatives of ex-members in general.

4. It is a cause of serious concern that myths discredited and debunked in the United States about brainwashing and mind control, thanks to the promotion by the anti-cult lobby, are still taken seriously in certain European countries. They need to be exposed as pseudo-science.

5. Words are not neutral. Words such as "cults" (or "sectes" in French, or equivalent words in other European languages) are easily used as tools of hate and discrimination, and should be avoided, particularly in official documents. Scholars often use "new religious movements." Although better than "cults," even this language can cause misunderstandings about movements which are new only in the West while they represent a century-old-tradition in the East (such as ISKCON, popularly known as the Hara Krishna movement, or Soka Gakki, part of the mainline tradition of Japanese Nichiren Buddhism). The most neutral term is "religious minorities." It avoids judgments about whether a group is acceptable, or is connected to an old tradition.

6. Nothing in this report should suggest that laws should not be enforced against criminal actions perpetrated within the frame of old (or not so old) religious movements. The experience shows that there are, in crimes (a different thing from the imaginary crimes of "belonging to a "cult" or "using mind control techniques") the suspects should be investigated and prosecuted as criminal suspects, not as members of religious minorities.