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## **FRANCE: Anthroposophy: French State Television censored for its anti-cult bias**

### **FRANCE: Anthroposophy: French State Television censored for its anti-cult bias**

*The French Council of Journalistic Ethic and Mediation found that France 2 relied excessively on apostate ex-members, and presented a distorted view of Steiner schools.*

*by Massimo Introvigne*

Bitter Winter (15.05.2023) – The French Council of Journalistic Ethic and Mediation (CDJM) rendered on April 11 an interesting opinion about a complaint filed by the National Association for the Promotion and Future of Steiner-Waldorf Pedagogy (ANPAPS), representing the schools inspired by Anthroposophy in France, against the government-owned TV network France 2.

France's journalistic milieus are normally biased against "cults" and tend to take seriously the information supplied by the governmental anti-cult agency MIVILUDES, which is often criticized abroad, and by "apostate" ex-members of religious movements. However, even in France there are limits, and the CDJM decision, which accepted several claims by the Anthroposophists, is extremely interesting because it censors French media's typical approach to "cults."

The case concerned a program titled "The Steiner Method, an Alternative Pedagogy Under Surveillance," broadcast by France 2 on November 3, 2022. The program stated that "the Steiner-Waldorf schools strive to train future citizens who would not be able to fit into our Republic," which corresponds to the accusation of "separatism" from common French "Republican" values commonly directed against both Islam and "cults."

Rather than videos from present-day Steiner-Waldorf schools, the footage used consisted of "images from another century, in black and white, showing a group of students walking in circles in white togas, like the Solar Temple cult," notorious for its mass suicides and homicides in the last decade of the 20th century. Statements by the MIVILUDES were repeated uncritically, and the program offered a tribune to Grégoire Perra, well-known as "the main detractor of Steiner-Waldorf pedagogy in France and of Anthroposophy."

A request by the Anthroposophists to publish their response and a correction was ignored. France 2 defended itself by stating, inter alia, that it relied on statements by the

MIVILUDES, a governmental agency. While, predictably, the CDJM stated that France 2 cannot be censored for quoting the MIVILUDES, it found aspects of the program's presentation of the Steiner-Waldorf schools both inaccurate and sensational. It also censored the statement that it is difficult to obtain information on the Steiner-Waldorf schools from inside, observing that on the contrary the schools are open to visitors and primary sources about them are easily available online. The CDJM thus concluded that "France 2 violated the ethical obligation of accuracy."

It also censored France 2 because it "chose not to broadcast contemporary images, but to insert black and white archival images of children running around in white togas. This excerpt is neither identified nor presented as an archival image, with an explicit mention on the screen. It has the effect of creating confusion on the current nature of the education that is provided in these institutions."

Finally, the CDJM also noted that France 2 gave a prominent part in its program to anti-Anthroposophist Grégoire Perra and another opponent while the response by Anthroposophy was reduced to "a simple sentence given about fifteen seconds at the end of the sequence in question." This, "when two witnesses, in particular, had spoken at length about their opposition to the [Steiner-Waldorf educational] method, cannot suffice as presentation of a reply, which would have been essential to achieve the balance requested by good journalistic practice."

Finally, the CDJM notes that, when requested by the Anthroposophists, "no rectification of error was made to the online text accompanying the video of the sequence in question, and that France 2 therefore violated its ethical obligation to rectify inaccuracies and infringements of the truthfulness of the facts."

In conclusion, while not all claims of the Anthroposophists

were accepted, the CDJM concluded that France 2 on several points “violated.., the obligations of fairness and verification of the facts. It also failed to respect the ethical obligation to correct errors.”

This incident is not isolated. Throughout the world, and with a special viciousness in France, media presents issues about groups labeled as “cults” by relying on statements by anti-cultists and “apostate” ex-members, i.e., the minority of ex-members who turn into militant critics of the movement they have left. Media do not verify the facts, and refuse to give equal space to members of the movements who would present their different points of view. This may only result in biased and defamatory reports.

Professional watchdogs such as the CDJM may play an important role in correcting this widespread form of journalistic malpractice. Perhaps, more religious movements should file complaints with them in the future.

## **HRWF Note**

**France 2** is not the voice of the French State. It is a French public national television channel. It is part of the state-owned France Télévisions group, along with France 3, France 4, France 5 and France Info. France Télévisions also participates in Arte and Euronews.

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*Photo: The Steiner-Waldorf school in Verrières-le-Buisson, France. Credits.*

**Further reading about FORB in France on HRWF website**

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