

**Audition of Nicolas Jaquette and Alain Berrou
ex Jehovah witnesses**

(minutes from the session of September 26, 2006)

Mr. Georges FENECH, President

President: Gentlemen, we thank you for answering to the enquiry commission's invitation. I remind you that according to article 142 of our assembly the commission may decide to quote in its report, either in part or in whole, everything that will be said here. The minutes of this audition will be transmitted to you. Your observations will be submitted to the commission. According to article 6 of the ordinance of November 17th, 1958 regarding the unfolding of parliamentary assemblies, auditioned parties are required to testify in conformity with article 226-13 of the penal code forbidding the violation of professional confidentiality as well as article 226-14 of said code which authorizes a breach of that confidentiality in cases of deprivation or prejudice, including those of a sexual nature.

Said ordinance also requires that auditioned parties swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Please, raise your right hand and say "I swear". (the witnesses oblige.) I finally remind representatives of the press article 39 of the act of July 29th, 1881, which states that a fine of 15,000 Euros applies to anyone publishing any information regarding the identity of a victim of assault, sexual or otherwise. I, therefore, ask you not to quote the names of children who may have been victims of such crimes.

Nocolas Jaquette: I am 24 years old and I spent the first 22 years of my life amongst Jehovah Witnesses. My parents were followers. I was raised in that movement from which I escaped 2 years ago with the help of my friends from ADFI of Lille. I am now writing my personal testimony and I am continuing my reconstruction work as I come before your commission.

I, therefore, have lived the life of a child who was indoctrinated and never asked to be, who had no critical thinking whatsoever on what was transmitted to him or imposed onto him and who was brought up as a person conditioned to serve the interests of the movement with a language, an education and a codification system transmitted to me by my parents.

Jehovah's Witnesses brag about not being a cult and say that their children are not shut out from the rest of the world: they go to school, sometimes even reach university level and work in the external world but there's no doubt that the indoctrination exists in them.

It causes prejudice to their identity, their personality, their affective, moral and physical life even though the child is conditioned to conceal them from the external world. After 22 years one cannot escape the movement without any psychological and moral effects with which they will have to

live the rest of their life. 2 years are not enough to get rid of everything that was thought, induced and programmed since early childhood. Even now I don't know how much time I'll need.

The word "effect" may seem vague when we talk about cults. It's the loss of self esteem because the movement convinces the individual that he\she is nothing except a sinner who's only hope resides in God, as represented by the group, and the hope of an afterlife in paradise where he\she will reach perfection. The world was presented to me in such a way that I felt it was bad enough for me not to feel good in it, let alone live in it as a normal individual. It took me a huge reconstruction process to learn how to live in that external world, as I was psychologically and mentally prepared to learn how to live away from it and in the bubble of the cult.

Life is regulated by all sorts of decrees on the nature of entertainment, relations with the opposite or the same sex, love and friendship, relationship with science or education etc. All aspects of an individual's life are managed in such a way as to rid them of what characterizes them as an individual. As I spent 22 years learning nothing but that way of life it was something completely normal for me. I have yet to learn what it's like to live as a free individual, able to live with his choices and decide for himself as opposed to being told by scriptures.

President: What was your daily life like since childhood? What was a day in your life between school and the Kingdom Hall?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: It was hectic but it needs to be assessed using a period of one week. You were attributed a "spiritual program" each day. As was the case for every Jehovah Witness children had to attend the 3 meetings as well as the preaching, even though they were neither baptized, nor publishers. On top of that is added a personal program for the child where, away from the family environment, they have to prepare each meeting all by themselves using literature provided by the cult, check the accuracy of Bible verses, that generally takes an hour to an hour and a half the day before each meeting, not to mention the activities within the family environment : The "text of the day", from a booklet, read each day with the explanations given by the cult, 45 minutes of family bible reading and personal reading a child must also do for 45 minutes.

I estimated that an elementary school child dedicates 23 hours a week to the cult.

President: Did you have time to play with your friends outside of the community? Did you participate to secular celebrations or events?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: Relationships with others are obviously something children are very sensitive about, mostly when it has to do with parties or celebrations which are, indeed, moments of social cohesion. To give a good image to the cult

children are allowed to socialize with others but in a very limited and supervised fashion. Amongst what is repeated to them regularly we hear: "you have friends in the congregation, don't make friends with anyone anywhere else. Bad association destroys useful habits." In other words, seeing friends from outside will spoil your faith by allowing into your ideas that are contrary to what the cult teaches you and push you to leave your religion. People from the outside world are constantly demonized. Linguistically speaking we say that someone is "in the truth" to designate a Jehovah Witness. By constantly hearing this as a child we come to a point where we can't separate "Jehovah's Witness" and "Truth". Simultaneously, people from outside are called "the world", which all the JW literature describes as nasty, possessed by the devil and bound to be destroyed. Demonization applies to friends at school of whom we learn to beware. We also learn, however, how to evangelize them while respecting the law imposing secularism at school. We are, therefore, prepared to consider them potential enemies. Thus, the child meets his\her friends at school with both an agenda to proselytize them and a fear of them. They'll push friendship only far enough to show that Jehovah's Witnesses are not a cult as evidenced by their ability to make friends.

Holidays are a particularly delicate topic for JW children even if we try to teach them that it's not the case. Each year, they see Christmas and the new year pass as if they were ordinary days and then hear their friends talk about their presents. As a reaction to their pain they have to reply that Santa Claus doesn't exist, that they know the truth and that that is a lie. We are thought slogans to protect ourselves against the pain of such a discriminatory type of circumstance. Not being allowed to go to a birthday party and not even being allowed to have ours celebrated. I don't even know how old my parents are. They never celebrated their birthdays. To ordinary people that day allows them to see time as it goes by for others. I don't have that notion, even for those who are close to me. That can sound like a banality but if we think about it seriously, those situations piled up to one another become quite a heavy load to carry in the end. If we manage to leave the movement we realize all the power we were subjugated by and how un-adapted we are to the real world. We have to learn to live a real life.

President: We all know that one of the fundamental principles of the Jehovah Witnesses' doctrine is the Apocalypse, or the announcement of the end of times. Have you been taught in that perspective as a child?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: That is weird... Hope, according to the Jehovah Witnesses' predictions, is that of Paradise. In their meetings, however, even though they don't talk about it that much, so as not to look too much like a scary and negative "apocalyptic cult", Paradise is directly related to the Apocalypse. In fact, their hope for a future eternal life is linked to the destruction of their fellow human beings... To a child, 1+1=2, so hope for a Jehovah Witness is motivated by some

perverted desire to see fellow humans die because that means Paradise is near, hence, the need to evangelize is taught to kids early in their life: You are responsible for the life of your friends. Let's say you know there will be an earthquake: If you don't warn anyone you are a murderer. The same goes for that: if you don't tell them that they need Jehovah's Witnesses in order to be saved you bear the responsibility of their death when the world is destroyed. Adults and children alike bear that responsibility. As soon as they are able to understand what is said in the movement, 5 or 6 years old, they get that sword above their head. They are, thus, convinced to try and save their friends. "You don't want them to die, and you don't want to die either just because you didn't warn them..." All this mess mixes up with the promise of the Apocalypse.

President: You heard this discourse in your family but not at school... How did you manage to live with that contradiction? Did you manage to solve it somehow?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: The solution was prepared in advance by the cult, which has the privilege of aiming at kids well before their school days. I already knew how to read at 5 years old thanks to my mother who made me learn on the literature of the Watch Tower Society. My learning method wasn't traditional but that of the cult. I, therefore, started to assimilate those ideas on education, philosophy, history and science.

When they start school kids are already prepared to what will be taught to them by the cult: what fits with the doctrine is acceptable whereas what doesn't fit is shunned. We really think we are superior to the rest of mankind because we know the "truth." Even the child is convinced of his\her superiority compared to his\her friends. He\she doesn't believe in Santa Clause, doesn't celebrate birthdays because he\she knows it's a pagan celebration. He\she doesn't believe in the theory of evolution because the Bible taught him\her that humanity was 6, 000 years old and that evolution is a farce...

All those thoughts induced by the cult make enough sense, obviously without any evidence, so as to convince the child who starts going to school that he\she will be taught incompatible ideas and that they have to be rejected. He\she is, therefore, warned in advance that he\she will hear about philosophy, evolution and ideas that are contrary to his\her faith. He\she is conditioned to react by transmitting his\her faith. I experienced it many times when taught about evolution and religion. I too, exposed my convictions to my teachers and schoolmates thinking some of them might be interested and that I could start proselytizing when I was not in school.

President: You spent 22 years amongst Jehovah's Witnesses and you are able to analyze this only 2 years after you left the movement. We can only be surprised by your reasoning and your critical thinking . How did you manage to get to such a maturity and have such an elaborate critical spirit?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: First of all, when I left the cult, I was

encouraged to write my testimony. Writing is a very effective process to link together stuff I thought was commonplace and natural. As I was writing I started to understand the JW system, how it worked and the way different elements were connected together to form a very effective mental incarceration mechanism.

Secondly, I always had some sort of a double personality due to the fact that I am a homosexual and that homosexuality is repressed in the cult. Aware that I had a preference for boys since I was about 8 years old and as I heard so often from the pulpit that I was hated by God and condemned to destruction I had to lead a double life in order to protect myself during the whole of my childhood and adolescence as well as my adult life. The constant fear of what I was and what was denied to me along with the fact that what was imposed to me didn't fit made it so that I was always aware of what was going on and was studying it without realizing it. As I left everything crumbled and I could see more clearly what I had felt for years. Anyway! I lived as a schizophrenic person until I was 22 with a double personality, split between my sexuality and my religion, of course it was pretty bad: I thought of committing suicide many times to end my misery, as it was so unbearable to see two conceptions inside of me which were totally opposed to one another.

Suicide, however, was also condemned by the cult because I would have been barred from eternal life so I was convinced not to do that, and that was a chance... That's the one and only thing I can be thankful for as far as the Jehovah Witnesses are concerned.

Martine David: Did the idea of leaving the cult come to you all of the sudden or was that something you had prepared for long in advance? Did you keep a relationship with your parents? Do you have brothers and sisters? What remains exactly from the family? We always say that we have to try and keep ties with the family, did you manage to do that? Finally, have you been pressured in any way since you left the cult?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: Only one element was preparing me to leave and that was my homosexuality. It gave me a chance and was an external element for me to hang on to. 2 months before, though, I was still proselytizing to a close friend. So much so that the people who helped me also had to work with that close friend of mine in order to get out of his head what I took just a few months to indoctrinate him with, thanks to cult literature. It worked quite well because after reading only a few pages he already had that sword above his head... I was lucky to find people on my path who had already been involved with cults and who, by lack of preparedness, had failed in having those they wanted to help leave the movement; when they met me they thought they wouldn't let me go so easily and immediately contacted ADFI to initiate a plan.

Martine David: Were you supported by ADFI?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: In fact, I think I was a bit "manipulated" by my friends and by ADFI in that I was completely unaware of what they had planned: they orchestrated a retaliation against sectarian indoctrination and helped me open my eyes and discover myself as a person, with my own judgment, my freedom of movement, etc. The method was quite effective because if the sectarian system works well in a closed environment, its defects will show up very quickly as soon as an external element is introduced. It's the support that allowed me to leave but I was advantaged by the fact of having friends outside of the cult.

One of the elements that will discourage someone from leaving, which should answer your second question, is the fact that the cult forbids its members from having any contact with those who leave or who are excluded from the cult. Given the fact that the member only has contacts with other members, leaving means that you are leaving behind all of your environment only to find yourself in a world where you have no relationships.

That constitutes some sort of blackmail which the Jehovah witnesses are very good at in order to keep members and even have some of those who left come back because of the state of emotional distress they found themselves in, having no relationships outside of the cult. I don't have any contact with my parents ever since I left the cult. Phone conversations just became shorter and shorter. "You are responsible for your own choices." They completely abandoned me, I am not their son. I have a big brother and 2 little sisters who are also members of the cult. My 2 sisters live in the same town as my parents and are obviously still under the domination of the cult. It's a small remote and isolated town where the possibilities, as far as friendships are concerned, are quite restricted. It's quite different from Paris, where there are many congregations and people often switch from one to the other.

I also had a chance, and that should answer your third question about harassment, because one of the leaders of the congregation suddenly died from asthma as I was leaving. I was, then, able to go without even being noticed at a moment when everything was disorganized. I finally received several phone calls from very close friends who were extremely worried about my spiritual health after what they thought was my departure... Luckily, some of those who helped me leave were with me and could witness the hypnotizing aspect of the means that were used. The system that is always used is one which consists in destroying arguments: I think it's not possible so I refuse. The surface is always attacked instead of deeper issues to avoid the risk of it being questioned. I was confronted several times to such a situation; by chance, I was prepared for what was coming thanks to my friends at ADFI, the risk of being harassed by my family and by the cult. I was lucky to have several months of rest which allowed me to strengthen myself and to avoid being caught off-guard, as many of those who leave are when confronted to tons of phone calls and letters which often times end up doing what they are supposed

to do. I elaborated an answering system with the help of my friends which is quite simple. "Thanks, I am continuing my research and I'll think about it..." This type of indecisive answer allowed me to avoid a lot of harassing.

Serge BLISKO: What academic level did you reach in those first 22 years?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: I did my BA plus 2 years.

Serge BLISKO: The main point of encounter with the external world for young JW's is school. Why don't they have a separate school system as many cults do by schooling the children themselves, even if they had to rely on distance learning? Isn't that a great danger for the movement to allow kids to be in contact with the external world? During your school years didn't your "weird" behavior (holidays, biology courses, sports, coed schooling, etc) alert your teachers or supervisors? We are having a hard time understanding this extraordinary lack of sensitivity of school staff towards your behavior...

Nicolas JAQUETTE: Even before they start going to school, children are prepared to beware of their friends. You have to understand that school represents for the movement an excellent recruitment pool. Teachers and children alike are potential members. They, therefore, teach the children to proselytize but in a very subtle way. As soon as I started going to school I knew every detail of the French law of secularism at school. I knew what to do and what not to do.

Serge BLISKO: They told you about it?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: Yes, and in a very clear manner in the literature we had to study: how to evangelize a friend without it being considered proselytizing at school: The child learns right from the start how to gauge what he/she can or cannot do at school in order to install his/her ideology.

The child is also taught to clearly identify him/herself as a Jehovah witness in front of teachers and pupils alike. Teachers will worry systematically but parents in the cult are trained with demonstrations and literature to set appointments with teachers to explain their beliefs, reassuring them regarding the child as well as proselytize them also. The child is also encouraged to behave as a model student and never to cause any trouble at school.

Serge BLISKO: Nothing in the school curriculum was prohibited to you?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: No. They let you go but warn you about what's good or bad in what is taught to you. I was laughing inside when I was taught about homo sapiens thinking, "They are so dumb, they don't even know man is only 6, 000 years old." I was unable to allow anything new educationally that conflicted with church teaching to be accepted at school.

Serge BLISKO: In other words, as opposed to other cults that see a threat in sending children to school, you were prepared and allowed to attend every class, including sports...

Nicolas JAQUETTE: We knew the content of every course in advance and we were warned about some of them. We weren't allowed to go on field trips if they lasted more than a day because parents had to sign a waiver in case of emergency which included the possibility of blood transfusions. We were also forbidden to attend sports competitions.

Serge BLISKO: Because of the risk of injury?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: Not necessarily but mostly because of the competitive spirit. We were also forbidden combat sports. In a more general manner sports at school were authorized but not outside of school because they unavoidably involved competition.

As for the "weird" behavior a child has to adopt towards his\her friends, denial of birthday parties, or express ourselves as thought by the cult, etc. it's obvious that it generates laughter, which makes the whole thing painful. As teenagers we don't even need to be a Jehovah Witness to be bullied so imagine that for someone who can't dress in a fashionable manner, has to go door to door in a suit and tie and is not allowed to celebrate his own birthday or go to parties, that's quite a heavy load... Confronted by school bullies, the JW child is comforted in his\her victim status as presented by the cult: the world is persecuting you because you are one of the chosen; you'll be persecuted just as Jesus was; if you are persecuted at school it's because you are "in the truth." That works quite well: the child thinks it's normal to be persecuted, even if it's extremely painful and unbearable. For a teenager having boyfriend or girlfriend is a must to be accepted at school; that is obviously forbidden by the cult for which sex has to be within marriage. A simple flirt is considered an unacceptable risk of deviation. Moreover, children are encouraged by the cult to spy on one another: in the presence of other JW children in the same school we will adopt the behavior dictated by the decrees of the cult so as not to be accused of a sin with regard to the teachings of the cult. The child is, therefore, constantly under the watchful eye of "Big Brother."

Philippe COCHET: I thank you for your extremely precise testimony. Given those 2 years of rest, it is a lot but very little at the same time, do you see other places or activities or places, apart from school, where one could hang on to in order to send distress signals or find potentially receptive people?

Do you think there are people in the cult who's job is to bring back quitting members?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: I don't see that many places or activities like that. Maybe in the medical field. When I was 13 I didn't want to go to school anymore because of what I was going through

when I was there. My family doctor was hesitant to prescribe antidepressants to me. He should have done something but given the fact that he had been my parents' doctor for many years he was warned about the blood transfusion thing and willing to respect my parents' wishes: he was disregarding and could care less about me. He should have rang the alarm bell since he had the opportunity to see that I was not feeling good.

I had the opportunity to meet other ex-JWs at ADFI. The experience of some of them was a lot more painful than mine and just as violent and they were traumatized in such a way that they will never recover. I, on the other hand, think I am on the right track. I lead a satisfying and happy life and I believe I have it better than some others who were affected a lot more deeply and intimately. My testimony won't be focused on the violence generated by some particular events but rather that of daily life, which has its own psychological consequences.

I don't think there are people in the cult who have a specific mission to bring back leaving members. If there are it's not really widespread. Members of the cult avoid organizations such as ADFI like the plague... Maybe the head of the JW movement gives some members a mission to infiltrate those organizations; I think I heard about this sort of thing regarding other cults, but never in the Jehovah Witnesses. I don't really think so.

Jaques MYARD: You stated that JW children were made to proselytize. Did you also go through that phase?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: Absolutely! Right from the cradle JW children follow their parents in their proselytizing activities. They don't have a choice. Up until I was 22 I devoted 2 hours every Saturday morning of my life to that.

Jaques MYARD: What about the other kids at school? How did the non believers react?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: Jehovah Witnesses are warned in advance that they will be confronted to denial and incomprehension almost permanently, be it at school or in regular proselytizing activities. At school however, the Jehovah Witness' personal behavior of exclusion attracts other excluded kids, those who are not in the cohesion system of other groups of kids and who are seeking acceptance from people who are eager to understand them. I was confronted to this situation as a child and I was socializing with other marginalized children who were quite receptive to what I was telling them. I distributed JW literature to many of them. One of those publications was titled "Questions Young People Ask: Answers that Work", supposed to be a living guide but that slowly brings them to integrating JW principles into their way of life.

President: You seemed to have quite a grudge against that doctor in your answer to Philippe Cochet's question: You said that the doctor was willing to take responsibility for his actions if anything happened to you. You are now a young adult who

realizes a few things. Do you think that all those people (teachers, doctors, etc) were turning a blind eye? You think that doctor should have felt more responsible... What should have happened? What should he have done?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: I can't possibly blame that particular doctor. Parents are supposed to chose their doctor in accordance with the criteria of the cult, meet with them, discuss their medical positions with them and reassure them about their beliefs. Jehovah Witnesses have orchestrated a real disinformation campaign aimed at the medical, educational and judicial sectors by using parents. They specifically aim at those fields who would normally worry about behaviors they don't consider to be normal, warn others and take adequate measures. All of those institutions suffer from a lack of information on cults and that one in particular, which now is the most important in France. Those particular points which are affecting kids more and more should be part of the training in the medical, educational and judicial bodies. Otherwise the only information they receive comes from parents and there's nothing to compare it to in order to have a balanced and objective opinion.

President: You are now heard by people who are voting laws and may influence public authorities to take action. Would it be safe to say that what you are talking about could go as far as not bringing assistance to a person in danger? That's the question we are trying to ask you: it is so rare for us to hear such an elaborate discourse. It's the first time I've heard something like this, could you go on further? Do you think that there's some sort of a failure somewhere?

Serge BLISKO: or blindness...

President: ... From the part of society with regard to those children you are talking about?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: The creation of a commission such as yours is already evidence of a step further. That's precisely what encouraged me to come: I see positive elements in that showing an obvious awareness. Jehovah's Witnesses, however, have a great strength. They learned discretion and how to blend into society without being noticed. It's really amazing to see just how much they managed to do that. Even in the X-Files TV series: 2 FBI agents knock on a door and are told by the 3rd person that if they are Jehovah Witnesses they are wasting their time.

Jaques MYARD: It's an American TV show?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: It's the French version so the translators have all the latitude to transpose. That thing, which seems commonplace, serves as evidence that the Jehovah Witnesses managed to integrate discretely to French society. They are just those nice but dumb folks who'll bother you by knocking on your door on a bright Sunday morning. They usually generate more laughter than fear.

President: In other words, society is asleep.

Nicolas JAQUETTE: Exactly! We usually think that the JW's issues are only about blood transfusions.

Jaques MYARD: You told us about how you were laughing when you heard about the homo sapiens. How is it still possible today for people to go on thinking this way given the amount of scientific information we have everywhere? How does cult teaching still manage to integrate into people's minds such archaic ideas? Isn't man a being with reason?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: The procedure is extremely dishonest but very simple. It consists of using scientific information out of their context in order to validate their opinions. It's something they've always done. Organ transplants were authorized, then forbidden, then reauthorized around 1979: Jehovah Witnesses were calling it cannibalism, quoting scientists. By reading their data, however, we realized that quotes from the earlier studies originally used by those scientists were obviously taken out of context in an effort to make people believe that they were the current thoughts of scientists with up to date research. Members of the cult who, given the density of the spiritual programs imposed to them, spend all of their time studying cult literature and usually have a very low level of education. When they hear the name of that scientist it will appear to them as something undeniable. Sentences such as "everyone knows that..." are also constantly repeated to induce a feeling that if you don't think the same as everyone else you are stupid. Scientists' credibility is ridiculed: They'll make you notice that this one said that and the other one said this... They disagree so they are not credible. We, therefore, come to a point where we hate scientific information, and that's if we have access to it. JW's can still watch the 1pm TV newscast but let's face it, the media are not exactly the best place to hear about scientific discoveries. In order to have access to it one must first be interested in it and go towards specialized organizations. Jehovah Witnesses are often told: if there's good literature from outside we will tell you about it. Don't go read anything by yourself though. You should, instead, spend more time studying in order to strengthen your faith but don't read anything from outside."

This aversion towards historians, scientists, education and the medical world transforms the Jehovah Witness into a child, completely closed to anything new taught to him at school: as soon as it doesn't fit the cult's ideology it's rejected. Some sort of self defense mechanism will block everything without the person even being aware of it. I am aware of it now that I left the cult because I tried to warn my friends in the cult of rather obvious stuff. The reaction is instantaneous as soon as we start dealing with fundamental problems: "I don't want to talk about it. I don't have a problem with my faith and I don't want you to spoil it." That instinctive movement is planted into the mind of the child even before he/she starts going to school. They are prepared to reject everything of that nature.

Philippe VITEL: You are not the only one who left the cult. In what proportions did people like you choose to leave the Jehovah Witnesses?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: I'll let Alain Berrou talk to you about this.

President: The transition is all done...

Alain BERROU: I am 36 years old and I spent 10 years amongst the Jehovah Witnesses. I was indoctrinated at school when I was 17. I left the cult in 1998 and started college in order to analyze what had happen to me. I also worked for ADFI.

I was indoctrinated at school but it wasn't by accident. It was an international campaign adapted to each country. What I thought were simple conversations with friends were, in fact, part of a vast proselytizing program . In my case it took about 2 years to be convinced of a certain number of ideas as a result of following pseudoscientific process which was flawed. As time went by I started to change and accept ideas I would normally be suspicious of. Curious about one of my classmates I engaged myself into what I thought were simple conversations with them. I hate the word "baptism", which gives it the look of something confessional. It was, in fact, an indoctrination process which lead me to bond with an organization and an ideology by a contract. We are persuaded, little by little, to go thru "dedicaton" which is a contract that bonds you with an organization.

My testimony will be mostly about subjugation and the way they do it. I'll take this opportunity to thank the members of parliament who voted in favor of the "About-Picard" act on June 12th, 2001, even if I couldn't use it. Now, at least, this crime is covered by the law.

This indoctrination had consequences on my family and my education because all of my time was spent on the cult. I was lead to get involved more and more into the movement to a point where I involved myself into some sort of a special service for children they called the "pioneer service" where I was spending all of my time proselytizing which was the main goal of the cult in France or anywhere else. The more active we are in practicing a mental and intellectual discipline of self persuasion and self censorship and less eager we are to meet people with subversive ideas. The consequences of that are the break-up of family ties and giving up on my education and even a trade because I was reduced, as many others were, to having a small nightshift job in a newspaper, devoting the rest of my time to the organization. As a local representative I received "training" to act as a liaison between the national headquarters and local representatives. I was ordered to go on a mission in Cisjordania and obeyed. I risked my life there for six months. That period was probably a peak. I also had four surgeries refusing blood transfusions each time which would not have been my position neither before nor after being in the cult.

What is both the strength and the weakness of such an ideology is its artificialness. People are surprised, when they hear ex members, talk about all this system of concepts integrated into you and by which you think and judge, by which you either feel guilt or gratitude and which can suddenly crumble as soon as you disobey. The problem is that I was conditioned to obey and feel guilty if I ever had subversive ideas. Mostly, I was conditioned to do, several times a day, this exercise of self persuasion and self censorship, whereas in the beginning they hammer you with tons of pseudoscientific arguments. Aside from Jehovah's Witnesses themselves American evangelical groups are devoting millions of dollars to disinformation campaigns while in Europe, the debate on "Intelligent Design" certainly has something to do with those campaigns.

When I came back to France from Cisjordania I found myself in another congregation. My health finally made me aware of the exclusiveness of the ideology. I was at the end of my rope working nights at the newspaper and devoting my daytime hours to the cult. I was just hammered physically and psychologically; my body commanded me to rest and that made me stray from all the eternal gymnastics. The indoctrination began to lose its grip on me and my critical thinking started to wake up. Little by little I became aware that I had integrated an ideology that had the characteristic of maintaining itself by legitimizing self censorship and self persuasion; the more I believe the more I obey and the more I obey the more I believe. I had put myself on auto-pilot for 10 years; even though I could distance myself the prejudice remains. One doesn't spend 10 years conditioned like this without keeping a certain relationship with guilt, duty and obligations.

I deeply regret wasting 10 years of my life even though I had a chance to open my eyes and make a very big change.

We have to understand that this is not a system that allows someone to think freely. It induces in them a mechanism that makes them feel guilty as soon as they think for themselves and imposes in them a duty of self persuasion. We can see the consequences of that: denial of blood transfusions, seizure of goods, etc. But the "ordinary crime" is to have made people lose their individuality and critical thinking for a cause they didn't choose. I would under normal circumstances never asked to serve as a human target in Cisjordania or to give up my education to do proselytizing or to mess up my career...

President: Contrary to Mr. Jaquette you weren't born in the Jehovah's Witnesses movement. Didn't your family try to warn you or discourage you?

Alain BERROU: No, They weren't aware of anything. That's how it goes traditionally: It's underground indoctrination. They tell young adults or teens that it's better not to talk to parents who could see as weird the fact that their spiritual project is only between them and God and that they will be free to make their

choice 2 or 3 years afterwards once they have looked at a few things together. When parents notice something it's usually too late. They have already integrated some of the parts of the self defense mechanism, some immunity system has already developed which operates on its own a bit like a an oyster that closes its shell as soon as the knife approaches as well as a "cognitive dissonance" : scientific arguments and ideas heard at school just can't overcome the huge disinformation campaign elaborated by very well organized structures that are using scientists and isolation claims. This disinformation is such that young people become completely immunized against information transmitted at school.

President: Blood transfusions are a major problem for Jehovah's Witnesses. You said you went through four surgeries as a member. How did you deal with that? Did you need blood transfusions? What do you know about the DVD produced by the Jehovah Witnesses Association on alternative methods to transfusion? What do you know about blood substitute products?

Alain BERROU: Worldwide, in the JW organization, there's a committee called hospital liaison formed by members who have an intellectual training that is a bit more elaborate then that of average members. They are equipped with textbooks produced by experts in infiltration campaigns aimed at hospitals and doctors. They favor arguments that are at times pseudoscientific and at times quite elaborate in order to convince doctors of the choice of their patients which, I must insist, are the result of indoctrination: As soon as they realize that, no ex member will refuse a blood transfusion.

Along with those disinformation campaigns, hospital liaison centers list doctors who are "receptive" and towards which Jehovah Witnesses facing a surgery requiring a blood transfusion can be oriented following a procedure that is very well known from members. They are required to inform local elders of the problem hospitals who will orient them towards determined doctors or clinics.

The conditions in which members sign wavers regarding blood transfusion are also interesting: Aside from the official ideology which requires denying blood the waver is actualized in a congregation meeting organized in January of each year. People are divided in groups affiliated to a local representative to which each member has to show their "card". They also make sure that everyone signed the wavier.

Jacques REMILLER: What about you? Did you get transfused? Was that ever medically required in your case? What were the blood substitute products?

Alain BERROU: My state didn't require transfusions but it could have...

President: What would have happened then?

Jacques REMILLER: He wouldn't be here...

Alain BERROU: I can thank a doctor who knew it wasn't my personal position...

President: In other words there's a risk.

Alain BERROU: Absolutely!

President: Have you ever heard of cases of Jehovah Witnesses who died as a result of refusing a transfusion?

Alain BERROU: I knew one person who was transfused against her will and who is now thankful for those who understood that her position was the result of indoctrination.

Nicolas JAQUETTE: In one of the three groups of my congregation in Paris, a young girl was suffering from leukemia and was treated for three years with alternative methods: it worked for a while until she died...

Notice that children are persuaded just as much as adults are by the cult that they have to deny blood transfusions. Up until recently children still had to wear a card signed by both parents. A law was just adopted to forbid that: Parents must now, under instructions from the cult, indicate "personally" on a blank page, their choice for their children. The cult's seal of approval is not on it, which relieves them from all legal responsibility. Only parents are, therefore, responsible. An article published in the magazine *Awake!* on May 22 1994 made a lot of noise: titled "Youths Who Put God First" we could see 24 pictures of children who died as a result of refusing a blood transfusion, threatening to unplug the IV if needed, etc., which tells about the circumstances of their death.

President: Was that in France?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: No, those weren't French kids. That issue was distributed worldwide, including France, and systematically quoted in those January special meetings which were used to show a "good examples" to children. There was a double language: Not only did they force children to respect the decree but they were told of how the attitude of those children had a positive effect for the cult on the medical staff who were asking questions. Some of them even allowed themselves to be indoctrinated. I would have had the same reaction, had I been hospitalized at that time.

It still feels strange today. After un-constructing all of that, I think that blood is not bad but the idea of a surgery that would require a transfusion makes me feel bad, sort of weirdly disgusted. Alain compared it to a situation where a Muslim would be required to eat pork... The first thing I did when I got out was to eat black pudding, eating blood was also forbidden. I got sick on it... I have been induced with extremely invading mechanisms.

President: You know that decisions rendered by French jurisdictions, fiscal advantages are granted to local JW associations. What do you make of that?

Alain BERROU: That money comes from "donations" from members subjugated by an extremely dishonest campaign.

President: That decision grants some organizations a cultural status. Do you have an opinion on that?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: Contrary to Alain, I was still a member when those decisions were rendered and obviously applauded by the cult. As soon as the announcement of tax exemptions was made they told us it was possible for us to give twice as much...

Another outstanding discovery for which I could almost congratulate Jehovah's Witnesses is their wish to dissociate themselves from the Catholic church with which they share most of their Christian faith. They think Catholics are "false religion" whereas they are "in the truth." One of their sayings is that contrary to Catholics they don't do the collection: donations are put in a box in the back of the room in which members are invited to freely deposit. Since a few years, however, they found something amazing: "resolutions." Letters are sent to congregations exposing a need for funds for a given purpose and asking the congregation if it would be able to give a certain amount each month to the JW society. The vote is done by raising hands: obviously, everyone will raise their hand. There's no factual collection but a voluntary donation from the group. That is primarily taken from the member's donations. The congregation still has to make monthly fees (electricity, telephone, etc.) if their's enough left. If they lack funds they'll ask members to be more generous. As is the case in many cults the unwritten rule suggests members to donate 10% of their wages. My parents had four children and very little resources; I don't know how my mother could manage but each month, as the paycheck came in, an envelope was used to give money to the cult. Members were told that the end of times was coming and that it was, therefore, useless to make any plans for the future; The cult will put your money to better use.

Jaques MYARD: When is that supposed to be? Looks like they missed a few times...

President: Hasn't it been seven times already?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: It's more than that

Jaques MYARD: What is the official prediction?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: Each announcement is strangely followed by a period of collective amnesia... There was an announcement in 1975 I had never heard of until I arrived to Paris in 2001. Some Jehovah Witnesses, who felt a bit more free than others, told me that the end of times was to be in 1975 because the earth's history was arriving to the end of its

sixth millennium, as established by the biblical calendar. Weirdly enough, the date disappeared... Jehovah Witnesses could care less about how the rest of society perceives them; what is important is the people inside. They speak a double language. The head of the cult is called the Governing Body and it is infallible: its members are the instrument of God that informs the people. When it's wrong, however, and that happens quite often mostly when it has to do with dates, they remind everyone that they are only humans and that a new spiritual clarification lead them to a new interpretation of a verse from Bible.

There are the "anointed", the generation of which they say "this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place"(1). Up until the end of the 1990s all the literature stated that the generation in question was that of 1914 and it was said that the end of times should occur before that generation disappears... We can observe the perversion of that as most people from that generation died in the last few years. It became rather obvious that the Governing Body was wrong.

Matthew 24:34:36 : "I say to you, this generation 20 will not pass away until all these things have taken place."

They explained that the word "generation" should be understood in a larger sense. Each time they find a way to play with words to claim that they weren't completely wrong, that the end of times is a sure thing and it's coming. Since 2000 however they don't prophesize any dates however. They seem to have learned...

President: Why are you both wearing dark suits? Was that just a random thing or was that related to your cult experience?

Nicolas JAQUETTE: The majority of the assembly doesn't generally wear bright suits. No sir. That was completely random.

Alain BERROU: I wish to inform this commission, and I am fully aware of the consequences of my statement: Jehovah Witnesses are extremely procedural... I remember, as a representative, being asked to copy, as dictated, unwritten instructions regarding cases of sexual abuse on children. I wish to read you instructions I have personally received, in a perfectly official situation from a representative of the national branch of the Jehovah Witnesses. The movement has a whole system of parallel justice and local representatives receive a manual on how to deal with members who assert too much intellectual freedom. In cases of sexual abuse on children this is what they made me write:

"Article 62 of the penal code states that anyone aware of an assault on a child who doesn't warn authorities is liable for legal procedures. If the perpetrator of such abuse is a baptized member of the congregation here are the instructions to follow:

First of all, call the "Service Department" (headquarters) of the society to get instructions.

Secondly, immediately investigate the facts.

Thirdly, form a judicial committee.

Then, eventually, call the authorities.

Elders are the eyes of the law, of the ministers of the cult and, as such, are bonded by confessional confidentiality derived from the professional confidentiality (article 378 of the penal code). They are freed from that obligation only in cases of incest, sexual prejudices or illegal abortions. The Governing Body will determine the best solution for the congregation and its reputation."

Though I have never been faced to such a situation I did attend "judicial committees" and heard many victims say that their complaints were buried. They were pressured into "forgiving" if the assault wasn't too obvious.

President: In other words, there's some sort of a parallel justice system that substitutes that of the republic?

Alain BERROU: Exactly!

President: To conclude, what do you expect from a commission such as ours in order to improve the fate of the children in that community?

Alain BERROU: Amongst the places eager to react to eventual alarm signals is school. Unfortunately teachers, the school doctor or social worker are not always aware they are dealing with a cult due to the seduction campaign orchestrated by the parents who are methodically debriefed. Maybe we should make them aware of the objections those children may occasionally have in philosophy or history courses; aside from the Jehovah Witnesses the danger could be fundamentalism.

Members of parliament could also work on the prescription period of the "About-Picard" act: a victim needs a lot of time to elaborate his/her point of view, take the necessary distance, analyze, realize he/she was victimized and learn to live with that. My attorney warned me that after being 10 years in the cult I had to be prepared to sustain 10 years of proceedings, forensic psychiatry and counter-expertise without even being sure of the final result: I finally gave up on that. Not only is it hard to understand the law but time is also needed to comprehend, analyze and finally commit.

Nicolas JAQUETTE: I agree with Alain Berrou on the question of education. Action is needed from the teachers but also from the medical field, to counter the seduction campaigns used in hospitals by the Jehovah Witnesses that, at times, become real threats. Fiscal decisions made by the government, however, are hard to understand and lived the hard way by ex members: It's not normal that some fines take so much time to be paid... How does a lobby manage to maintain public authorities inactive for so long?

Mostly, we would like to shout about what we went through; we

are glad we could do just that today but the chances are extremely rare. We should multiply them, knowing that many of those who managed to leave would prefer to stay put and hesitate in getting more involved in the fight against cults; because of that we tend to minimize the number of victims. Contacting ADFI is not for everyone: many people disappear from the landscape without talking to anyone and without ever finding solutions. They remain with heavy consequences. I realized, by meeting many of them, that traces of the cult's conditioning were still in them because they didn't work on reconstruction. Support for victim associations is, thus, extremely important. One would think they lack visibility and consideration and that they were kept out of the debate. Your initiative shows that this is not the case and I hope there will be others, It has the merit of allowing the deciders of this country to analyze the situation without relying solely on experts, lawyers, jurists and psychologists who can only have a fragmented view of the problem. We thank you.

President: The commission thanks you also.