

Table of Contents

- [Senators concede objections to the offence of "mental manipulation"](#) - (10.11.2000)
- [Representatives of the four monotheist religions hostile to anti-sect bill](#) - (17.10.2000)
- [Arson at Synagogue in France](#) - (13.10.2000)
- [Already passed by the Assembly, the anti-cult law is criticized by the Churches](#) - (16.09.2000)
- [2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: France](#) - (05.09.2000)
- [France turns on Mormons over 'baptism of dead'](#) - (23.08.2000)
- [French mayors rebel against gypsy gathering](#) - (21.08.2000)
- [Religious groups criticize French sect proposal](#) - (10.08.2000)
- [Scientology Papers Inquiry Begins](#) - (28.07.2000)
- [France's anti-sect bill could hinder religious freedom](#) - (20.07.2000)
- [French forget lesson of Bastille Day](#) - (14.07.2000)
- [French "cults law" draws fire from religious groups](#) - (14.07.2000)
- ["Proselytize, go to jail"](#) - (02.07.2000)
- [Sweeping new laws on sects 'could be abused'](#) - (29.06.2000)
- [French court to rule on \\$40 million tax bill on Jehovah's Witnesses](#) - (29.06.2000)
- [French proposal targets proselytizing](#) - (28.06.2000)
- ["Scientology Case Judge Faces Probe"](#) - (26.06.2000)
- [Highest administrative court rules that Jehovah's Witnesses are a religion](#) - (23.06.2000)
- [Lawyer calls for replacement of judge in French scientology case](#) - (23.06.2000)
- [France adopts tough anti-sect law](#) - (22.06.2000)

- [Assembly passes extreme anti-cult law, making brainwashing a crime](#) - (22.06.2000)
- [Pope John Paul II calls for religious liberty in France](#) - (22.06.2000)
- [The Interministerial Mission to Battle Against Cults \(MILS\) Accuses its Detractors of Collaborating with Scientology](#) - (21.06.2000)
- [France restricts religious freedom again](#) (15.06.2000)
- [France and Germany meet on Scientology](#) - (07.06.2000)
- [Socialist Party Proposes Extreme Anti-Cult law, Making Brainwashing a Crime](#) - (07.06.2000)
- [Marseilles: An enquiry committee hears evidence from vicims of anti-sect policy](#) (05.06.2000)
- [Jacques Guyard to pay damages for having labelled anthroposophy a sect](#) - (23.03.2000)
- [Report Urges Dissolution of Scientology Church in France](#) - (29.02.2000)
- [Church provokes unholy row](#) - (28.02.2000)
- [Dangerous Liaisons between Laicist France and Polish Catholic Anti-sect Groups](#) - (27.02.2000)
- [French Judge upholds acquittal of 21 religious group members](#) - (24.02.2000)
- [Moderate Islam positive force in France - minister](#) - (18.02.2000)
- [Paris Mayor wants Crackdown on Sects](#) - (13.02.2000)
- [The Victim Compensation Commission recognize two former members of the Mandarom as victims of sex crimes by their late spiritual leader](#) - (10.02.2000)
- [French report calls for dissolution of Church of Scientology](#) - (08.02.2000)
- [The 2000 Report of the French Mission to Fight Cults](#) - (08.02.2000)
- [French official body slams US over sects](#) - (07.02.2000)
- [French Moslems angry over presidential snub](#) - (06.01.2000)
- [France fined over missing Scientology files](#) - (05.01.2000)

Senators concede objections to the offence of "mental manipulation"
They heard religious leaders

Le Monde (10.11.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (16.11.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - For the first time, the representatives of the four major religions in France were heard in a parliamentary setting on the question of sects. In the Senate, Pastor Jean-Arnold de Clermont, President of the Protestant Union, Jean Vernet delegate of the Catholic Episcopate, Joseph Sitruk, Grand Rabbi of France, and Dalil Boubakeur, vice-chancellor of the Mosque of Paris, were auditioned, on Wednesday, November 8th, by the Law commission, before the examination in second reading, at the beginning of January, of the private bill on the fight against the "groups of a sectarian nature".

Adopted unanimously by the National Assembly, on June 22nd, this text is likely to be significantly modified following reservations expressed by Elisabeth Guigou, when she was still Minister of Justice, by the National Consultative Commission of Human Rights and by the representatives of great religions. Nicolas About (UDF, Yvelines), rapporteur for the Law Commission of the Senate, had pushed through a vote, in the first reading of a law proposal planning the dissolution - on the basis of a 1936 text concerning militias - of groups "constituting a risk public order and a major danger for the human person". The proposition had been strengthened, at the National Assembly, by Catherine Picard (PS, Eure), who had added to it the creation of an offence of "mental manipulation" explicitly targeting sects.

Before the Law Commission of the Senate, the religious representatives renewed their criticisms on this proposition. Whilst they considered perfectly legitimate the fight against all the sectarian offences they also considered the current legal arsenal sufficient to prevent and to repress them. They warned the senators against the risks of excessive interpretation that could be introduced by the notion of "mental manipulation", considering this as "imprecise" and "dangerous".

Night-prayer

Even if great religions do not feel targeted today, one cannot exclude, declared Mgr. Vernet, that a religious congregation might be harassed one day due to practices such as night-prayer or fasting. Pastor de Clermont also regretted the negative drift in the current climate of the "fight" against sects, quoting an "evangelical" minister who had recently been rejected from a parents' association.

The Jew, Moslem, Catholic and Protestant representatives expressed that they were for the creation of an independent and multi-disciplinary "observatory" - similar to the National Committee of Ethics - able to hear victims but also the suspected groups designated as sects. This independent Observatory - the one created by Alain Juppé in 1996, falls under the authority of the Prime Minister - would correspond to the wishes of the Council of Europe, concerned about the creation in France of the Interministerial

Mission to Fight Against Sects chaired by the former socialist Minister Alain Vivien. Belgium, Switzerland, England and Italy have independent Observatories.

"Thought Police"

In their responses, the Senators underlined their intention to fight firmly against sectarian offences and their opposition to "any thought police". Mr About will meet Mrs Picard "to improve", the private bill, he said to Le Monde, "by saving the spirit of the National Assembly, but by amending it so that it is no longer questionable for the religious groups".

Magistrates and the Consultative Committee on Human Rights would like to transform the offence of mental manipulation into the broader offence of "placing someone in a state of weakness", which already partially exists in the Penal code.

Concerning the dissolution of groups of a sectarian nature, the authors of the proposition are also thinking about another formulation. The religious representatives said that the dissolution by a judge, voted by the National Assembly, should be replaced with an administrative dissolution under the control of the Council of State, applicable to any criminal group, whatever it may be. This proposition was favourably welcomed by Mr About.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Representatives of the four monotheist religions hostile to anti-sect bill

AFP (17.10.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (19.10.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The representatives of the four monotheist religions have been received Monday after they asked for it, by advisors of the Prime Minister Lionel Jospin to announce their concern about the private anti-sect bill.

Already adopted by the National Assembly, it will be examined soon by the Senate. The president of the Protestant Federation of France (FPF), Pastor Jean-Arnold de Clermont, on the initiative of this step, was accompanied by Mr Bernard Lagoutte, Secretary-General of the Episcopate, Rabbi Alain Goldman and the vice-chancellor of the Mosque of Paris, Dalil Boubakeur.

The religious representatives are particularly hostile with the creation of an offense of "mental manipulation - a so vague concept which can apply to anything, and why not with political parties?" underlined Pastor Clermont. They pointed out "an obviousness, which is the legal impossibility to define a sect, and thus the difficulty in making a law turned against the sectarian movements," he added.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Arson at Synagogue in France

AP, (13.10.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (16.10.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The door of a synagogue was doused with gasoline and set on fire in southern France, police said Thursday, in the latest in a series of anti-Jewish attacks across the country.

The flames were quickly contained Wednesday evening and damage to the synagogue in La Seyne-sur-Mer in the Var region was minimal, police said.

The incident brings to 22 the number of anti-Semitic incidents since the start of the month. On Tuesday night, a synagogue in Trappes outside Paris was all but destroyed by fire.

The attacks are believed linked to the crisis in the Middle East.

Officials at a Jewish school in Paris said Thursday that they were filing a complaint after students were pelted with objects and showered with insults as they left school Wednesday, French radio reported.

Security was reinforced around the school, which has 800 students of all ages.

Jewish, Muslim and Christian religious leaders, meeting Thursday in Marseille, called for calm.

Confrontation here does nothing to help solve the problem of peace in the Middle East, Muslim Imam Bachir Dahmani said.

Jewish officials this week published a list of 19 anti-Semitic acts committed since Oct. 1. We do not accept the fact that some people are trying to transfer to France events taking place in the Palestinian territories in Israel," said the statement by the "Consistoire," the body that governs Jewish religious affairs in Paris.

French President Jacques Chirac condemned the anti-Semitic attacks, saying "these manifestations of intolerance ... undermine in an inadmissible way the values and traditions" of France.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Already passed by the Assembly, the anti-cult law is criticized by the Churches

by Xaver Ternisien

Le Monde (16.09.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (19.09.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The Senate will have to debate, at the beginning of November, the anti-cult law passed by the Assembly on 22nd June. This text provides for the dissolution of legal entities in case of repeated criminal offences and establishes a new crime of "mental manipulation". This latter point, criticized by the Human Rights League, divides the representatives of the churches, some of them fearing its easy abuse.

The About-Picard draft law against "cults" (sectes), passed by the National Assembly on first reading on 22nd June (see "Le Monde" of 24th June) should be debated by the Senate at the beginning of November. The text, presented at the Assembly by (Socialist) MP of Eure, Catherine Picard, widens the penal responsibility of legal entities and makes their dissolution easier in case of infraction, in order to better fight cults. It also sets up a new criminal offense of "mental manipulation".

But, the governmental Mission to Fight Cults (MILS), presided by Alain Vivien, already breaks free from the About-Picard bill. In a note sent to the Prime Minister's office, the MILS considers that the word "mental manipulation" used by the text and taken from the 1999 Parliamentary report on cults' finances "is not the most appropriate one." The government may want, according to the MILS "to take this part away from the rest of the draft law."

The MILS is also worried by the "extraordinary world-wide and European mobilization lead by Scientology" which has "created problems for France abroad and in particular in the United-States." The 1995-1996 Parliamentary report on cults, which included a list of 172 groups regarded as cultic, is again criticized. For the American Department of State, this document has "contributed to create an atmosphere of intolerance towards minority religions."

The Anti-Cult Mission presided by Alain Vivien, suggests now to abandon the use of the list of cults included in the Parliamentary report. According to Mr Vivien, the dialogue would be impossible with "absolute cults" such as Scientology. But, he adds, French authorities could start some sorts of consultation with "structures" "whose creed and practices may breach French law 'only' due to their narrowness or totalism, including a tendency to separate the person from his or her family and social milieu." The MILS places in particular in this category Jehovah's Witnesses. "Christian or Eastern movements" included in the second category may eventually no longer be "regarded as cults," concludes the Mission.

The proposal to create a new criminal offense of "mental manipulation" has excited a wave of protests, not only from the groups regarded as cults, but also from the Churches. The spokesperson of the French Catholic Bishops, Father Stanislas Lalanne, considers that the Parliament must "amend its text": "A crime of mental manipulation is so vaguely defined that it can bring on uncontrolled floods of unwanted consequences."

The President of the French Protestant Federation, Pastor Jean-Arnold de Clermont, also considers that the About-Picard bill is "dangerous": during the traditional French Protestant "Assembly of the Desert", on 3rd September, he stated that the Protestants would be "particularly alert (...)" in front of the project to legislate on cults."

Yet, some voices discordant from the Bishops' Conference were heard in the Catholic Church who defended the draft law: the Bishop of Soissons, Monsignor Marcel Herriot, the Dominican theologian Jean-Marie Gueulette, Father Gaston Pietri, former deputy secretary general of the Episcopal Conference and Father Jacques Trouslard, a priest in Soissons who has been fighting cults for a long time. "The Catholic Church should not be afraid of this law, which in no case wants to interfere with religions and faiths," states Mgr Herriot.

Additional Thinking

Elisabeth Guigou, the Minister of Justice, had also called on 22nd June, for some "additional thinking," including consultations with the Human Rights League (LDH) and the National Commission of Human Rights (CNCDH). Michel Tubiana, president of the LDH and a member of the CNCDH, has already given his critical comments in detail. They are on the proceedings of "judicial dissolution" of cults, which have been found repeatedly guilty of criminal offenses: according to him, the procedure voted by the Assembly "does not allow to organize a defense." Regarding the creation of a new criminal offense of mental manipulation, Mr Tubiana considers that it raises "serious problems in its general principle." He would prefer that the existing article of the Criminal Code punishing the "fraudulent abuse of a state of ignorance or of a situation of weakness" be amended. This article could integrate ideas of "serious and reiterated pressures" and of "techniques capable of altering the judgement", present in the text of the bill. The CNCDH should give its conclusions on 21st September.

Source: CESNUR Web site: www.cesnur.org

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom: France

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor U.S. Department of State (05.09.2000)/HRWF International Secretariat (14.09.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the Government--including the legislative branch--took some actions during the period covered by this report that affected religious minorities that it considers to be "sects." The 1905 law on separation of church and state--the foundation of current legislation on religious freedom--makes it illegal to discriminate on the basis of faith.

There was no change in the general status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

Relations among the various religions are generally amicable; however, there were instances of threats and violence against members of religious minorities.

The U.S. Embassy maintained active contact with government officials on the issue of religious freedom.

Section I. Government Policies on Freedom of Religion

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the Government--including the legislative branch--took some actions during the period covered by this report that affected religious minorities that it considers to be "sects." (A "cult" or "culte" is generally considered to be a "religion." Cults are considered to be positive elements in society, while "sects" or "sectes" are defined as "persons who profess the same doctrine," often with a negative connotation.) The 1905 law on separation of church and state--the foundation of current legislation on religious freedom--makes it illegal to discriminate on the basis of faith.

The Government uses many categories to describe associations. Two of these categories apply to religious groups: "associations cultuelles" (associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes) and "associations culturelles" (cultural associations, which are not exempt from taxes). Associations in these two categories are subject to certain management and financial disclosure requirements. An association of worship can organize only religious activities, which are defined as liturgical services and practices. It may not operate a school or employ a board president. A cultural association, on the other hand, is a type of association whose goal is to promote the culture of a certain group, including a religious group. Although a cultural association is not exempt from taxes, it may receive government subsidies for its cultural and educational operations (such as schools). Religious groups normally use both of these categories; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, for example, runs strictly religious activities through its association of worship and operates a school under its cultural association.

Religious groups must apply with the local prefecture to be recognized as an association of worship and, therefore, receive tax-exempt status for their religious activities under the 1905 statute. The prefecture, upon reviewing the documentation supplied regarding the association's purpose for existence, can then grant that status. In order to qualify, the purpose of the group must be solely the practice of some form of religious ritual. Printing publications, employing a board president, or running a school can disqualify a group from receiving tax-exempt status.

According to the 1905 law, associations of worship are not taxed on the donations that they receive. However, the prefecture can decide to review a group's status if the association receives a large donation or legacy that comes to the attention of the tax authorities. If the prefecture determines that the association is not in fact in conformity

with the 1905 law, its status can be changed, and it can be required to pay a 60 percent tax rate on present and past donations.

According to statistics published by the Ministry of the Interior, 109 of 1,138 Protestant associations, 15 of 147 Jewish associations, and 2 of 1,050 Muslim associations currently have tax-free status. Roughly 100 Catholic associations are tax exempt; a representative of the Ministry of the Interior reports that the total number of non-tax-exempt Catholic associations is too numerous to estimate accurately.

For historical reasons, contrary to practice in the rest of the country, the Jewish, Lutheran, Reformed (Protestant), and Roman Catholic groups in three departments of Alsace-Lorraine enjoy special legal status in terms of taxation of individuals donating to these religious groups. Adherents of these four religions may choose to have a portion of their income tax allocated to their church in a system administered by the central government.

The State subsidizes private schools, including those that are affiliated with churches. Central or local governments own and maintain religious buildings constructed before 1905, the date of the law separating church and state. In Alsace and Moselle, special laws allow the local government to provide support for the building of religious edifices. For example, in April 2000, the mayor of Strasbourg proposed granting a tract of land and subsidizing construction costs for a new mosque. The decision provoked controversy in the Muslim community, part of which supported a different project. In May 2000, the city council decided to support both projects.

Religious Demography

The Government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation. The vast majority of the population is nominally Roman Catholic, although many Catholics do not practice their faith actively. According to one member of the Catholic hierarchy, only 8 percent of the population are actually practicing Catholics. Muslims constitute the second largest religious group in number; Islam has approximately 4 million adherents in France. According to the Ministry of the Interior, there are 1,536 mosques or prayer rooms in metropolitan France. According to various estimates, about 6 percent of the country's citizens are unaffiliated; Protestants account for 2 percent; and the Jewish and Buddhist populations each account for 1 percent. Jehovah's Witnesses claim that 250,000 persons attend their services either regularly or periodically.

According to various estimates, Orthodox Christians number between 80,000 and 100,000; the vast majority of these persons are associated with the Greek or Russian Orthodox Churches. The Jewish community numbers between 600,000 and 700,000 persons and is divided among Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox groups. According to press reports, up to 60 percent of the Jewish community celebrates at most only the high holy days such as Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. One Jewish community leader has reported that of the practicing Jews in the country, the largest number are Orthodox.

Religion is not taught in public schools. Parents may home school children for religious reasons, but all schooling must conform to the standards established for public schools. Public schools make an effort to supply special meals for students with religious dietary restrictions.

The Government has made efforts to promote interfaith understanding. The Government also has strict antidefamation laws prohibiting racially or religiously motivated attacks. For example, the Government has programs to combat racism and anti-Semitism through public awareness campaigns, and by encouraging dialog between local officials, police, and citizen groups.

The Minister of the Interior has met periodically with various representatives of the Muslim community to encourage the creation of a Muslim council to discuss that community's religious concerns; however, internal divisions have prevented Muslim leaders from responding positively.

Governmental Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government's response to some minority groups that it views as "sects" has been to encourage public caution. In 1995 the National Assembly formed a parliamentary commission, known as the Gest or the Guyard Commission (after the names of its chairman and rapporteur respectively), to study so-called "sects." In 1996 the Commission issued a report that defined sects as groups that place inordinate importance on finances; cause a rupture between adherents and their families; are responsible for physical as well as psychological attacks on members; recruit children; profess "anti social" ideas; disturb public order; have "judiciary problems;" and/or attempt to infiltrate organs of the State. Government officials have stated that "sects" are "associations whose structure is ideological and totalitarian and whose behavior seriously oppresses fundamental liberties as well as social equilibrium." (These attributes are in addition to specific criminal behavior prohibited by law.)

The Commission's report identified 173 groups as sects, including Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Scientology. The report was prepared without the benefit of full and complete hearings regarding the groups identified on the list. Groups were not told why they were placed on the list, and, because the document exists as a commission report to the National Assembly, there is no mechanism for changing or amending the list short of a new National Assembly Commission inquiry and report.

The ensuing publicity contributed to an atmosphere of intolerance and bias against minority religions. Some religious groups reported that their members suffered increased intolerance after having been identified on the list. The Commission's findings also led to calls for legislative action to restrict the activities of sects, which the Government rejected on grounds of religious freedom. Instead, the Justice Ministry issued a directive to all government entities to be vigilant against possible abuses by sects and to monitor potentially abusive sect activities.

In 1996 the Government created an interministerial working group on sects (known as the Observatory on Sects) to analyze the phenomenon of sects and to develop proposals for dealing with them. The working group's final report in 1996 made several proposals, including granting legal standing to organizations that oppose sects, thereby allowing them to initiate civil actions against sects; a modification of the law requiring associations to divulge information regarding the sources and management of their finances related to their effort to obtain tax-exempt status; a limit on the allocation of public campaign funds in order to limit public financial support for small fringe groups; the creation of a representative in each prefecture to provide information on sects to local officials; the creation of a permanent commission at the European Union level to reinforce international cooperation in controlling sect activities; and measures to restrict group members' entry into professional training programs.

In October 1998, the Government issued a new decree disbanding the Observatory on Sects and creating an "Interministerial Mission to Battle Against Sects" (mission interministerielle de lutte contre les sectes, or MILS). Although the decree instructs the MILS to "analyze the phenomenon of sects," it does not define what is meant by the term "sect," or how sects differ from religions. The MILS also is charged with serving as a coordinator of periodic interministerial meetings, at which government officials are to exchange information and coordinate their actions against sects.

On February 7, 2000, the Interministerial Mission for the Fight Against Sects submitted its first annual report to the Prime Minister, which addressed the perceived problem of "sects." Publication of the report had been delayed; according to press reports, the delay was due to government reservations about the content of the report, which reportedly advocated new legislation aimed at abolishing a number of so-called "dangerous sects." The Prime Minister's office, as well as some prominent government figures, publicly opposed such measures, citing concerns about the constitutional protection of "freedom of conscience." The report specifically raised the possibility of the dissolution of movements which, being "in essence and in action totalitarian" are dangerous to their members and to democracy in general. The report urged government action to deal with sects or cults according to their degree of dangerousness, such as groups that limit personal freedoms of members, "new age" groups, and "absolutist" groups that are totalitarian in nature. However, the report did not advocate new legislation to abolish groups considered to be dangerous.

The report presented two options: The use of criminal cases against individuals for violating existing laws, which rarely is done, and the use of existing administrative and political means--a 1936 decree against "factious leagues"--which would require action by

the Council of Ministers and the assent of the President. The report specifically cited concerns regarding the Church of Scientology and the "Solar Temple" group.

In December 1998, a deputy introduced a private bill in the National Assembly that would allow anti-sect groups, classified as having "state-approved" ("utilités publiques") status, to become parties to court actions involving sects. Its main provisions, with some

modifications, were integrated into a separate bill on legal reform aimed at strengthening the presumption of innocence and victims' rights. That bill, which became law in June 2000, allows associations that defend or aid an individual or a collective entity against a person or organization that is characterized as having the goal or the effect of creating or exploiting a psychological or physical dependence to have standing in judicial proceedings. Still further modifications of this law, which would limit this standing to associations classified as "utilités publiques," are contained in pending legislation on "sects."

In December 1998, the National Assembly created a new parliamentary commission to study the way that sects are financed. In June 1999, the National Assembly released its second report on "sects," which addressed the finances of the groups. The report was based on questionnaires sent to groups listed as "sects" in the 1995 parliamentary report, requesting detailed information about the finances of these groups, including donations, investments, financial activities, and other sources of income. The report focused on multinational groups, especially Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Scientology. The stated basis of concern was that these groups may use excessive or dishonest means to obtain donations, which then are transferred out of the country and beyond the reach of French tax authorities. The report also raised questions about volunteers, who should be compensated under the law for having provided uncompensated labor to "for-profit" organizations.

In March 2000, a Paris Correctional Court fined National Assembly Deputy Jacques Guyard, the president of the 1999 Parliamentary Commission of Inquiries Against Sects and a drafter of the 1996 National Assembly report on so-called "sects," approximately \$16,500 (90,000 francs) in damages to three groups that were named in the June 1999 parliamentary report.

These three groups--the Federation of Steiner Schools, the New Brotherly Economy, and "le Mercure Federal" (an anthroposophical medical association)--had charged Guyard with slander for labeling the groups as "sects" in a June 1999 television interview. The court found that Guyard had made accusations against these groups when existing evidence did not warrant even a serious inquiry into their activities. The court noted that the National Assembly report resulted from written declarations from persons claiming to be victims of anthroposophy, but that the Commission had not heard any of the claims in person, and that there was no supporting documentation for accusations that the groups had used mental manipulation, pressure to give money, or practical medicine that endangered lives. The court rejected Guyard's later attempts to qualify his statements, and also rejected a request from Guyard's lawyer for parliamentary immunity, stating that Guyard's high position as head of the Commission would cause his remarks to have substantial influence on the public.

In June 2000, the National Assembly passed on its first reading a private bill that would tighten restrictions on religious and other organizations. This bill--which amended an earlier version that had originated in and had been passed by the Senate in December 1999--included the following clauses: (1) criteria for the dissolution of so-called "sects,"

(2) the prohibition of sect publicity in "vulnerable" areas (i.e., near schools and hospitals), (3) prohibition of the reconstitution of dissolved "sects" under a different name, and (4) establishment of the new crime of "mental manipulation." This bill was sent back to the Senate, where it may receive a second reading as early as late October 2000. However, various sources indicate that this proposed legislation, in its current form, is unlikely to become law prior to early 2001, if at all. The Justice Minister, who attended the National Assembly vote, noted that certain provisions of the bill would help "victims" of "sects," but warned that other provisions might threaten fundamental liberties, such as freedom of association and belief. She questioned whether certain clauses were in conformity with the European Convention on Human Rights and called for a "parallel reflection" on these points to be organized by human rights groups when the Senate reconsidered the bill in the fall.

The Government has not outlawed any of the groups on the list; however, several groups have reported that they have experienced discrimination since the publication of the 1996 parliamentary commission report. For example, leaders of l'Institut Theologique de Nimes (ITN), a private Bible college founded in 1989, claim that the institute and its members began experiencing discrimination in 1996, after the group was named on the 1995 list. The founder and leader, Louis Demeo, is head pastor at an associated church (Eglise Evangelique de la Grace), which also runs a private high school and a private primary school. However, the church itself was not named on the list. The Church of Scientology claims that its members have been targets of discriminatory behavior.

Local authorities often determine the treatment of religious minorities. For example, in April 1999, an official of a district of Paris refused in writing a request to stage an art exhibition on city property because of the applicant's affiliation with the Church of Scientology. The Association of the Triumphant Vajra also has been involved in a dispute with local officials over the building of a statue and a temple. Alleging unfair treatment on religious grounds, the association mounted a public campaign, which included an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, to prevent application of a Court of Cassation ruling upholding a lower court order to tear down a statue that allegedly had been erected without a permit.

Some observers are concerned about the scrutiny with which tax authorities have examined the financial records of some religious groups. According to the 1905 law separating church and state, religious associations are not taxed on voluntary donations that they receive, although all churches pay taxes on certain activities. Religious groups must differentiate between activities carried out as an association of worship ("cultuelle"), which are not taxed, and activities carried out as a cultural association, which are subject to tax. The Government currently does not recognize the Church of Scientology or some branches of Jehovah's Witnesses as qualifying religious associations, and therefore subjects them to a 60 percent tax on all funds that they receive.

In January 1996, the tax authorities began an audit of the French Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, and in May 1998, formally assessed the 60 percent tax against all donations received by Jehovah's Witnesses from September 1992 through August 1996. In June

1998, tax authorities began proceedings to collect the assessed tax, including steps to place a lien on the property of the National Consistory of Jehovah's Witnesses. The total amount claimed--including taxes, penalties, and interest--is over \$42 million (300 million francs). However, in June 2000, the Conseil d'Etat, the highest administrative court in the country, decided that two of the branches of Jehovah's Witnesses could be recognized as religious associations according to the 1905 law, and thus be exonerated from certain tax obligations. Separately, in July 2000, a Nanterre court decided against the French Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, confirming the necessity to pay the approximately \$42 million (300 million francs) in back-taxes to the fiscal authorities. The case was sent to an appeals court, and the tax proceeding continued throughout 2000.

Authorities also have taken action against the Church of Scientology. Tax claims asserted in 1994-95 against several Scientology churches forced them into bankruptcy. In the case of the Paris church, the Ministry of Finance refused to grant the church authorization to import funds to pay the claimed taxes even though the church offered to pay the total amount of all taxes assessed. In December 1997, the Government filed legal action for the claimed amount against former officers of the Paris church and against the Church of Scientology International (a California nonprofit organization). The hearing in this legal action was deferred pending a decision regarding an administrative claim by the Paris church that the Minister of Finance acted improperly in refusing to allow the church to import funds to pay the assessed taxes. In January 1999, the Conseil d'Etat requested the advice of the European Court of Justice, and on March 14, 2000, the Court ruled that French law was incompatible with European Union laws regulating the free flow of capital. However, the Court ruled that such regulations could be allowed if required on the grounds of a threat to public security or public policy. The Conseil d'Etat overturned the tax assessment. However, the judgment's practical effect was limited because the affected churches had dissolved themselves and been reconstituted in the intervening period under different names.

A number of court cases have been initiated against the Church of Scientology. These cases generally involved former members who have sued the Church for fraud and sometimes for the practice of medicine without a license. According to representatives from the Church of Scientology, there also have been cases under the data privacy act brought against the group by former members who have continued to receive mailings from the parent church in the United States. A 1999 case in the Marseille Correctional Court received wide media attention after judicial officials admitted that 3½ tons of documents pertaining to the case had been destroyed by mistake. In November 1999, the Marseille court in that case found a former local leader of the Church of Scientology and four other church employees guilty of fraud for swindling money from former members. The court sentenced the local leader to 2 years in prison, of which 18 months were suspended and the remaining 6 months served prior to sentencing, and a fine of approximately \$16,700 (100,000 francs). The other four members received suspended sentences; charges against two other persons were dropped.

Problems experienced by Muslims appear to be based on cultural rather than on religious differences. Debate continues over whether denying some Muslim girls the right to wear

headscarves in public schools constitutes a violation of the right to practice their religion. In 1989 the Conseil d'Etat ruled that the "ostentatious" wearing of these headscarves violated a law prohibiting proselytizing in schools. After much unfavorable media attention to the wearing of such headscarves, the Ministry of Education issued a directive in 1994 that prohibits the wearing of "ostentatious political and religious symbols" in schools. The directive does not specify the "symbols" in question, leaving school administrators considerable authority to do so. The Conseil d'Etat in 1995 affirmed that simply wearing a headscarf does not provide grounds for exclusion from school and subsequently struck down some decisions to expel girls for wearing headscarves. The decision about whether or not headscarves or other religious articles are "ostentatious" rests with the director of each school. Various reports indicate that, while some school directors permit the wearing of headscarves, others do not. Students are free to pursue their right to wear religious articles of clothing through the court system, and the courts have ruled upon a number of cases regarding headscarves. The outcome of these cases varies, and no national decision has yet been taken to rule definitively on whether or not the wearing of headscarves should be allowed.

Foreign missionaries must obtain a 3-month tourist visa before leaving their own country. Upon arrival missionaries must apply with the local prefecture for a *carte de sejour* (a document that allows a foreigner to remain in the country for a given period of time), and then must give the prefecture a letter from their sponsoring religious organization.

On October 21, 1999, the Court of Cassation upheld a Bordeaux court's 1998 conviction of Maurice Papon for his actions as secretary general of the prefecture of Gironde from 1942 to 1944. Papon was found guilty of complicity in committing crimes against humanity for his role in the deportation of hundreds of Jews to Nazi concentration camps during the World War II German occupation. The Bordeaux court had sentenced Papon to 10 years' imprisonment; however, he remained on bail pending the outcome of his appeal to the Court of Cassation. Just before that court's ruling, Papon fled to Switzerland. His failure to appear resulted in an automatic rejection of his appeal. On October 22, he was arrested in Switzerland and returned to France, where he remains in prison. According to press reports, his lawyer intends to take the case to the European Court of Human Rights.

There was no change in the general status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion of Minor U.S. Citizens

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section II. Societal Attitudes

Interfaith relations at a popular level are amicable.

The annual National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (NCCHR) report on racism and xenophobia, released in March 2000, noted an increase in the number of attacks against Jews after a steady downward trend since 1992, although the number of anti-Semitic threats continued to decline. In 1999 there were 9 reported attacks and 52 reported threats, compared with 1 and 73 respectively in 1998. The attacks recorded in 1999 occurred throughout the country and included three assaults, three acts of vandalism, and three attempts to set fire to synagogues. There were also occasional attacks on members of the large Arab/Muslim community.

The Conseil des Eglises Chretiens en France (CECEF), formed in 1987 and made up of three Protestant members, three Catholics, and three Orthodox Christians, serves as a forum for dialog among the major Christian churches. There is also an organized interfaith dialog among the Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish communities, which discuss and issue statements on various national and international issues. The Ministry of Interior has urged the creation of a Muslim council to discuss that community's religious concerns, but internal divisions have prevented Muslim leaders from responding positively.

Section III. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy maintained active contact with government officials on the issue of religious freedom. Representatives from the Embassy have met several times with government officials and members of the Parliament. Embassy representatives also meet regularly with a variety of private citizens and nongovernmental organizations involved in the issue. Several other visiting officials, including Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom Robert Seiple, also discussed religious freedom issues with senior French officials.

www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/irf/irf_rpt/irg_france.html

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

France turns on Mormons over 'baptism of dead'

By John Lichfield ("UK-Independent," August 23, 2000)

UK-Independent (23.08.2000) / HRWF International Secretariat (28.08.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The French state is growing increasingly anxious about the "baptism of ancestors" by the Mormon Church.

According to an investigation in yesterday's Libération newspaper, Paris is having second thoughts about a 13-year-old agreement allowing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints to microfilm all birth and death registers and parish records in France up to the beginning of the 20th century. Under the agreement, made in 1987, the Mormon church agreed that the records would not be resold and would be used only by its members.

According to their doctrine, Mormons must "baptise the dead", or attempt to baptise their ancestors as far back as they can be traced. In return for allowing Mormon researchers to film the records - anyone is entitled to write them down - the French government received two free copies of each microfilm for its own archives.

But the agreement failed to take account of the internet. The information gathered so far, covering 56 of the 100 French metropolitan and overseas départements, and containing the names of 400 million dead French people, is now available on the Mormon

website, familysearch.org.

Similar efforts are under way to trace ancestors in other countries, including Britain (where most parish records can be freely consulted). This drive - officially an effort to "bring together the human family" - has produced a vast archive of three billion names, which are stored in a "genealogical library" contained within cellars.

The information is an invaluable source for genealogists and individuals tracing their roots, whether they are Mormons or not. But the French government fears it is being used, subtly, by the Mormons as a recruitment tool. French civil liberties organisations fear it amounts to a creation of a "secret file" on the human race.

It also raises the odd possibility that many of us are post-facto descended from newly baptised Mormons, without knowing it.

Although not officially admitted, ex-Mormons have spoken of "mass baptisms" of the dead, using names gathered by researchers. In other words, the Mormons are gradually kidnapping all our ancestors.

Christian Euvrard, a spokesman for the Mormons, said it was impossible to know whether "the spirits of the dead" accepted the invitation to become Mormons. He said: "We are not hijacking them. The dead have their own independent referee. Between his death and his resurrection, Christ preached the gospel to the dead.

"Our belief is that men and women can be converted in the spirit world, after their death. For us, there is no one more alive than a dead person."

The posting of the French records on the internet - which implicitly breaks the 1987 agreement - was raised with the Mormon church by the director-general of the French

archives, Philippe Belaval, in June. The French Ministry of Culture is to meet civil rights groups next month to hear their complaints.

The French national committee for information and liberty fears that the Mormon file could allow living people to be classified according to their race or religion or enable the health history of their ancestors to be investigated without their knowledge or agreement.

Mr Belaval acknowledged to Libération that there was a potential problem. "The existence of this website has led us to question the way the state and the [Mormons] agreed to use this information. Why is the church putting this information on the web? For what purpose and in what context?"

"The 1987 agreement failed to foresee the coming of new technologies. We cannot remain with the status quo."

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

French mayors rebel against gypsy gathering

By Matthew Green

Reuters (21.08.2000) / HRWF International Secretariat (22.08.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - French mayors have threatened to disrupt a referendum on shortening France's presidential term in protest at an evangelical gathering of tens of thousands of gypsies this weekend.

Branded racists by a major anti-discrimination group, the mayors said they had no choice but to shock the government into action after suffering thefts and threats from troublemakers at similar rallies in previous years.

"They are citizens like me but they do not respect the same laws," said Jean Libotte, mayor of the northeastern village of Chambley where the gathering will be held. "They relieve themselves anywhere and everywhere, shamelessly breaking the law, but we have no way to stop them," he told Reuters.

Complaining that authorities failed to provide adequate facilities or policing, Libotte said about 40 mayors from the region have decided to vent their spleen by refusing to make regional arrangements for the Sept. 24 referendum on whether to cut the French presidential term to five years from seven.

Aiming to shorten the French term in line with those in most other Western democracies, the move represents a break with 127 years of tradition in France where the presidency is one of the most powerful offices in the world.

Accusing the mayors of attempting to blackmail the government, France's Movement Against Racism and For Friendship Between Peoples (MRAP) said they were portraying a whole group of people as delinquents. "It's a racist attitude -- if it had been an influx of tourists it would not have been the same," MRAP Secretary General Mouloud Aounit told Reuters. Libotte said the locals had no argument with the vast majority of Christians who have for the past five years attended the "Life and Light" gathering for baptisms and weddings in dandelion-filled meadows around an abandoned air base.

But Libotte said the several hundred residents could no longer tolerate the car thefts, threats of violence and petty stealing by some of the nomadic travelers who arrived from across Europe in trailers and caravans.

"If we had been listened to, if the government had organized things differently, then we would not be in this extreme situation," he said.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Religious groups criticize French sect proposal

Religion News Service (10.08.2000) / HRWF International Secretariat (11.08.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Three international religious organizations -- Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Advocates International and the World Evangelical Fellowship -- have told a United Nations panel in Geneva that a French legislative proposal to regulate religious sects is a threat to religious liberty.

"Without the freedom to speak and the related freedom to hear ideas there can be no true freedom of belief as protected under international law," a WEF spokeswoman told a UNESCO subcommission earlier this month. "The bill threatens to undermine these rights and to set an unsuitable precedent in the region."

In June, the French National Assembly passed a bill declaring "mental manipulation" a criminal offense, and authorizing courts to disband groups identified as sects. A report released in February by the group that proposed the bill, the Interministerial Mission for the Fight Against Sects, included Scientology and the Unification Church among some 200 groups labeled as sects.

The bill "paves the way for serious abuses of freedom," the WEF spokeswoman said, and has language so vague it "appears to seriously infringe upon the freedom of speech, including speech intended to persuade another person to a particular point of view, whether philosophical, political or religious."

WEF said criminal activity -- "religious, political or otherwise" -- should be prosecuted, but insisted the French government give minority religious groups the same legal protection afforded majority religions.

"We are not advocating protection for groups that cloak illegal activities under the guise of religious freedom," she said. "Time-tested legal methods have protected society from criminal elements in the past and safeguarded minorities that may not be popular but are otherwise law-abiding. These are the tools that should be resorted to rather than blacklisting groups or conducting extra-judicial investigations."

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Scientology Papers Inquiry Begins

by Pierre-Antoine Souchard

Associated Press (28.07.2000)/HRWF International Secretariat (02.08.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Prosecutors opened an investigation Friday into the disappearance of hundreds of documents that were to be used as evidence in a case against Church of Scientology members, judicial officials said.

Authorities were expected in the coming days to name a special magistrate to carry out the investigation, the officials said, speaking on the customary condition of anonymity.

The dossiers, which disappeared in 1998 from the Justice Ministry, were part of a case opened in 1990 against 16 regional Scientology leaders for alleged fraud, illegal practice of medicine and premeditated violence.

The case stemmed from a complaint by a former Scientologist, Juan Esteban Cordero, who accused the Church of Scientology of "progressive mental conditioning" that led him to spend more than \$177,000 on Scientology-related courses.

In June, the ministry said it had asked the judicial watchdog organization to investigate Judge Marie-Paule Moracchini, who was handling the Scientology case when certain records were lost and others destroyed. She risks possible disciplinary sanctions.

Justice Minister Elisabeth Guigou has said she believed fraud was involved in the dossiers' disappearance.

The Church of Scientology's French headquarters could not be reached for comment late Friday.

France has long had a contentious relationship with the Los Angeles-based Church of Scientology, which is seeking recognition as a legitimate religion in Europe. In France, the Church of Scientology figures on a list of 173 groups that should be tracked to prevent cult activities.

A Paris court decided in September to go ahead with the case against the Scientologists despite the loss of the documents.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

France's Anti-Sect Bill could hinder Religious Freedom

Religious Minorities Can be Accused of 'Mental Manipulation'

by Willy Fautre

Worthy News (20.07.2000)/ HRWF (28.07.2000) Website <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The French National Assembly has adopted Europe's toughest anti-cult legislation, which would create a controversial new crime of "mental manipulation" punishable by a maximum fine of \$75,000 and five years imprisonment. Christian leaders are concerned about the bill's possible consequences.

"Without understanding the risks, it is dangerous to create a crime of mental manipulation -- something that sooner or later will be assimilated with a crime of opinion," said Stephan Lauzet, general secretary of the Evangelical Alliance.

"The situation is sufficiently worrying that we should remain vigilant."

The new anti-cult bill dated May 30 and unveiled on June 6 was authored by Member of Parliament Catherine Picard and signed by all French Socialist members of the National Assembly. It went through the Law Commission on June 21 and was voted on the next day in the National Assembly. It must now go back to the Senate for approval of the latest amendments. The Senate approved a less stringent bill last December.

The bill, which contains 11 articles, represents the latest effort to pass repressive legislation against minority religions.

In 1996, the French government published a list of 173 "dangerous sects" that included an evangelical church with connections with Baptists in the United States, as well as Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientologists.

Article 1 of the Assembly bill provides for the dissolution of a corporation or association whose activities "have the goal or effect to create or to exploit the state of mental or physical dependence of people who are participating in its activities" and which infringe on "human rights and fundamental liberties," when this association, or its managers (or de facto managers) have been convicted "several times" for offenses such as fraud, illegal practice of medicine, and several other criminal offenses.

Article 6 bans sects from advertising and prohibits them from opening missions or looking for new members within a perimeter of 200 meters from a hospital, a retirement home, a public or private institution of prevention, curing or caring, or any school for two to 18-year-old students. Violation can bring a sentence of two years imprisonment and a \$30,000 fine.

Article 8 punishes any promotion or propaganda by an association or group falling under Article 1 "intended for young people" (age not defined) under penalty of a \$7,500 fine, applicable to both individuals and associations.

Article 9 establishes the new crime of "mental manipulation." Mental manipulation is defined as any activity or activities "with the goal or the effect to create or to exploit a state of psychological or physical dependence of people who are participating in the group's activities, to exercise on one of these people repeated and serious pressure and to use patent techniques to change the person's judgement in order to lead this person, against his or her will or not, to an act or an abstention which is heavily prejudicial to him/her." The penalty is three years of imprisonment and a fine of \$40,000.

If the victim is considered particularly weak due to his or her age, illness, etc., the penalty is five years imprisonment and a \$75,000 fine.

This bill has given rise to considerable concern not only among so-called "sects" but also among the religious establishment, which fears the reawakening of anti-Catholic forces and a new wave of religious intolerance.

In its June 23 editorial, the French daily newspaper "Le Figaro" wondered if the Catholic Church would not be targeted by the anti-cult law in the future: "A young girl who has chosen to live outside of the world, who has given up her belongings, left her clothes, cut her hair, who obeys without a murmur to anything, works hard without any salary and gets up several times a night to recite prayers learned by heart may be considered one day, by a judge, as the victim of 'mental manipulation.' Nevertheless, that is the way Carmelites live."

Pope John Paul II, formally accepting the credentials of the new French ambassador to the Holy See, Alain Dejammet, on June 10, devoted a part of his speech to religious liberty: "To discriminate against religious beliefs, or to discredit one or another form of religious practice, is a form of exclusion contrary to the respect of fundamental human values and will eventually destabilize society, where a certain pluralism of thought and action should exist, as well as benevolent and brotherly attitude. This will necessarily create a climate of tension, intolerance, opposition and suspicion, not conducive to social peace."

Father Jean Vernet, the episcopate's delegate on the cult issue, said in an interview with the daily Catholic paper "La Croix" on June 22, "How can one make, with no mistake, the difference between spiritual guidance and mental manipulation? My fear is that the fight against cults, although necessary, will become, for some people, the vector of a new fight against religion."

Reverend Jean-Arnold de Clermont, president of the French Protestant Federation, said in the June 22 "La Croix," "Where is the limit between the persuasive speech, the passionate sermon and mental manipulation? In fact, all the religious movements must feel

threatened by the anti-cult fight. I am still waiting for an accurate definition of mental manipulation. Is it possible that one day I will be suspected too?"

The Protestant weekly magazine "Reforme" devoted a full issue to cults and warned against "aberrations" of public opinion and political powers.

Aaron Rhodes, the chairman of the International Helsinki Federation, told Compass, "For several years, we have been one of the rare European human rights organizations to warn France about the dangerous deviations of its anti-cults policy, the introduction of measures and laws of exception."

From July 1 to December 31, 2000, France will be chairing the European Union.

Some observers fear that it will use its position to promote anti-cult policy.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

French forget lesson of Bastille Day

USA Today (14.07.2000)/HRWF International Secretariat (19.07.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The blacklisting of "cults" originated in a 1996 parliamentary commission report headed by French legislator Jacques Guyard. While part of the impetus for the legislation was the tragic murder- suicide of members of the Solar Temple movement in France and Switzerland, it also encompasses such familiar

religious groups as Jehovah's Witnesses, Southern Baptists (presidential candidate Al Gore's own faith), as well as Satmar Hasidic Jews.

What a deeply moving experience it was for me as a woman in my 20s to find myself wandering around Paris one gray, drizzly July 14 -- Bastille Day.

The city sparkled on this national holiday commemorating the storming of the notorious Bastille Prison in 1789, with a solemn military parade up the grand boulevard, Champs-Elysees, fireworks and dancing. While this holiday symbolizes liberty, democracy and struggle against all forms of tyranny, I wonder whether the French will find time this year to reflect on how fragile these ideals really are.

How deep and enduring must be the shadow cast by Bastille Prison now that the French National Assembly is considering legislation that would allow private citizens to sue practitioners of at least 172 religious groups, considered to engage in the "mental manipulation" of their purported victims.

The blacklisting of "cults" originated in a 1996 parliamentary commission report headed by French legislator Jacques Guyard. While part of the impetus for the legislation was the tragic murder- suicide of members of the Solar Temple movement in France and

Switzerland, it also encompasses such familiar religious groups as Jehovah's Witnesses, Southern Baptists (presidential candidate Al Gore's own faith), as well as Satmar Hasidic

Jews.

This proposal is just the latest threat to minority religions in France, which have included efforts to tax donations and challenging tax exemptions.

As an American of African descent, I am at times painfully aware of our own nation's struggles to live up to the ideals enshrined in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. Even so, we may still have a lesson or two to teach the French from our own history about the ways in which decent citizens can be prone to rationalize away the freedoms of others.

Sure, some proselytizers could win an Academy Award for sheer theatrical obnoxiousness. But isn't extending our democratic liberties to those whom we perceive as different from us the real point of religious, racial and other forms of tolerance in the first place?

I fear this move toward religious tyranny in France. In fact, I wouldn't even think of visiting Paris again before checking that ever- growing blacklist to see whether "my kind" would be welcome there.

Constance Hilliard is an associate professor of history at the University of North Texas in Denton and author of *Intellectual Traditions of Pre-Colonial Africa*.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

French "cults law" draws fire from religious groups

By Justin Torres

CNS (14.07.2000) / HRWF Internationa Secretariat (17.07.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Under the wording of a proposed French law that would allow religious groups defined as "cults" to be prosecuted and suppressed, groups such as the Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witness and the Southern Baptists, who count among its members the president and vice president of the United States, could find themselves subject to civil action for "mental manipulation" and creating "feelings of dependence."

The law, which has broad support within the French National Assembly and seeks to "paralyze the activities of cult organizations and render them harmless," has drawn fire from religious leaders such as Pope John Paul II and global human rights activists.

The law would allow French courts to dissolve any religious group that has been convicted of harming the "physical or psychical integrity of an individual, ... endangering

an individual, ... undermining the freedom of an individual, ... harming personality, ... jeopardizing minors, or ... damaging property."

The law would also make the group liable for civil penalties, restrict its right to advertise or proselytize, curtail the travel freedom of group leaders, and prohibit the groups from owning property, holding services or reincorporating themselves under another name.

Among the groups targeted by the law are 173 blacklisted organizations, including the Church of Scientology, the Unification Church, Seventh Day Adventists, Southern Baptists and fundamentalist Christians, and Catholic groups such as the Jesuits and Opus Dei.

The law is supported by the official French government agency that would make the determination of what groups are or are not a cult. That agency is the Inter-ministerial Mission for the Struggle Against Sects (Mission Interministeriale de Lutte Contre les Sects), chaired by Minister Alain Vivien.

Officials at the French Embassy in Washington declined to comment to CNSNews.com on this story, noting that the law has not yet passed the full Assembly.

According to Bruce Casino, president of the International Coalition for Religious Freedom, the legislation is aimed at small religious groups, but the scope of the language makes it applicable to almost any religion, no matter how well established.

"It would, by its terms, give enormous discretion to French prosecutors and civil litigants to go after religious organizations, political parties, trade unions and other groups that call for contributions or volunteer efforts from members," Casino said.

Casino, who has represented the Unification Church in several legal matters, was participating in a panel discussion in Washington Thursday organized by the Institute on Religion and Public Policy.

As an example, Casino cited the Protestant practice of tithing. Under the terms of the French "cults law," tithing could be considered damaging to property interests and hence make churches liable to criminal and civil prosecution.

John Graz, the Secretary General of the International Religious Liberty Association and a Seventh Day Adventist, said the law represented an attack against all religions, not just small ones, new ones, or cults.

"The real target of this law is religion in general," said Graz. "It's naive to think that only the listed groups are in danger."

The feeling that the law's vagueness makes it a danger to any religious organization has galvanized mainline churches in France to oppose it. Included in the opposition are Roman Catholic bishops, leaders of the largest church in France.

In fact, Pope John Paul II recently addressed the proposed French law in accepting the credentials of the French ambassador to the Vatican, saying that "religious liberty, in the full sense of the term, is the first human right ... To discriminate religious beliefs, or to discredit one or another form of religious practice, is a form of exclusion contrary to the respect of fundamental human values and will eventually destabilize society, where a certain pluralism of thought and action should exist."

Observers also maintain that the proposed law and denunciations of "cults" have created an oppressive and dangerous atmosphere in a nation that has historically been rife with religious intolerance, including attacks on Protestant communities during the Reformation and the outlawing of religious expression after the French Revolution.

Heber Jentsch, president of the International Church of Scientology, recounted how Scientologists have been arrested and interrogated throughout France, and businesses operated by Scientologists have been forced into bankruptcy by being "outed" in the local press.

"These are tactics better suited to Stalin's Russia," said Jentsch.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

"Proselytize, go to jail"

Proposed French law criminalizes Southern Baptists as 'dangerous sect'

by Julie Foster

World Net Daily (02.07.2000)/HRWF International Secretariat (05.07.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Europe's crackdown on what French lawmakers have deemed "dangerous sects" - including Southern Baptists - has captured the attention of Congress now that France's National Assembly is considering a law to imprison "proselytizers" for up to two years.

The bill aims to restrict the growth of 173 blacklisted faiths, including Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists and Unificationists. Also among the targeted groups is the Southern Baptist Convention, one of the largest denominations in the United States and the church affiliation of both President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore.

Should the bill become law, evangelism by the groups could be criminalized as an "exercise [in] serious and repeated pressure on a person in order to create or exploit a state of dependence." The socialist French government would be allowed to shut-down a religious group when two representatives are found guilty of at least one legal infraction, including "mental manipulation."

Morris H. Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, said he is concerned about the legislation.

"It is particularly disheartening that the selfless act of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ could be equated to the 'mental manipulation' of the public," he said in a statement released by the Baptist Press. "God does not desire to control the minds of men but to change their hearts."

Currently, the SBC's International Mission Board has 40 workers in France and has had an established missionary presence in the country since 1960.

"Overly aggressive evangelical preaching could be interpreted by some as mental manipulation," Rev. N.J. L'Heureux, moderator of the religious liberty panel of the National Council of Churches, told the Washington Times.

However, Dwayne Hastings, a spokesman for the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said the Bible commands believers to share their faith.

"The Bible is explicit in its command that we should seek to share the Gospel with everyone," he said. "Evangelism and witnessing are actions generated out of love and concern, not hostility or hatred. It is clearly not an exercise that should be regulated by the state."

French Justice Minister Elisabeth Guigou, who approves of the measure, said she has suggested lawmakers "pause" on final approval of the legislation to give human rights and church groups a chance to comment.

Last week, Guigou called the bill "a significant advance giving a democratic state the legal tool to efficiently fight groups abusing its core values."

However, she said the new criminal code -- drafted by members of the Socialist Party -- could conflict with the European Convention on Human Rights. The legislation must also be reconciled with a similar bill approved in the French Senate in December. It then would go to President Jacques Chirac for approval.

The Senate bill's title defines the intent of the legislation, stating it is "aimed at reinforcing the criminal repression of associations or groups to be regarded, because of their criminal activities, as troubling public order or being a major danger for human personality."

In his congressional testimony, general counsel for the Jehovah's Witnesses Philip Brumley described the treatment of the blacklisted religion in France, saying the discrimination began in 1985 with an "adverse ruling" in an inheritance case.

"The Conseil d'Etat refused to allow one of Jehovah's Witnesses to leave a portion of her estate to the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses in France because the court did not agree with our doctrinal rejection of blood transfusions and refusal to participate in military service," Brumley said.

Other, more widespread adverse treatment has been instituted against the church, as well.

"A direct result of the discriminatory treatment toward Jehovah's Witnesses in France is a 60 percent tax that has been levied on donations received by the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses in France," he added.

"To our knowledge, no other religion is being taxed 60 percent on personal contributions made in good faith to their church. Instead," Brumley continued, "other religions enjoy tax exemptions granted by the Conseil d'Etat. Not even most minority religions are taxed - in fact, we are only aware of one other case where personal donations to a religious association have been questioned."

State Department officials who have spoken to French lawmakers say many of them describe the legislation as advocacy work by a charismatic citizen named Jacques Guyard, who leads an anti-sect movement and was author of the government's sect list.

"This is something that we are going to have to watch closely," a senior State Department official told the Times. "In a worst-case scenario, it could turn out to be a nasty piece of legislation."

The French sect list, published in 1996, was followed by the establishment of a government agency called the Interministerial Mission to Battle Against Sects in 1998.

While France is the first nation to push for criminalization of certain religious activities, it is by no means alone in its quest to stop the growth of "sects." France, Germany, Austria and Belgium are reported to have set up commissions to list sects, which in Belgium includes even the YWCA.

The push in Western Europe to form "sect commissions" began after the 1994 and 1995 suicides and murders by Solar Temple members in Canada, Switzerland and France.

Craig Jensen, chairman and chief executive officer of Executive Software, told the House committee of his experiences in Germany.

"Purchase of my company's software products is restricted in Germany by government edict, and attempts are being made to forbid it entirely," he told the committee. "This is a recent development, as my products have sold well in Germany for over a decade. What prompted the embargo is the announcement that Microsoft Corporation's new Windows 2000 computer operating system includes a component developed by my company."

This fact is being used to justify calling for a full-scale German government prohibition on the sale of Windows 2000 in Germany."

"The official reason given is that my company, Executive Software, is headed by an 'admitted' member of the Church of Scientology -- me," he explained, noting he has been a member of the organization for 25 years.

But Germany insists it upholds religious freedom as a "fundamental right," according to German Ambassador Jürgen Chrobog.

"As in the United States, freedom of worship and conscience is a fundamental right in Germany," Chrobog said. "Our constitution, the Basic Law, stipulates that 'Freedom of faith and conscience as well as freedom of creed, religious or ideological, are inviolable,' and, further, that 'the undisturbed practice of religion shall be guaranteed.' These rights are fully respected by the German government."

"The state is constitutionally obliged to maintain a position of neutrality," he added.

Problems for Scientologists came to a head when Germany decided the group is not a religion and so is not entitled to protection or tax-exempt status.

"With evidence that a group's activities are profit-oriented, the state may reject a group's application for non-profit status," Chrobog remarked. "It is for this reason that Scientology has been declined tax-exempt status in Germany."

"The Federal Labor Court ruled in 1995 that Scientology was not a religious congregation, but a commercial enterprise," he continued. "The court quoted one of L. Ron Hubbard's instructions to 'make money, make more money -- make other people produce so as to make money' and concluded that Scientology purports to be a 'church' merely as a cover to pursue its economic interests. Therefore, Germany does not consider the Scientology organization a religion. It is not alone in this assessment; Belgium, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain, Israel and Mexico, to name but a few, share this view."

"It isn't surprising, given the climate of increased repression and persecution of Christians in many countries around the world," said the Southern Baptist Convention's Hastings. "It is inappropriate for any government agency or faith community to attempt to intimidate or silence any other entity in the public or private expression of their faith."

"It would behoove Southern Baptists to be aware of this proposed legislation and make their concerns known to the U.S. State Department," he added.

"The mere fact that such a proposal is being seriously considered in France should call us to reflect upon the preciousness of the liberties guaranteed to us under the U.S. Constitution," concluded Hastings. "The cost of maintaining these freedoms remains unflinching vigilance to threats at home and overseas."

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Sweeping new laws on sects 'could be abused'

by Samantha King

South China Morning Post (29.06.2000) / HRWF (30.06.2000) - Website <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email info@hrwf.net - The measures, approved unanimously by Parliament, have raised fears among civil rights organisations and other groups, which believe they could be used to attack them.

The Government's aim is to "paralyse the activity of organisations of a sect nature so that they are no longer able to cause harm". But the implementation of the law is open to abuse, opponents say.

French courts had long complained that existing laws were insufficient to control the growing phenomenon of sects. Despite new measures introduced in 1996 and 1998, only 48 out of 280 cases brought ended in a conviction. A lack of evidence and fear on the part of the victim were the main reasons for the low conviction rate.

Now the new crime of "mental manipulation" is being introduced. The wording goes further than the current "abuse of a vulnerable person", which was difficult to apply to those other than children or the elderly. The charge carries a maximum term of three years behind bars or a fine of 300,000 francs (HK\$334,000).

The law also allows the sect itself, rather than just its leaders, to be put on trial, and it could be dissolved by the courts if it is found guilty more than once. Any sect found to be directing marketing towards the young stands to be penalised, and local authorities will have the right to refuse planning permission to sects that have fallen foul of the law. The move has provoked a strong reaction, mainly because it is difficult to define what is a "sect" and what is a church or an association.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

French court to rule on \$40 million tax bill

on Jehovah's Witnesses

Watch Tower Public Affairs (29.06.2000) / HRWF (30.06.2000) - Website <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email info@hrwf.net - A French regional court will rule Tuesday on whether donations given by Jehovah's Witnesses to their religion can be taxed. The ruling could have widespread implications for all religions and nonprofit organizations in France.

A news conference on the decision will be held Tuesday, July 4, 2000, 3:30 p.m. at 11 Rue de Seine, 92100 Boulogne-Billancourt (near Porte de St-Cloud). Phone: (33) 1-46-94-86-01.

Background

In the case of Jehovah's Witnesses, the French tax administration in an unprecedented move levied a punitive 60 percent tax on donations, along with a 48 percent penalty. The tax bill, issued in 1998 and covering 1993 through 1996, amounts to more than \$40 million.

Paying the bill would require that every penny donated for the next four years to support the worship of Jehovah's Witnesses be diverted to pay taxes. Jehovah's Witnesses are concerned that if the third-largest Christian religion in France can be taxed virtually out of existence, then religious freedom in France is in serious jeopardy.

The decision will be issued by the Tribunal de Grande Instance of Nanterre (Paris region). The case resulted after Jehovah's Witnesses sued the regional tax authorities because the Witnesses' claim for exemption was denied. The tax authorities argue that the donations of Jehovah's Witnesses to their religion are subject to the same "gift tax" that is levied against the transfer of an estate between individuals. However, donations to religious organizations and not-for-profits are exempt from taxes according to French law.

On June 23, 2000, France's highest administrative court, the Council of State, ruled that Jehovah's Witnesses qualify as a religion under French law. The case involved exempting Jehovah's Witnesses from property taxes levied against the one thousand houses of worship owned by this Christian religion, which has been present in France for more than one hundred years.

Climate in France toward religious minorities

On June 22, 2000, the French National Assembly passed a bill criticized by international human rights advocates as repressive toward minority religions. The bill would make it a crime to "mentally manipulate" others. Human rights advocates fear that the bill could be applied against evangelizing one's religious faith to another and would therefore restrict freedom of religion, conscience and speech.

Contact: Judah B. Schroeder or James N. Pellechia (New York), telephone: (718) 560-5600

or Jean-Claude Pons (Paris), (33) 2-32-25-55-5.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

"Scientology Case Judge Faces Probe"

Associated Press (29.06.2000)/HRWF International Secretariat (05.07.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The organization that acts as a watchdog over French judges will investigate the handling of an inquiry into members of the Church of Scientology after evidence disappeared, the Justice Ministry said Thursday.

The announcement came a week after Justice Minister Elisabeth Guigou said she believed fraud was involved in the disappearance of the dossiers. Her comments were based on a report by the General Inspection of Judicial Services.

Hundreds of documents disappeared in October 1998 in a case that had been opened in 1983 against 16 members of the Church of Scientology suspected of "fraud and illegally practicing medicine."

The Justice Ministry said Thursday that it has asked the Superior Council of the Magistracy to investigate Judge Marie-Paule Moracchini, who has been handling the case. She risks possible disciplinary sanctions.

A Paris court decided in September to go ahead with the case against the Scientologists despite the disappearance of the documents.

The case stems from a complaint by a former Scientologist, Juan Esteban Cordero. He accused the Church of Scientology of "progressive mental conditioning" that led him to spend more than \$177,000 on various Scientology-related courses.

The Church of Scientology contends that the failure to "reconstitute the missing part (evidence) is imputable alone to public servants of the justice system."

In France, Scientology is registered on a list of 173 groups to be tracked to prevent cult activity.

The Los Angeles-based Church of Scientology claims 8 million members worldwide.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

French proposal targets 'proselytizing

by Larry Witham

Washington Times (28.06.2000)/ HRWF (29.06.2000) - Website <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email info@hrwf.net - Religious liberty advocates on Capitol Hill are concerned about a proposed French law to imprison religious "proselytizers" for up to two years for "mental manipulation" of the public.

The bill aims to limit the spread of what French officials have called 173 "dangerous sects" in France. These include Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists and Unificationists, among others, but also well-known evangelistic denominations such as the Baptists.

The proposed crime, which critics say could cover many religious, advertising and interest groups, is to "exercise serious and repeated pressure on a person in order to create or exploit a state of dependence." The bill would allow the French government to shut down a religious group when two representatives are found guilty of at least one legal infraction.

The legislation must be reconciled with a less stringent bill approved in the French Senate in December. It then would go to President Jacques Chirac for approval.

Once approved, French law could proscribe incidents of evangelism even by the religious faith of President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, who are both Southern Baptists.

"This is something that we are going to have to watch closely," a senior State Department official said yesterday. "In a worst-case scenario, it could turn out to be a nasty piece of legislation."

French Justice Minister Elisabeth Guigou last week called the bill "a significant advance giving a democratic state the legal tool to efficiently fight groups abusing its core values."

However, she said, the new criminal code could conflict with the European Convention on Human Rights, and she recommended a "pause" before the French Senate votes so that human rights and church groups can comment.

T. Jeremy Gunn, who as a member of the U.S. Institute of Peace had visited France on religious liberty matters, said several French officials resorted to "ad hominem" attacks on American officials by charging they belonged to the "sects" in question.

State Department officials who have spoken to French lawmakers say that many of them describe the legislation — drafted by members of the Socialist Party — as advocacy work by a charismatic citizen named Jacques Guyard. Mr. Guyard leads an anti-sect movement and was author of the government's sect list.

"There is a hope [among some French officials] that this will rise above personality," the State Department official said.

"Overly aggressive evangelical preaching could be interpreted by some as mental manipulation," the Rev. N.J. L'Heureux, moderator of the religious liberty panel of the National Council of Churches, said in an interview.

Mr. L'Heureux, a Methodist, was one of eight witnesses who testified before the House Committee on International Relations June 14 regarding the French law and other efforts in Western Europe to curtail new, minority religious denominations.

The push in Western Europe to form "sect commissions" and legislate against sects began after the 1994 and 1995 suicides and murders by Solar Temple members in Canada, Switzerland and France.

Scholars say Western Europe is the most secular part of the world and many young people are looking at unconventional approaches to find a deeper meaning to life. For example, in traditionally Catholic France only 8 percent of the population attends Catholic services, according to a Catholic bishop cited in the State Department report.

France, Germany, Austria and Belgium set up commissions to list sects, which in Belgium include even the YWCA. But France is the first to make so-called religious "mind control" a crime.

The French sect list, published in 1996, was followed by the establishment in 1998 of a government agency called the Interministerial Mission to Battle Against Sects. "The fact that it is called a 'battle against' assigns a prejudice," the State Department official said.

Testimony before the House committee suggested the young democracies of Russia and Eastern Europe are working out the relationship between majority and minority religions and might be influenced by the proposed French law.

The European Union so far has rejected the rush to blacklist small religions. France's former foreign minister, M. Alain Vivien, is chairman of the French anti-sect commission. According to the House testimony, he was in Germany, Russia and Poland this month promoting anti-sect work.

In Rome, Pope John Paul II welcomed France's new ambassador to the Vatican on June 14 by saying "religious liberty, in the full sense of the term, is the first human right." He urged the French news media "to be vigilant and to treat fairly and objectively the different religious denominations."

Sensational coverage of the French sect list had stirred public fears and some harassment, the State Department's 1999 report on religious liberty said.

In response to the proposed law, Michel Bertrand, president of the council of Protestant Churches, said, "We will not move forward . . . by casting suspicion on all forms of religious faith."

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Highest administrative court rules that Jehovah's Witnesses are a religion

Watch Tower (23.06.2000)/ HRWF (26.06.2000) Website <http://hrwf.net> - Email info@hrwf.net - France's highest administrative court, the Council of State, ruled today that Jehovah's Witnesses qualify as a religion under French law. The case involved

exempting Jehovah's Witnesses from property taxes levied against their houses of worship.

"France's equivalent of a supreme court has now clearly stated for the first time that Jehovah's Witnesses are a recognized religion that offers no threat to public order," said Jean-Claude Pons, spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses in France. "We believe this will hinder any future attempts to classify our houses of worship as taxable. It also strengthens the recognition by the government that Jehovah's Witnesses are a legitimate religious group."

In France as in the United States recognition of a religion is given through tax exemptions rather than through a registration process. Jehovah's Witnesses have been present in France for more than 100 years.

The Council of State ruled that the two local associations of Jehovah's Witnesses of the cities of Riom and Clamecy are religious in nature according to the criteria established under French law for religious organizations, which is more restrictive than the legislation for other non-profit organizations. The Council of State determined that the activities of the associations of Jehovah's Witnesses are solely religious and that they do not breach public policy or public order.

Today's ruling also upholds the 921 favorable decisions obtained since 1997 before 25 local administrative courts on the property tax issue for houses of worship as well as the 65 favorable decisions from four appeals courts in 1999 and 2000.

The Administrative Court of Appeal of Lyon had ruled in favor of the two associations of Jehovah's Witnesses in October 6, 1999, and those two decisions were appealed by France's Ministry of Finance. Today's decision denied the Ministry's appeal.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Lawyer calls for replacement of judge in French Scientology case

Agence France Presse (23.06.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (26.06.2000)
Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - A lawyer for plaintiffs in a long-running case involving the Church of Scientology in France said Friday he had applied to have the investigating magistrate in the affair replaced.

Olivier Morice pointed to the lack of action in the case, which was taken on by investigating magistrate Marie-Paule Moracchini in 1993.

The case groups together a number of different complaints, covering charges of fraud and illegal exercise of medicine, some of which date back as far as 1989.

On Thursday, Justice Minister Elizabeth Guigou announced she was opening an inquiry into the October 1998 disappearance of one and a half volumes of the case's 10-volume dossier.

In the row that followed the news of the missing files, prosecutors in the case tried to have Moracchini taken off the case, while lawyers for Scientology tried to have the case thrown out. Judges denied both applications in a ruling last September.

In January, the Paris courts condemned the state to pay 20,000 French francs (2,850 dollars, 3,050 euros) in damages to two plaintiffs in the case over the disappearance of the documents.

President of the court Marie-Claude Domb said the error could not be blamed on Moracchini, but described the incident as an "inexcusable mistake" that was down to the failure to keep properly recorded copies.

The affair comes against the background of a controversial anti-cult bill that is going through the French parliament, which has been fiercely attacked by human rights groups and religious leaders.

The Church of Scientology spokesman in France Jean Dupuis has condemned the bill as a "fascist exercise worthy of a totalitarian state."

Scientology is not recognised as a religion in France but classified as a cult. It believes it is a principal target of the planned legislation.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

France adopts tough anti-sect law

by Jon Henley

The Guardian (22.06.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (26.06.2000) Website <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email info@hrwf.net - The French National Assembly adopted Europe's toughest anti-sect legislation Thursday, creating a controversial new crime of "mental manipulation" punishable by a maximum fine of \$75,000 and five years

imprisonment.

The move was applauded by Alain Vivien, head of a government committee that has identified 173 dangerous quasi-religious groups in France, but was denounced by both the Church of Scientology and the Unification Church as fascist, anti-democratic and in breach of basic human rights laws.

Current French law - described as "inadequate to deal with increasingly sophisticated and manipulative groups" by Catherine Picard, one of the legislators who proposed the bill - allows sect activities to be prosecuted for traditional crimes such as incitement to murder, sexual assault, fraud and the abuse of vulnerable individuals.

The new law allows judges to order the dissolution of any sect whose members are convicted of a criminal offense. It also bans sects from advertising and prohibits them from opening missions or touting for new members near schools, hospitals or retirement homes.

But the law's key weapon is the new crime of "mental manipulation," defined as "exercising, within a group whose activities are aimed at creating or exploiting psychological dependence, heavy and repeated pressure on a person, or using techniques likely to alter his judgment, so as to induce him to behave in a way prejudicial to his interests."

A Justice Ministry spokeswoman said the legal definition had been prepared carefully to ensure that it could not be applied to legitimate churches.

But some Catholic leaders have expressed reservations about the law, saying that may lead to "over-zealousness and judicial excess" as well as discrimination against genuine religions.

"This is a steep and slippery slope for democracy," said Daniele Gounord, a spokeswoman for Scientology, which is not recognized as a religion in France. "In

Western Europe, the only regime so far to pass a law on mental manipulation was the fascist government of Mussolini in an attempt to get rid of the communists."

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Assembly passes extreme anti-cult law, making brainwashing a crime

Cesnur (22.06.2000)/ HRWF (23.06.2000) Email info@hrwf.net - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - A new, and really extreme, anti-cult draft law dated 30th May 2000 and unveiled on June 6, authored by MP Ms Catherine Picard and signed by all French Socialist Members of the National Assembly, was approved on June 22 in the National Assembly and now awaits approval by the Senate to become effective. The Socialist Party is the party of France's Prime Minister.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Pope John Paul II calls for religious liberty in France

Cesnur (22.06.2000)/ HRWF (23.06.2000) Email info@hrwf.net - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Within the context of the heated debate on the French anti-cult law making brainwashing a crime, it is significant that Pope John Paul II, formally accepting the credentials of the new French Ambassador to the Holy See, Mr. Alain Dejammet, on June 10, 2000, devoted a whole part of his speech to religious liberty, an unusual theme when receiving ambassadors of Western democratic countries.

The Pope reminded the ambassador that "religious liberty, in the full sense of the term, is the first human right. This means a liberty which is not reduced to the private sphere only". " To discriminate religious beliefs, or to discredit one or another form of religious practice", the Pope said, "is a form of exclusion contrary to the respect of fundamental human values and will eventually destabilise society, where a certain pluralism of thought and action should exist, as well as a benevolent and brotherly attitude. This will necessarily create a climate of tension, intolerance, opposition and suspicion, not conducive to social peace".

The Pope also called "the media to be vigilant and to treat fairly and objectively the different religious denominations (in French, "confessions"). Although the Pope may have had in mind primarily religious liberty for Catholic schools and organizations (mentioned in another part of the speech), and mentioned specially "values shared by an important number of persons", it is significant that he devoted a specific paragraph to the issue in an official diplomatic event involving France, and that he mentioned "one or another form of religious practice" and the "different religious denominations" or "confessions" (French authorities would of course comment that "cults" or "sects" are not "confessions", a word game they have continued to play in order to discriminate against the former).

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

The Interministerial Mission to Battle Against Cults (MILS) Accuses its
Detractors of Collaborating with Scientology
The International Helsinki Federation is especially targeted

HRWF (21.06.2000) - website: <http://hrwf.net> - Email info@hrwf.net - In a letter dated June 15 addressed to Mr Alain Vivien, president of the French Interministerial Mission to Combat Against Cults, Aaron Rhodes, the director of the *Helsinki Federation*, expressed his anger at statements made by Mr Vivien in *Le Figaro* of June 13, 2000, that the *Helsinki Federation* was infiltrated by transnational sects, and in particular by Scientology.

"I am embarrassed, for you and for your French fellow citizens, that you have resorted to methods of denunciation and insinuation, methods which remind us of those we sometimes experience at the hands of totalitarian and retrograde regimes, simply for reminding them of their obligations to respect international law norms regarding human rights", stated Aaron Rhodes in his letter.

At the root of this accusation was the publication of a booklet on religious freedom by the *Moscow Helsinki Group*, member of the *International Helsinki Federation*. The Church of Scientology had contributed to this booklet, and their contribution was acknowledged "in black and white" inside the publication, as even Alain Vivien admitted in his interview with *Le Figaro*.

"The Moscow Group had allegedly been advised to refuse this involvement", declared Aaron Rhodes in his letter, "(...) but the *Moscow Helsinki Group*, the most well-established and respected human rights organization, which brought to birth the human rights movement throughout Europe, a group whose members either died or were tortured in the Soviet gulags for their opinions and beliefs, did not fall into the hands of the Scientologists it spoke on behalf of. Unfortunately, its members are not strangers to accusations such as yours, which have too often in the past been intended to undermine their credibility".

"Excluding the *Moscow Helsinki Group* is therefore not at all on the agenda", replied Aaron Rhodes to a question from *Human Rights without Frontiers*. "The *International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights* is a federation composed of 39 independent and autonomous organizations whose mandate is to promote the observance of the Helsinki agreements".

The conflict between the ministerial Mission and the IHF

The conflict between the governmental Mission and the IHF began in autumn 1998 at the OSCE Conference in Vienna. On that occasion, the IHF jointly accused France and Russia for not respecting their international obligations towards religious freedom, in particular where members of non-traditional religions, labeled "sects" by the two countries, were concerned. Other human rights organizations have joined the

International Helsinki Federation in expressing the same criticisms. Going with the flow of this full-frontal and unexpected attack, Mr Denis Barthelemy, Chief of Staff for the governmental Mission and spokesman for the French delegation, accused them all indiscriminately of being "remote-controlled" by Scientology, a comment immediately picked up and relayed by the French press agency, *Agence France Presse*.

In March 1999 at the OSCE conference in Vienna, the *International Helsinki Federation* again renewed its attack on the French anti-sect policy, noting in its report "an increase of intolerance and discrimination against 'new religions' since 1996, with the publication of a list of 172 sects alleged to be dangerous". In a communique dated of March 18, 1999, *Agence France Presse* wrote: "The report implicitly accuses the French ministerial mission of bias, noting that it is directed by Alain Vivien, president of an anti-sect movement. (...) From the International Helsinki Federation's point of view, a virtual persecution has sprung up against these sects".

Better prepared this time, the Mission's delegation counterattacked, accusing its *Federation* again of being linked to Scientology and then persuading the *French Helsinki Committee*, without the IHF's knowledge, to issue a declaration completely disassociating itself from the position taken by the Federation with regard to the French anti-sect politics. However, the French Committee has not been excluded from the *International Helsinki Federation*. Some human rights observers note however the presence of many, especially right-wing, politicians in the committee, from its president through to the honorary members and wonder just how independent they really are in relation to domestic political 'games'.

The IHF's 2000 report, published at the beginning of this month, made a critical analysis of specific anti-sect measures taken in 1999, raising some cases of discrimination with regard to Islam and denouncing the politics behind the fiscal harassment led against Jehovah's Witnesses. "Our last annual report makes no mention of Scientology, but Alain Vivien persists in wanting to discredit our organization and it is ironic that some members of our French Committee are themselves feeling as if they are under suspicion for working in a 'suspect' organization, and are wondering about their future within that organization", Aaron Rhodes told *Human Rights Without Frontiers*. "We are one of the rare European human rights organizations that warns France about the trends of its anti-cults politics, the introduction of measures and laws of exception against 'cults' and the deterioration of freedom of conscience and religion in this country, but the French authorities are unable to take even constructive criticism".

An American delegation controlled by Scientology?

In April 1999, an American delegation composed of three people and mandated by the U.S. Department of State's office for religious freedom visited the Austrian, German, French and Belgian authorities to inquire about the situation of non-traditional religions in their countries.

In Paris, the governmental Mission's president cancelled the meeting arranged by the American embassy because, according to him, one of the members of the delegation was a Scientologist. However, Dr David Little, a Harvard University professor, Dr Jeremy T. Gunn, Executive Fellow of the U.S. Institute of Peace, and Karen Lord, religious freedom adviser to the Helsinki Commission of Congress, had never been members of Scientology. The individual Mr Vivien took issue with was Karen Lord, a member of an evangelical church, refusing either to meet her or to answer her questions. Several days later, Alain Vivien persisted in stating nevertheless during a speech that one member of the American delegation was a Scientologist.

Interviewed by *Human Rights Without Frontiers*, Dr Jeremy T. Gunn stated in conclusion " The most important issue is not that Vivien made a false statement that was designed to discredit Ms Lord or the efforts of the United States to promote religious freedom. The important issue is that his way of responding to questions about discrimination against certain groups exemplifies the tactic of much of the anti-cult campaign: the use of uninformed, provocative and false allegations. If the president of MILS is willing to broadcast such false allegations about a member of an official U.S. delegation, one can well imagine what he might do to members of small religious and belief groups in France.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

France Restricts Religious Freedom Again

Religion Today (15.06.2000) / HRWF International Secretariat (16.06.2000) - Website: www.hrwf.net - Email: info@hotmail.com - France is restricting religious freedom. The national Senate approved legislation allowing private citizens to take legal action against "marginal religious groups" that practice "mental manipulation," according to The Guardian, a British publication. The law is aimed primarily at Scientologists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other fringe religions, but could include some evangelical Protestants, observers said.

The government blacklisted 700 religious groups it identified as "sects" and "cults" in 1997, causing an outcry from religious rights advocates. Among the groups listed was the Nimes Theological Institute, an evangelical school, according to news reports.

President Jacques Chirac rebuffed President Clinton's call for tolerance, and criticized the U.S. Congress for meddling when it introduced laws to protect religious freedom internationally. "No one can forbid us to take action against sects in the interest of human rights," said Alain Vivien, chairman of the French ministerial mission to combat the influence of cults.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

France and Germany meet on Scientology

Reuters (07.06.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (19.06.2000) - Website: www.hrwf.net - Email: info@hrwf.net - Germany and France intend to cooperate on an international level in the surveillance of the Scientology Organization. "A resolution of the sect phenomenon must be found on a European level," said France's national sect commissioner, Alain Vivien on Wednesday in connection with the federal-state conference on "So-called Sects and Psychogroups" in Hamburg, in which Vivien also took part. France issued invitation for a European conference in the beginning of 2001 so that future operations can be discussed. Most countries reacted to Scientology like Germany and France, said Vivien, though with hesitation.

According to estimates from the Federal Interior Ministry, Scientology has up to 6,000 members in Germany. The organization, founded in the USA in 1954, has been active

in Germany since 1970. It has been under surveillance by Constitutional Security since 1997 because, as they say, Scientology presents "evidence of endeavors against liberal

democratic basic order."

Hamburg's Interior Senator Hartmut Wrocklage (SPD) said, "The battle against Scientology can only be won internationally." Vivien said that Scientology was an international matter, because, not least of all, its goal was worldwide domination. He warned that Scientology could "infiltrate" international organizations like the United Nations (UNO). For instance, he said, there was a non-governmental organization, "Friends of the United Nations," which was officially recognized by the UNO whose charter said it was involved with developing countries. But the fact of the matter was that it was issuing statements about the "alleged non-maintenance of religious freedom in France."

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Socialist Party Proposes Extreme Anti-Cult Law, Making Brainwashing a Crime

Cesnur (07.06.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (13.06.2000) Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email info@hrwf.net - A new, and really extreme, anti-cult draft law dated 30th May 2000 and unveiled on June 6, authored by MP Ms Catherine Picard and signed by all French Socialist Members of the National Assembly, will go before the Law Commission on the 21st June and, provided it is approved there, may be voted the next day in the National Assembly. The Socialist Party is the party of France's Prime Minister.

The draft law contains 11 articles derived in part from several former proposals, including the one by Senator About.

The main features of the draft law are as follows:

1. Article 1 provides for the dissolution of a corporation or association whose activities "have the goal or effect to create or to exploit the state of mental or physical dependence of people who are participating in its activities" and which infringe "human rights and fundamental liberties", when this association, or its managers (or de facto managers) have been convicted "several times" (how many times is not specified) for offenses such as fraud, illegal practice of medicine, and several other criminal offenses. The introduction makes it clear that this combination of mind control, infringement of "human rights", and "several" criminal convictions is the definition of a "sect" or "cult" now regarded as legally workable. The procedure of dissolution is judicial and can be introduced in front of a civil court by the local prosecutor or by any person which has an interest in the matter (including, apparently, anti-cultists).

2. Articles 2 to 5 create a corporate criminal liability for corporations or associations falling under Article 1 in cases where only personal liability existed.

3. Article 6 is punishing any person which participates to the reconstitution of a corporation or association which has been dissolved with 3 year prison term and a Francs 300,000 fine. Article 7 calls for the renewed dissolution of an association which has been refounded after a first dissolution.

4. Article 8 forbids the set up of any offices, seat, church, advertisement or advertising activity by sects (i.e. the associations and groups defined as per Article 1) in the perimeter of 100 m from a hospital, a retirement house, a public or private institution of prevention, curing or caring, or any school from 2 to 18 year old students. If this interdiction is violated, the sentence is 2 years of imprisonment and a Francs 200,000 fine and the corporation or association can be condemned itself.

5. Article 9 is punishing any promotion or propaganda done by an association or group falling under Article 1 "intended for young people" (age not defined) under penalty of a Franc 50,000 fine, applicable to both individuals and associations.

6. Article 10 is establishing the new crime of mental manipulation "Mental manipulation" (in fact "brainwashing", although this term is not used) is defined as any activity or activities "with the goal or the effect to create or to exploit the state of mental or physical dependence of people who are participating in the group's activities and to infringe human rights and fundamental liberties; to exert repeated pressures in order to create or exploit this state of dependence and to drive the person, against its will or not, to an act or an abstention which is heavily prejudicial to her". The penalty is 2 years of imprisonment and a fine of Francs 200,000. If the victim is particularly weak due to its age, illness etc..the penalty is 5 year and Francs 500,000. Penalties will apply to associations as well as to individuals.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Marseilles: An enquiry committee hears evidence from victims of France's anti-sect policy

HRWF International Secretariat(05.06.2000) - Website: www.hrwf.net - Email: info@hrwf.net - The Enquiry Committee into violations of human rights, an offshoot of Omnium des Libertés* gathered at Marseilles on the 29th March to record the evidence of 20 individuals. The committee was made up of four experts, Dr Erick Dietrich, Christian Cotten, and the singer Nayah (previously a French entrant for the Eurovision song contest).

One of the individuals, a teacher, stated that she had been reprimanded for being a member of a "sect". A militant ecologist from Marseilles related that he had been ejected from an organic produce co-operative that he had saved from bankruptcy, simply because of his religious affiliation. A woman who gave evidence for Dr Tal Schaller and his wife explained that their health centre had been investigated by the police on the basis of erroneous information alleging their association was affiliated to the Order of the Solar Temple. Two women told of the difficulties they had experienced in trying to organise cultural activities or concerts, as the music to be presented was considered "sectarian". A journalist related how he had been discredited and fired from a Lyons radio station because he wanted to have spiritual experiences related on air. A woman related how a personal development organisation had been classified as a dangerous sect in the 1995 French parliamentary report, on the basis of a rumour started by a journalist. An estate agent had to close his agency after it was accused of being linked to a sect.

A Montpellier musician was thrown out of an up-and-coming pop group by his fellow members because they were worried that having a guitarist that belonged to a "sect" in their group would hamper their (future) success.

After the public hearing, the singer Nayah strongly voiced her commitment to freedom of religion and conscience.

*Omnium des Libertés, 40 rue du Paradis, 76530 Grand-Couronne, France. Tel 00 33 2 35675562

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Jacques Guyard to pay damages for having labelled anthroposophy a sect

Apparently, the work of the parliamentary inquiry commission into sects is not a "serious inquiry"

Le Monde (23.3.00) HRWF International Secretariat (31.3.2000) - Website: www.hrwf.net- Email: info@hrwf.net - For labelling the anthroposophic movement "a sect" on the French television channel France 2, the inquiry commission's president,

Jacques Guyard, was on Tuesday 21st March ordered to pay a fine of 20,000 francs and damages of 90,000 francs. The Paris court considered that Mr Guyard was not "in a position to justify a serious inquiry" into the movement to back up his accusations.

Unable to "justify a serious inquiry", presenting "irrelevant" documents with "no convincing value", the lack of discussion opportunity evident in the report... The methods of the parliamentary commission seemed to be on a downwards spiral according to the 21st March judgement of the correctional chamber of the Paris Tribunal. In that judgement, the commission's president Jacques Guyard, Socialist party representative for Essonne, was ordered to pay a 20,000 franc fine and 90,000 francs in damages for having slandered three anthroposophic movements, which claim to follow the thinking of the philosopher Rudolf Steiner.

On the 17th June 1999, while the inquiry commission was making its second report public, a report dealing with sects and their finances, Mr Guyard was invited to appear on the current affairs programme "Le journal de 13 heures" on France 2. A short documentary dealing with an anthroposophic community household was also shown. Anthroposophy, not listed in the first report in 1995, did appear on the 1999 parliamentary list. Mr Guyard was asked the question "Under what criteria has this community been classed under the heading of a sect". His response: "This community is typical. All these movements appear to be seductive at first, and then it turns out that their real motive is either to misappropriate money or to exercise total control over people (.). In this situation, there is a clear indoctrination". Mr Guyard went on to discuss "a worrying medical aspect", based on "precise statements made by the sick". His comments were unwelcome by the Federation of Steiner Schools (there are 17 in France, two of which are contracted, and 180 in Germany). The anthroposophic finance company Nouvelle Economie Fraternelle, controlled by France's Caisse Centrale (national credit exchange) and official partner of the Ministry for Employment felt the same way. So did the Mercure Fédéral, the union of anthroposophic medical associations in France (400 doctors, 1,500 consultants), indicating that anthroposophy is considered by European authorities to be on the same level as acupuncture, homeopathy and herbal medicine.

"I didn't know that anthroposophy was going to be the only subject discussed that day" claimed Jacques Guyard, endeavouring to explain his televised remarks. The minister has however maintained his claim that the movement was a "sect" mainly on the strength of a note from the Renseignements Généraux (Intelligence Service), the security branch of the police force. His frequent references to the "secret" nature of the parliamentary commission's work also prevented him from revealing his sources. "So many secrets when everyone just wants to know how it all works!", exclaimed finally Judge Martine Ract-Madoux, the president of the Tribunal.

No opportunity for discussion

The judgement concluded: "We are forced to note that Mr Guyard made his televised accusations against a movement into which he was not in a position to justify a serious inquiry. It is apparent from his statements that he had only had knowledge of written statements of individuals claiming to be victims of anthroposophy, but that neither the authors of these correspondences nor the presumed leaders of the anthroposophic movements were given a forum by the commission; that the only opportunity for discussion within these investigations was the sending of a questionnaire to sixty movements that were considered to be sectarian."

"None of the documents produced as evidence related to the accusations of mental manipulation, financial pressures, misappropriation of funds and medical practices that placed the lives of the sick in danger" added the Tribunal, which also refused to give the document from the security branch of the police force any "convincing value".

Rejecting the benefit of parliamentary immunity for Jacques Guyard, the Judges considered that the prejudice to the plaintiff was "substantial (.) as the defamatory statements were made by a minister, the president of the commission, whose authority and competence would not be doubted by the public"

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Report Urges Dissolution of Scientology Church in France

Europe: Panel calls group a danger to the public and a threat to national security

By JOHN-THOR DAHLBURG

Los Angeles Times (29.02.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (03.03.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The Los Angeles-based religion treated with suspicion and hostility by several Western European governments, is now under siege in France, where an official report has called for disbanding church operations here.

A blue-ribbon government panel studying what French officials define as "sects" has concluded that the faith, founded by the late U.S. science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, is a "vast enterprise of transnational character" with its own private police force run clandestinely from the United States.

"They have a clear strategy of infiltrating and of trying to influence the state, and the will to do it," said Denis Barthelemy, a career magistrate serving as secretary-general of the panel, the Interministerial Mission on Combating Sects. "This goes beyond being an ordinary pressure group. For the internal security of the state, we are afraid."

Panel Also Targets Cult Tied to Suicides

In the report to Prime Minister Lionel Jospin published this month, the panel contends that Scientology is, in fact, a moneymaking venture. The report goes to the extraordinary length of proposing the dissolution here of Scientology and another religious group, the Order of the Solar Temple, which lost 74 members to murder-suicides in France, Switzerland and Canada between 1994 and 1997.

It is the latest controversy to embroil Scientology in Europe, where the actions of courts and governments threaten to put some countries on a collision course with the Clinton administration. A 1998 U.S. law makes ensuring freedom of religion a priority in foreign policy, and the State Department's worldwide survey of human rights practices released Friday criticized some French conduct.

Tax claims brought against some Scientology churches in France in 1994-95 forced them into bankruptcy, the State Department said. The survey also found that the classification of Scientology and 172 other groups as sects by a French parliamentary committee four years ago contributed to "an atmosphere of intolerance and bias against minority religions."

"We are in a climate of terror and witch hunts," said Daniele Gounord, spokeswoman for the Paris Church of Scientology. She noted that the panel's report is short on specifics to buttress its charges and said Scientologists were never asked to give their side of the story.

"France is dealing with us the exact same way the Chinese deal with the Falun Gong," she said, referring to a religious movement banned by leaders in Beijing.

However, in the view of the government panel--which was chaired by Alain Vivien, a former member of Parliament--Scientology constitutes a clear and present danger to "public order" and the "dignity of the human person."

Some former Scientologists agree. "I was turned into a robot," said Mona Vasquez, a 40-year-old Frenchwoman who spent seven years in the organization. "They made me leave my studies, my boyfriend, my family."

France is far from the only European country where Scientology, which was founded in 1954 and claims 8 million members worldwide, faces official pressure. In Belgium, police in October raided the local church headquarters and 24 other locations, including affiliated businesses. Thousands of documents were carted away in that country's largest investigation of Scientology's operations to date.

In Germany, where the government has denounced Scientology's "totalitarian structure and methods" as a threat to democracy, church activities are being probed by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution. In the southern state of Bavaria, applicants for civil service jobs are required to disclose any ties to Scientology.

According to the German Embassy in Washington, no applications have been rejected on those grounds so far. "What's happening in Europe is that more and more countries are expressing concern about the proliferation of groups commonly known as cults and doing more to protect their citizens," said Ian Haworth, secretary-general of the South London-based Cult Information Center. Among critics of controversial religions, Haworth said, there is broad consensus that Scientology is the "worst group, the most sinister."

In June, the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe, an organization of 41 countries that promotes European cooperation, recommended formation of a continentwide agency to watch over fringe "religious, esoteric or spiritual groups" and facilitate the exchange of information.

In December, the French Senate--with Scientology as one of the potential targets in mind--unanimously approved a bill that would empower the government to dissolve religious sects if they disturb public order or present a "major peril" for their members. The lower house of Parliament is expected to examine similar legislation.

Paris Mayor Jean Tiberi has called for a ban on recruitment efforts by sects near schools, retirement homes, drug-treatment centers and other locales where, he said, society's "most vulnerable elements" are targeted.

French 'Are Putting a Religion on Trial'

French officials "are putting a religion on trial," charged Bill Walsh, a Washington attorney who represents the Church of Scientology International. "They are saying Scientology is a criminal enterprise and should be banned and shut down." French authorities, however, maintain that they are not attacking religious beliefs, which are protected by law, but illegal conduct. In November, a Marseilles court found five current or former members of the church guilty of swindling. In 1996, a Lyons court found the former local Scientology director guilty of swindling and involuntary manslaughter in the death of a man who committed suicide after his wife was pressured by the church official to take out a loan to finance \$6,000 of church teachings for him.

France also appears to be the only country to have convicted the creator of Scientology of a criminal offense. In 1978, Hubbard was found guilty in absentia of swindling and sentenced to four years in prison. The author, who never came to France, died in 1986.

Leaders of France's Scientologists indignantly deny the charges against them. They plan to issue a detailed rebuttal. "These are total hate campaigns," Gounord said. "We are people who obey the law."

According to the spokeswoman, the organization's members in France--she put their number at 50,000--are subject to increasing official harassment, including tax audits, the closing of their schools and police pressure on other French not to do business with them.

French officials reject accusations of harassment. Like some of those who have left Scientology, they paint an unsavory picture of a globe-girdling organization obsessed with making money that uses blackmail, harassment and smear campaigns to keep former members or opponents in line.

According to the French officials and former Scientologists, tight control is exercised from the mother church, located on a Hollywood street renamed in 1996 to honor Hubbard, and from a command center at Gilman Hot Springs in Riverside County. "All directives, everything we did, was ordered by missionaries from the United States," said Vasquez, the former member. "Every Thursday, we collected the money from all over Europe and sent it to the United States. Copenhagen [site of Scientology's European headquarters] obeyed; everything they did was decided by the Americans."

Barthelemy, the government panel's secretary-general, said former Scientologists have told French authorities that information collected by the church, including potentially embarrassing or compromising data gleaned from questionnaires and interviews with members, is forwarded to the U.S.

Local Annual Revenue Said to Be \$9.2 Million

In June, a French parliamentary commission investigating the finances of religious groups classified here as sects estimated Scientology's annual revenue in France at more than \$9.2 million, and worldwide at between \$1.5 billion and \$3 billion. Gounord, Scientology's Paris spokeswoman, said the only connection the churches in France have with Los Angeles is the training of pastors and auditors, who carry out question-and-answer counseling sessions the church calls auditing.

The French report makes special mention of Scientology's Office of Special Affairs, which it labels a private police. Stacy Brooks, a former member now working with an anti-Scientology organization in Clearwater, Fla., described the OSA as a dirty-tricks squad that targets the church's critics. "I know all about these people," Brooks said.

"They tried to smear and harass me and my husband after I left in 1989." Karin Pouw, spokeswoman for the Church of Scientology International, called Brooks a "liar for hire." Pouw, a member of the OSA, said the office functions as a "public affairs office."

Faced with the mounting pressure in France, Scientologists said they will call on other countries, including the U.S., and international bodies for help. On Thursday, they plan to hold an international conference in Paris to examine limits placed on religious freedom here.

Gounord said the court cases and official criticism have only increased the French members' determination. "We always win," she said. "In Scientology, we believe in what we are doing."

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Church provokes unholy row

Church of Scientology was recently branded 'totalitarian'

BBC (28.02.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (03.03.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Plans for an evangelical church to move into a dilapidated Parisian theatre is turning the spotlight on an official clampdown on what the French authorities are describing as dangerous, religious sects.

Three weeks ago, a government committee recommended dissolving the Church of Scientology there on the grounds that its activities threatens public order.

The latest target is an evangelical church, which promises to cure diseases, including Aids.

'Dangerous'

It hails from Brazil and has only a few hundred followers in Paris, but its small size has not stopped the authorities from being worried.

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, which has millions of followers in Brazil, its own TV channel and a football team, is one of about 200 groups who have been branded dangerous by a recent parliament report.

A group of local protestors led by the district mayor have been demonstrating outside the theatre near the 10th arrondissement, brandishing banners with the slogan "No religious sects", in an attempt to prevent the building being occupied.

'Mind control'

The religious row comes weeks after a government committee branded the Church of Scientology a "totalitarian" sect that keeps files containing personal information on its members.

The committee said while it opposed a blanket ban on sects, it favoured banning dissolving "extremely dangerous" organisations.

One of the report's authors, French MP Jacques Yard, told the BBC that churches such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God should not be allowed to operate in France because they "try to control people's minds".

He is in no doubt that such organisations are dangerous - not least, he says, because they extort money from their followers.

But the Brazilian church says it is the target of a witch-hunt. It says the government's labelling of the church a sect is unfair.

Father Pedro told the BBC that sects are usually used to describe people who exploit their members but his followers are just ordinary Christians who assemble to pray to Jesus.

Too slow

Michel Ottawa, deputy mayor of the area where the cinema is located, is critical of the Mayor Tibiae saying that his pledge to ensure a sect-free Paris has come too late.

He says Mr Tibiae was informed of a number of religious organisation establishing themselves in Paris years ago and was slow to act.

Last year, a US Government report expressed concern over the growing intolerance shown to minority religious groups in some European countries, including France and Germany.

Built in 1874, the theatre at the centre of the latest controversy - La Scale - once played host to France's greatest artists of the Belle Époque.

It is located on the Grandes Boulevards - once the city's most elegant shopping and dining area. Stretching from the Opera to the red light district of Saint-Denis, the Boulevards have fallen on hard times.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Dangerous Liaisons between Laicist France and Polish Catholic Anti-sect Groups

HRWF (27.02.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - When the head of France Inter-Ministerial Team for Fighting Sects, Alain Vivien, visited Warsaw recently, he was welcome by Catholic anti-sect groups as an ally in their struggle. (...)

During his visit, he put the number of "harmful and dangerous" sects in France at precisely 175, and insisted his team took care to distinguish "totalitarian" groups from those which do not "threaten to destroy the social order". He was evasive when asked in Warsaw how many Catholic and Protestant groups are included on his blacklist. And he declined to give details about current prosecutions in relation to 260 "sect-related offences", beyond conceding that the high number reflects a greater "activeness by courts" rather than an upsurge in sect activities. (...)

Vivien will have been pleased when Xavier Delamare, a Scientology leader in Nice, was jailed for fraud in November. But Delamare's six-month sentence took French prosecutors ten years to secure. That is not much to show for the much -vaunted fight against the sects.

Source: Excerpts from "War or peace with cults?" by Jonathan Luxmoore, published in The Tablet, 22 January 2000

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

French Judge upholds acquittal of 21 religious group members

TheFamilyNA@aol.com (24.02.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (25.02.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - A French judge has closed the case against 21 members of The Family, a controversial religious group formerly known as the Children of God. Judge Philippe Assonion declared this afternoon that there was no evidence to bring the twenty-one to trial on charges of inciting children to sexual immorality.

Charges were brought against the 21 nationals of France, England, Belgium, Denmark, Holland, Spain, Canada and the USA following armed police raids in June 1993 on the group's communities in southern France. Authorities took 80 children into custody for up to two months before returning them to their parents. Twenty-one adult members were arrested, then released within 48 hours, and over the coming months all juridical control was lifted.

After five years of investigation, the Prosecutor concluded that there was "no proof, photos or medical evidence" to substantiate the charges, and recommended the case be closed without being brought to trial. Judge Assonion of the Tribunal de Grande Instance of Aix-En-Provence accepted this recommendation, closing the proceedings in January 1999. This decision was upheld on February 24th with the judge rejecting an appeal by UNADFI (Association for the Defense of the Family and the Individual) and a private individual unconnected with The Family.

Human rights organisations interested in religious freedom issues have welcomed the decision, especially in light of legislation by the French government that has progressively marginalised religious minorities. UNADFI, which pushed for the failed case against members of The Family, had apparently been instrumental in helping to draft this legislation.

Members of The Family expressed satisfaction with the verdict but dismay at the treatment they received. "My friends and I lived a nightmare," exclaimed Maria, who was 11 at the time of the raids and was incarcerated for 2 months. "Can you picture being woken in the night by armed police storming your home, your baby brother being grabbed out of your mother's arms, herding your friends into vans, taking everyone you know-not-where? It was the most frightening day of my life, one that I will never forget. We hope that this verdict will be accepted by those who keep on portraying us as a 'dangerous sect' and that they will stop harassing us because of our beliefs. Our parents have brought us up as Christians, and they cherish us, their children, as gifts of God. I can't say the same for those behind those brutal raids."

Further Details on the Resolution of the case involving members of The Family in France

Background to the case

In June 1993, French police conducted surprise raids on communities and private homes in France associated with "The Family" (formerly known as "Children of God"). The case involved accusations against 22 people. Fifteen of the accused were full-time "D.O." Family members at the time of the raids while five were associate members, known to The Family as "TRF Supporters" or "TSers". They were living in private homes. One of the two remaining individuals had been a member of "The Family" earlier but at the time of the raid had no formal connections to the group and was living in his own private home, while the other individual (Paolo Savy) was never a member of "The Family" or the "Children of God".

All the children seized from the communities, from the youngest (9 months) until the oldest (17 years), were examined by doctors in search of marks of abuse. The physical examinations were followed by harrowing questioning into the private lives of the children. Some of the children who knew little or no French were questioned by people who did not speak any English.

Despite the expectations of social services, there were no signs, physical or otherwise, that the children had been abused. To the contrary, they were found to be in excellent health, physically and mentally. Judge Permingeat went so far as to state categorically in his ruling on March 3, 1994 that "...without any possible doubt, the children have not been submitted to sexual practices."

The minors judge in charge of some of the children's cases stated, "seeing that the children develop well and are followed medically; that no element would allow to establish that the children would live, this day, in an unfulfilling family atmosphere; that in the absence of danger relative to their situation, there is no place to initiate an educational assistance."

The children were returned to full custody of their parents in "The Family" within two months. Lawyers for "The Family" later raised the question as to why no attempt had been made to assess the children at their home, according to the requirements of Article 375 Code Civile which instructs that parental agreement should be sought and children should be kept in their natural environment "milieu naturel".

Despite the children's good health, Judge Mackowiak began the investigation to see if there was a case against the 22 adults on the accusation of "incitement of minors to debauchery" - inciting children to sexual immorality.

After three and a half years of investigation, with no evidence forthcoming, Judge Mackowiak closed the dossier and passed it to the Prosecuting Attorney with the recommendation of non-lieu (that there was not enough evidence to bring the accused to court).

Before the case ended, the Prosecuting Attorney and Judge changed. The new Prosecuting Attorney agreed with Judge Mackowiak's original recommendation that there was insufficient evidence to bring the case to court and therefore the case should be closed. The new Judge of the Justice Court of Aix-en-Provence, Judge Assonion, after receiving the recommendation of the Prosecuting Attorney, awarded the non-lieus to all the accused, closing their case on January 11th 1999.

The appeal hearing

Within days of this January 1999 decision, UNADFI and a woman named Tamara Van der Pyl launched an appeal, insisting that there was sufficient evidence to bring the accused to court.

The appeal was heard on November 25th, 1999. In their appeal UNADFI asked that 22 people be brought again before the court, and the children be re-examined by a psychiatrist who is an expert in sect matters. These are the 21 Family members and another individual who is not a member, Mr. Paolo Savy.

According to the documents submitted at the appeal, the only individual who stood accused of specific criminal acts is Mr. Paolo Savy. Several years ago, Mr Savy's private home was raided by the police on the basis of allegations by his ex-wife, Mme Van der Pyl. From what we understand, Mr Savy will be brought to court on the charges against him.

Mr Savy is not now and has never been a member of The Family, although he has been friends with some Family members. We are not in a position to comment on the allegations made against Mr. Savy. However we would like to point out that:

Mr. Paolo Savy is not a member of "The Family"

Mr Savy's relationship with The Family has been merely on a friendly basis, never as a member, either as a "Charter" or "Fellow" member. Although it appears that Mr. Savy has a personal friendship with various members of The Family, this friendship did not constitute membership of The Family.

In The Family's "Charter of Responsibilities & Rights" (governing constitution, adopted April 1st 1995), there are 23 requirements listed for full-time Family membership. Mr Savy has not been fulfilling these requirements; thus it is clear that he could not be one of our members.

UNADFI has claimed that Mr Savy is a member of "The Family" partly because literature published by "The Family" was found in his possession. However, possession of literature does not denote membership. "The Family" publishes and distributes thousands of pieces of literature to members of the public. Possession of this literature no more indicates membership of "The Family" as does the possession of a "Playboy" magazine indicate that the person visits the Playboy clubs and/or is a Playboy bunny!

As stated above, although Mr. Savy has been a friend of some full-time and associated members of The Family, his friendship does not constitute membership.

French Assembly report

It should also be noted that UNADFI's appeal had included reference to the French National Assembly Report on Sects (No. 2468) December 22nd 1995 saying the Children of God / The Family is a harmful sect. This latest verdict of the court contradicts the Report's conclusion.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Reuters (18.02.2000)/HRWF International Secretariat (21.02.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Moderate Islam can help stabilise France and the state should support Moslems building mosques, Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevenement said.

He told the newspaper Le Monde in comments published on Friday that the time had come to give the Moslem community the same legal standing as Catholics, Protestants and Jews.

Islam is the second-largest religion in France.

Chevenement said French Moslems, who in line with Islamic practice have no organised clergy or central authority, should create an official body to represent them when dealing with the state, he said.

Most of France's four million Moslems are residents of North African origin, about half of them French citizens. Roman Catholics are in the majority in France.

"Moderate Islam can also be a stabilising element in French society," said Chevenement, a left-winger who has been both tough on illegal immigration and broad-minded about integrating foreigners living legally in France.

"Islam is the only great religion whose practice in France has no overall organisation." Chevenement said many Moslems did not know the state could help them build mosques and said local officials should help them guarantee bank credits for their construction costs.

He stressed his effort to integrate Moslems more into French society did not amount to support for Islamic fundamentalists, noting his interior ministry was responsible for public order.

France was a frequent target of Islamic radical terror attacks in the early and mid-1990s.

The lack of a central authority to deal with the state has put Moslems at a disadvantage to other religions in some areas of French life. There are no private Islamic schools and no Moslem chaplains in schools, the military or hospitals.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Paris Mayor wants Crackdown on Sects

Reuters (13.02.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (15.02.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The conservative mayor of Paris said on Sunday he would push for the creation of exclusion zones to prevent cults from recruiting near sensitive locations such as schools and shelters.

Mayor Jean Tiberi said he would present to the National Assembly a draft law that would also ban sects from advertising within a certain radius of establishments considered vulnerable. A similar law currently applies to pornographic businesses.

"Jean Tiberi wanted to go further in order to protect from the risk of manipulation or press-ganging the most vulnerable people such as lonely old people, young people suffering family break-ups, minors..." Tiberi's office said in a statement.

A report by a government mission this week said there were some 200 sects in France, most of them well organised.

Tiberi said he would suggest to Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin the creation of a monitoring unit to gather and update information about sects.

The move comes as local authorities warn of an increase in what they consider to be cult activities in Paris, in particular by the U.S.-based Church of Scientology. Unlike the United States, France does not consider Scientology a religion.

Members of the group, founded in 1954 by the late American science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, complain of harassment and persecution in France, which is considering banning the movement.

The newspaper Le Journal du Dimanche said in a report published on Sunday that members of the Church of Scientology were recruiting near high schools in smart neighbourhoods.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

The Victim Compensation Commission recognize two former members of the Mandarom

as victims of sex crimes by their late spiritual leader

HRWF (10.02.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - Two ex-members of the Mandarom movement have appealed to , lodging a complaint against Gilbert Bourdin for "rape and sexual assault". The Commission came to a decision on

the 27th January at Digne, awarding one victim 200,000 French francs from the Victim Compensation Fund and the other 50,000 francs.

The decision was actively contested during a press conference held by Mandarom followers in Nice the following day. The spokespeople of the Mandarom said their spiritual leader had never been found guilty while he was alive and there was no evidence of the accusations made 10 years after the alleged facts. They see the decision of the Victim Compensation Commission as "indirectly sentencing someone who is already dead" and intend to bring the affair before the European Court of Justice.

In 1995 the two ex-Mandarom members had lodged complaints against the "cosmoplanetary Messiah", alias Gilbert Bourdin, allegations that he had consistently denied. Mr Bourdin was taken to Digne prison on the 18th June 1995 but later freed after 17 days for health reasons and a bail of 1 million French francs. Gilbert Bourdin died on the 19th March 1998 with his case still waiting to be heard by the criminal Court of Appeal with a possible later hearing before the Court of Assizes.

His death resulted in the extinction of the legal action against him, denying the two young women "public recognition" according to one of their lawyers, Mr Cohen-Seat. He stated that recognition of their status as victims could only come from the Commission.

For Christine Amory, president of the Triumphant Vajra association, based at Castellane the decision is "scandalous. It's like a posthumous prison sentence".

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

French report calls for dissolution of Church of Scientology

AFP (08.02.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (10.02.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - A French government report has described the Church of Scientology as a dangerous organization that "threatens public order" and "human dignity" and has called for its dissolution.

The 60-page report, submitted Monday to Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, described the US-based group as a "totalitarian" sect that keeps files containing personal information about its members.

French deputy Alain Vivien, head of a sect-busting government committee set up two years ago, said the committee had determined that the church's leaders in France were manipulated by their headquarters in Los Angeles.

"The actions carried out by Scientologists chosen to operate within the Office of Special Affairs (the organization's intelligence service) seem to be controlled by the sect's headquarters in the United States and can be qualified as underground activities led from abroad," the report said.

Vivien said that while the committee opposed a blanket ban on sects, it favoured dissolving "extremely dangerous" organisations including the Church of Scientology.

"When such organizations disrupt public order and violate human dignity, measures should be taken to dissolve them," the report states.

Also targetted by the commission as a dangerous organization that should be dissolved was the Order of the Solar Temple, founded in 1977 by Canadian Luc Jouret.

Seventy-four members of the sect died in presumed collective suicides in 1994 in Switzerland and Canada, in 1995 in France and in 1997 in Canada.

The Church of Scientology has come under attack several times in France in recent years, with some of its members tried for fraud.

Daniele Gounord, a spokeswoman for the sect in Paris, denounced the government report describing it as a "slap-dash Mickey Mouse job in which facts are pulled out of a hat."

"With this report, France has joined the ranks of banana republics," she said.

France, along with Germany, has come under repeated attack in the United States for labelling the Church of Scientology a sect.

The church offers self-improvement on the basis of the writings of the late science-fiction author L. Ron Hubbard, who spelled out principles that he called scientology and dianetics.

Established in Los Angeles in 1954, the wealthy organisation claims eight million members worldwide, including Hollywood stars such as John Travolta and Tom Cruise. It has 30,000 members in France.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

The 2000 Report of the French Mission to Fight Cults

by Massimo Introvigne

Cesnur Website (08.02.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (10.02.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - The French governmental Mission to Fight Cults released on February 7, 2000 its report of activity. According to the French press, it went back and forth with the Prime Minister's office, as the Mission experiences internal dissension and widespread criticism of its president, Alain Vivien. The report confirms the Mission's crisis. The "results" obtained are modest indeed. Mostly, the Mission has carried out a propaganda activity in co-operation with different branches of the French administration and with private anti-cult movements. On the political side, little has been achieved.

"Whilst the [second parliamentary] report [on cults] of 1999 suggested a new statute against the crime of mind control, we should unfortunately conclude that there has been no political reaction whatsoever to this proposal". The proposal by Senator About (a member of the Mission's consultative council) of a law allowing the government to disband a number of organizations, aimed directly at the "cults" ("sectes" being, as usual, the preferred four-letter word in French) has been passed unanimously by the Senate, but has received a number of objections by the government (and, we are told, within the Mission itself). The Mission proposes to disband two organizations: the Order of the Solar Temple and the Church of Scientology. As for the former, the Mission recognizes that it may not exist as a corporate body in France but suggests that a "de facto association" can be disbanded. Apart from the legal problems involved, it is unclear what a dissolution of the non-incorporated Order of the Solar Temple would achieve. Japan itself decided not to disband Aum Shinri-kyo but to put it under surveillance. "Disbanding" the Solar Temple, as the 1997 incident in Québec proves, would not dissuade the (former) members, still persuaded that a ritual suicide will lead them to a better state of existence, from committing suicide. The Solar Templars who committed suicide in Québec in 1997 did not need a legally incorporated structure to perform their tragic deed. In fact, the "dissolution" of the Solar Temple is simply proposed as a desperate symbolic attempt to rescue the general idea that "cults" may be disbanded by simple governmental fiat. Nobody, the Mission thinks, will defend the Solar Temple. And, once the principle is established in respect of the Solar Temple, it will be applied to the Church of Scientology and other organizations. As for Scientology, the report curiously mentions most of the same quotes from L. Ron Hubbard and incidents described in the 1998 Swiss Report on Scientology in order to draw an opposite conclusion. The Mission is also quite confused about the Solar Temple. It claims that certain "scholars" (between brackets), who have argued that public action taken against the Order may have been a cause of the tragedy, "ignore chronology". In fact, no scholar argued that public hostility was the sole cause of the suicides and homicides. Rather, both Jean-François Mayer and the undersigned have argued that perception of a public hostility by the Solar Temple (something different from hostility in itself) may have played a role, together with other causes, in the tragedy. This perception was magnified by the arrest of Canadian members of the Temple, by an international police investigation, and by the refusal by French authorities to renew the passport of the leader's wife, all events obviously having taken place before the first suicides-homicides in 1994. The Mission, thus, not the scholars is the party guilty of "ignoring chronology".

Chronology is not the only thing the Mission ignores. It proposes a definition of "cult" ("secte") introduced as accepted almost unanimously by "psychiatrists, academics, authors of parliamentary reports and even religious activists". A "cult", according to this definition, is "an association with a totalitarian structure that may or may not claim to pursue religious aims whose deeds threaten human rights and the social balance (équilibre social)". This is, perhaps, a good definition of the Mission itself. On the other hand, only a handful of anti-cult "academics" would accept it as a definition of "cult", while among "parliamentary reports" the German report (1998) argued explicitly that no definition of "cult" is possible. The operative word here is "totalitarian", and a "totalitarian" association is one where the leader "cannot be removed through a democratic process", is not elected by the majority of members, and has the ultimate power of defining a doctrine that "cannot be contested". Once again, French anti-cultists cannot come out with criteria which may distinguish between a genuine religion and an evil "cult". In the Roman Catholic Church the Pope "cannot be removed through a democratic process", is not elected by the majority of the Catholics, and has the ultimate power of defining doctrine that cannot be contested without, ultimately, leaving the Church. This is also true for countless other religious organizations.

The additional criteria introduced are not more helpful. There is a lengthy discussion (and an entire separate chapter) about the "infiltration" of economy and businesses as a trademark of the "cults". This is, however, a mere tautology: it is because the "cults" have been preliminarily defined as "evil that the participation of their members in business activities is an infiltration". The same economic activities carried out by members of non "cultic" religions or of the French Freemasonry (whose recent scandals are making the covers of mainline French magazines in these very weeks, and which is well represented in the Mission) are not regarded as "infiltration".

The key test of the first French parliamentary report on cults, of 1996, of "mental destabilization" (in fact, brainwashing) is now regarded as "interesting but having, in the present status of science, a subjective character making it difficult to be used in a legal scenario". (This may be the reason why the proposal of the 1999 report to create a new crime of mind control has not been taken seriously by politicians.) An additional test is now proposed in the shape of "equality between men and women": "it would be a serious breach of human rights to admit that groups calling themselves religious may profess a non-equality in this field". Again, this test is useless in order to distinguish between religions and cults since the two largest religions in France, Roman Catholicism and Islam, are often accused precisely of "professing a non-equality", often in stronger terms than "cults".

A large section of the report is devoted to the international problems of France. It is an incredible text, where rough anti-Americanism and nationalism are offered as poor substitutes for logical argument. The report offends the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. legislation on freedom of religion, and the U.S. congressional investigations of religious liberty in France as part of a vast pro-cult conspiracy, involving also the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe). The Mission is apparently proud of its participation at the OSCE meeting in Vienna in March 1999, where the hysterical

reaction of its secretary, Mr Denis Barthélemy, exposed the Mission to severe international criticism. The report continues to blame the criticism of France at that meeting to "the participation of cults", while in fact the strongest criticism did not come from religious movements but from the general reporters appointed by OSCE to introduce the discussion (one of them being the undersigned). The report also protests the CSCE hearing in Washington of June 8, 1999, dismissing the witnesses as cultists or cult apologists, and objecting that no French representative was invited to offer an answer, apparently ignoring that the French situation had been the object of a previous CSCE briefing held in Washington on July 30, 1998 (where the undersigned was a witness). At that briefing, the ambassadors of the relevant countries had been invited, but nobody from the French Embassy had deemed wise to show up.

The Mission's only argument, apart from its rude anti-Americanism, is that America appears to be at least divided on the issue, since the same Mr Barthélemy has been invited at the yearly conferences of the American Family Foundation both in 1999 and in 2000. Obviously, the American Family Foundation is hardly a counterpart to the U.S. Congress or the Department of State. But the Foundation, who has recently tried to distance itself from the most extreme forms of anti-cultism, should seriously consider whether its dangerous liaisons with Mr Barthélemy would not place it precisely in the most extreme, lunatic fringe of cult-watching. That the Mission is indeed part of this fringe is confirmed both by its continuing assault on scholars (including the rather moderate editors of the collective book *Sectes et Démocratie*, perhaps evidence that moderation is no defense against the Mission's hysteria), and by its praise and sponsorship of the anti-cult propaganda in French public schools through textbooks, regarded as "fool" in the U.S. even by self-respecting cult critics. The report praises a textbook including the most absurd atrocity tales about cults (English translation available in this Web site). Commenting on the section on brainwashing in that manual, Dr Benjamin Zablocki, a leading academic exponent of brainwashing theories in the U.S., wrote that it "proves that there can be fools on all sides of an issue. I totally disavow the simplistic theory presented in the paragraph" (quoted with permission). It is probably time for the American cult awareness community to decide whether it wants to support French foolishness, primitive anti-Americanism, and intolerance, or seek elsewhere in Europe partners for a responsible, if difficult, dialogue.

Ultimately, the report defies ridicule by claiming that almost all countries look to France as "one of the homelands of human rights", that France should withdraw from dialogue on this issue with the United States, and should stand firm and proud of its record on religious liberty. Unfortunately, as recent European trends seem to confirm, such forms of nationalism are not merely ridicule, and may cause serious manifestations of hate and intolerance. Nationalism, it should be remembered, is no substitute for the truth. There are instances when, as Samuel Johnson said in 1775, "patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel".

Full text in French on Cesnur Website <http://www.cesnur.org>

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

French official body slams US over sects

Reuters (07.02.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (08.02.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - A French government mission criticised the United States on Monday for being too lax on cults and unfairly blaming France for its harsher stance.

The Interministerial Mission for the Fight Against Sects said in a report delivered to Prime Minister Lionel Jospin that Washington, in the name of religious freedom, was giving excessive protection to cults.

"The confusion maintained across the Atlantic between religious freedom...and prevention, even repression, of punishable sectarian excesses does not make dialogue any easier," the report said.

Paris and Washington clashed last year over a U.S. State Department report scorning official French scepticism about the U.S.-based Church of Scientology.

French Justice Minister Elisabeth Guigou has raised the prospect of banning the Church of Scientology, which France, unlike the United States, does not regard as a religion.

Members of the group, founded in 1954 by the late American science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, complain of harassment and persecution in France.

Monday's report said there were some 200 sects in France, most of them well organised. It said those that reject democracy and spread racist ideas must be banned, and called for new legislation against those that violate human rights.

It singled out as dangerous the Order of the Solar Temple doomsday cult, which it said was still active although more than 70 members had died over the past six years in ritualised suicides in Switzerland, France and Canada.

The report called for states in Europe and elsewhere to prevent the development of sects and urged new legislation to fight attacks on national security such as the use of computer viruses.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

French Moslems angry over presidential snub

Reuters (06.01.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (11.01.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - One of France's foremost Moslem figures protested on Thursday that President Jacques Chirac failed to invite the Moslem community, France's second largest religion, to an annual reception for French religious leaders. Dalil Boubaker, rector of the Paris mosque expressed his "regrets that once again Islam was absent" from Chirac's New Year greetings ceremony on Wednesday at his Elysee palace.

"This exclusion is felt as an additional humiliation by the Moslem community of France and seriously harms France's official relations with Islam," Boubaker said in a statement.

A presidential source said the Moslem community was not invited to the reception because it does not have a unique representative like the other religious groups -- Roman Catholics, Protestants and Jews.

The French government has been trying to persuade the divided Moslem community to settle its internal disputes and become more united. There are between four and five million Moslems in France, most of them immigrants, or children of immigrants from France's former North African territories of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

France fined over missing Scientology files

Reuters (05.01.2000)/ HRWF International Secretariat (06.01.2000) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Email: info@hrwf.net - A French court on Wednesday ordered the state to pay 20,000 francs (\$3,070) in damages to two plaintiffs over the mysterious disappearance of legal evidence in a probe into the Church of Scientology.

The court said Paris investigating magistrate Marie-Paule Moracchini was at fault for failing to make copies of the 44 documents whose disappearance in 1998 has never been explained.

The plaintiffs, both former Scientology members, had launched legal action against other former members of the Church, accusing them of fraud and illegally practising medicine.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs said foul play was involved in the disappearance of the files.

The Church of Scientology has denied responsibility and says the case is covered by the statute of limitations that says a probe must be closed if it has been dormant for more than three years.

Legal evidence vanished in another case against the Church of Scientology in Marseille last year.

Justice Minister Elisabeth Guigou has said it was destroyed by mistake by court clerks who thought the documents were related to an investigation that had been closed, and that foul play was not involved.

Scientology, founded in 1954 by the late American science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, claims more than eight million adherents worldwide. Unlike the United States, France does not recognise it as a religion.