

To: Mrs Anne Brasseur  
President of the Parliamentary  
Assembly of the Council of Europe  
Avenue de l'Europe  
67075 Strasbourg Cedex

Or-Yehuda, Israel, 6 April, 2014

Dear sir,

I, Professor (Emeritus) Rimon Kasher, am a religious Jew and have researched and taught for more than 40 years in the Faculty for the Study of the Torah in the Jewish-religious Bar-Ilan University. My main subjects through those years, and to this day - as I am still publishing papers - are Bible in the Department for the Study of Bible, focusing on the Jewish religious beliefs during the Biblical and the Byzantine Era, and I also research the development of New Religious Movements.

Both as a member of one of the "old" religions and as a Scholar on the subject of religion, I wish to express my deep concern and disagreement with regards to the recent report to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe by Mr. Salles concerning "Cult Excesses".

Based on my understanding of the term "religion", any attempt to differentiate between the Western Monotheistic Religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and the New Religious Movements of the last century or two is without merit, both academically and morally:

1. Academically: for dozens of years the term "cult" has been deliberately cancelled out of the academic discourse on New Religious Movements, as it is prejudiced and not neutral or scientific. Phenomenologically, there is no essential difference between the 'old' religions and new religions, as the latter category corresponds fully with the characteristics of the phenomena we know as 'religion'.

Thus, any attempt to 'recruit' older religions to persecute new religions is doomed for failure and is absurd.

2. Morally: the attempt to differentiate between various religions as far as their value ('good' vs. 'bad' ones) is a direct infringement of the Freedom of Religion and Belief, as laid in article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights:

*"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."*

As an additional point, it should be of concern that wherever new religions are ostracized, any minority faith will soon follow as a target, as it is the fact they are a minority which exposes them to be stereotyped. There are instances I have been informed on of Hassidic Jews, Baptists, Evangelical groups and Muslims who have suffered from the same type of treatment as "cult" members, in France, due to their beliefs. Every religion, no matter how big, is a minority somewhere.

I sincerely hope this report's obvious push to export the French Model to the entire continent and marginalize and discriminate against the many members of new religious movements across Europe will not come to pass, as it will be a step backwards for the freedoms and basic rights guaranteed to all.

Regards,

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