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# The Pastoral Intervention of the Orthodox Church in front of the Internet Activities of Dangerous Sects

## Abstract

Our thesis focuses on pointing out the need of pastoral counseling and intervention of the Orthodox Church, as well as its collaboration with relevant social factors, that aim to cope with the ever increasing action of occult sects and parareligious groups in contemporary postmodern society. After clarifying the term "sects" conceptually and explaining the criteria of their categorization, we move on to highlight the expanded dimensions of their devastating and deconstructionist work for our society. We make an effort to describe, even in general terms, the methodology of their leaders, as well as the social characteristics of groups

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or persons running the risk of being trapped in their tentacles. Within the framework presented above, the use of internet by sects as a communicative tool to attract their members is also included. Reference is also made to gangs handling material of satanists via Internet, Facebook groups that praise Lucifer and approach sensitive souls of kids and chatrooms that undertake to "explain" theories of darkness and occult to innocent children. In addition, we refer to sites that encourage suicidal behaviour or incite to suicide. We make an effort to describe the way in which sects take advantage of Internet, not only for catching new members and providing them with instructive material, but also integrating them in the activities of the sect. We present a list of specific proposals, in order to prove that pastors are capable of contributing decisively in coping with such a problem.

Keywords
Pastoral Theology, sect, occult, parareligious groups, proselytism

## 1    Introduction

In the vast and uncontrollable virtual environment of the internet, in which user's attention shifts from inter-subjectivity to self-reporting[1], efforts of occult sectarians and parareligious groups to achieve their various goals unfortunately gain ground in our modern world. It's obvious that evaluation of the way, in which the internet comes to serve, as a valuable tool, the various goals of these closed groups and at the same time expand, as a multiplier, the risks that derive from the reckless trapping of users and especially the young users, into these strange sites,

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[1]    E. Halabi, *Η χρήση του διαδικτύου στην ποιμαντική πράξη της Εκκλησίας* (Θεσσαλονίκη: non-published Thesis, 2012), p.129.

cannot be achieved as a matter of course. It presupposes a suffi-
cient understanding of the broader content of the objectives of
these occult sects. and the decoding of the methods, by which
they attempt each time to achieve their implementation.

## 2    The term "sect": A conceptual approach

So let's try to approach our subject starting with a conceptual
approach to the term "sect". By "sect" we mean an organized
group of people who share the same beliefs and follow with
absolute dedication someone, who masters the role of the
teacher or group leader and is differentiated from another gen-
eral social group or collectivity.[2] Given that under these circum-
stances the will of a free person is being manipulated, we would
say that sect is an organization with a complete structure and
possibly a religious mantle, which, regardless of whether or not
it declares religious purposes, violates human rights and social
balance.[3] These are, therefore, organizations whose followers
have most likely been recruited by illegal and misleading
means. The basic belief and teaching of the members of such
closed groups is that there is a "hidden" reality that cannot be
made accessible through science. Occultists accept that the ap-

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[2]    Etymologically, the term "secta" comes from the Latin word "secta, ae",
which is derived from the verb "sequor" which means "follow": Σ.
Κουμανούδης, *Λεξικόν Λατινοελληνικόν* (Αθήνα: Γρηγόρης, 2006), p.
1068.

[3]    This is a definition given in 1999 by the "French Inter-Ministerial Mission
for the Struggle against sects", which is accountable to the French Prime
Minister himself: Α. Βλιαγκόφτης, Το σκηνικό των σύγχρονων αιρέσεων.
http://aktines.blogspot.gr/2014/06/blog-post_18.html (10 Απρ. 2016).
«Sects tend to be fundamentally at odds with society. Ecumenical rela-
tions with other religious groups rarely exist.....»: W. Zellner, M.
Petrowsky. (Eds.), *Sects, cults and spiritual communities. A sociological
analysis.* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1998), p. 158.

proach to this "occult" reality can be made through "occult" techniques.[4]

Today, there are a plethora of sects worldwide, which are categorized in accordance with different criteria. Sometimes they are categorized in accordance with values they teach, sometimes in accordance with how dangerous they are for the society and person in general, sometimes in accordance with the number of their members or their financial strength, and sometimes in connection with the target group they aim to catch. Generally speaking, we can characterize as occults satanic, neo-satanic, neo-pagan, eschatological and guruist groups, the so-called economic religions, referring directly to parareligious systems that have been changed into social and economic enterprises, as well as adjacent social spaces.[5] In any case, each sect forms its own dogmatic framework of beliefs, its own system of hierarchy, its own code of communication, and finally, its own morphological characteristics. However, what all of sects have in common is their obvious goal of gaining power over their members, whom then they aim to manipulate in various ways and mainly financially. In Greece, since 1995, 422 such groups have been registered, which have been characterized by the official Church as groups incompatible with the Orthodox faith.[6] Obviously this number has been increased dramatically since then. Dangers that have always arisen from the uncontrollable action of sects - and especially the occult sects -, even be-

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[4]   Α. Αλεβιζόπουλος, *Αποκρυφισμός, Γκουρουισμός*. (Αθήνα: Νέα Εποχή, 1993), p. 5.

[5]   π. Κ. Τσουρός, Νεοφανείς αιρέσεις και παραθρησκεία Α', *Διάλογος 42 (2005),* pp.*1*-3.

[6]   List compiled by the 7th Conference of Authorized Orthodox Churches and Holy Dioceses on issues of sects and Parareligion (Aliartos 20-26.9.1995). See on the website of the Synodal Committee on the heresies of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece: http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/ holysynod/commitees/heresies/ omades outchrist.html. For more information on the activities of religious groups and sects: Σ. Α. Λιόσης, *Γνωστές θρησκείες, αιρέσεις και παραθρησκευτικές ομάδες στην Ελλάδα,* (Αθήνα: Άθως, 2004).

fore they take advantage of the internet tool in their communication strategy, have always been particularly important. However, in our present study we do not approach sects and parareligious groups activity as a mainly ecclesiological deviation from the theological teaching and the experience of the Orthodox Church. We highlight the dangerous consequences of their actions on the person, the family and society as a whole, regardless of religious expression or religious beliefs.

## 3    Dangerous consequences of sects' actions on person, family and society as a whole

It is, therefore, a huge social, apart from pastoral, problem, which brutally affects on the structures of the family and society as well. It is, after all, a global problem, which, as will be shown below, is made even more complicated by its online extensions. For instance, in 2012, Russian President Vladimir Putin called on the Russian government to tighten the rules governing the activities of religious groups, so that any sects that emerge and multiply throughout the country can be enforced. According to experts, there are currently 300 to 500 dangerous sects in Russia, with a total of 800,000 members! All of these groups, according to the Russian president, constitute a threat to society and person, as they hunt and seize "not only people's souls but also their property".[7]
Some sects target on solitary individuals. Others attract intellectuals. Behind the pretext of various seminars, they exert psychological pressure on people. Many groups of this kind act in a secret way, behind the mask of a fake presentation and are difficult to be detected. Their goal is to turn potential victims into

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[7]    Ε. Ζήνωνος, 2016. Η Ρώσικη Δούμα ανάβει το πράσινο φως για έλεγχο και περιορισμό των δραστηριοτήτων των σεκτών. http://www.ppu.org.cy/index.php/en/49-heresies/sects-cults/998-duma.html (10 Apr. 2016).

"pawns" in the hands of a guru or the messiah of the organiza-
tion, reaching what is called the "abolition of existence".[8]

The consequences of a person's involvement in an organization
like that are also important for his family. Not infrequently,
victim's family is led to financial hardship, paying enough for
this involvement. Sometimes the family is led to dissolution, if it
has not the intention of approving of the "existential" choice of
its member. Quarrels are often, which can lead even to the
murder of the parent or spouse, who does not give in to the
wishes of the victim-follower. He is completely dependent on
the leader of the cult, the guru or the teacher. At the social level,
such groups, characterized as "destructive cults", have been
proven to be involved in specific illegal and immoral practices,
including: a) Child abuse, neglect and death, b) illegal immigra-
tion, c) drug use and trafficking, d) fraud and deception in the
recruitment of fans, e) illegal economic activities and opera-
tions with colossal winnings, f) thefts, g) threats, harassment
and blackmail of the families of the victims and those who criti-
cize the cult, taking advantage of lawsuits and indecent acts, h)
storage and trafficking of weapons and ammunition, i) sexual
abuse and prostitution, j) kidnappings, murders, attempted
murders and k) psychological and emotional damage. Many
members of devastating cults, who managed to escape, have
reported practices mentioned above.[9]

## 4 The way sects integrate internet tool into their com-munication strategy to attract their members. Stages and targets

So, next to the philosophy and self-knowledge seminars, the
sports events with oriental philosophy and the excursions asso-
ciated with lectures and more generally occult events, the pro-

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8   Διάλογος, τ. 13, p. 14.
9   From the information of the Panhellenic Parents' Association for the pro-
    tection     of     the     Family     and     the     Person:
    http://www.ppu.gr/greek/sects_gr.htm#family.

vocative environment of the internet is now being added, which is known to have a huge, almost universal, penetration in young people. Today, young people, lost in the ideological quagmire of our modern disintegrated post-modern society, which proves to be powerless to guide the individual on the path of his general self-realization, are desperately looking for a way out of their modern impasses. Obviously, they are looking for taking advantage of the tools of modern culture. Their constant search in forums and mailing lists to find answers to their existential questions and websites on facebook or blogs of, let's say, spiritual content, are indeed a sign of their spiritual thirst within them and a presumption of the pursuit mentioned above. This, of course, is attempted without the necessary self-knowledge of the inadequacy of self-proclaimed online educators, which, through the formation of false online identities[10], make this type of communication problematic and dangerous.

This gap is cleverly exploited by sects, in order to integrate the Internet tool into the communication strategy they apply to attract their members. A simple search of the word "satanism" in google is enough to display infinite pages and profiles on social media with titles such as "Satan", "666", "Lucifer", "Demon", etc. on the computer screen. As those who, as journalists, report the extent of the phenomenon of occultism, but also others through their social experiences agree, "gangs that deliver satanic material via Internet, Facebook groups that praise Eusphorus and approach sensitive souls, chat rooms that undertake to "explain" to the uninitiated members such theories of darkness and occultism "are unfortunately a tangible reality. Internet has now become the most common way to trap somebody in blackmail and satanism and make him follow dark paths that go beyond logic itself. Moreover, others like to down-

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[10]  In the "online" society formed on the internet there is no objective reality, but this is constructed by the historical conditions and the individual choices of its users. In this context, identity is fluid, changeable, constantly rebuilt and constructed through speech: D. Barney, The Network society, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), pp. 16-18.

load death metal songs from youtube or other sites and after "enjoying" the music of the lyrics, they then try to decode the confusing words or terms that refer to the teaching of occult texts".[11]

## 5 Stage A: Display of various satanic content, announcement of satanic ceremonies and invitation to children in order to participate in events

Internet now provides them, in an easy and fast way, just in a simple google search, with the ability to enter satanic content discussion forums and get the "necessary" information. The display of various satanic content, the announcement of satanic ceremonies and the invitation to children to participate in them are unfortunately signs of this online reality. Posting detailed instructions on the websites for the exact ritual of ceremonies makes gradual introduction of candidates possible. Encouraging the invocation of satanic forces, insulting God in a vulgar way, catching young people in chat rooms, and exerting pressure on members to register on specific sites of satanic and black magic content are equally distinct aspects of this diligent effort of sects that take advantage of the internet tool to find their potential victims.[12] According to researches, there are more than 100,000 websites that provide information on planning, commiting and recording a suicide, of which at least 80 suicides are presented in gruesome detail. These websites, like the relevant online forums, often encourage suicidal behavior, incite suicide or facilitate it.[13]

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[11] Πώποτας, Δ. 2014. Κυκλώματα διακινούν σατανιστικό υλικό μέσω Ίντερνετ. *Πρώτο Θέμα*: 21 Ιουνίου.

[12] https://www.enallaxnews.gr/2015/01/12/satanistes-prosilitizoun-neous-mesw-diadiktiou-sthn-maurh-mageia/.

[13] L. Biddle, J. Donovan, et al., Suicide and the Internet. *British Medical Journal 336 (2008)* pp. 800-802. https://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/336/7648/800 (10 Apr. 2016).

The unchanged reference, however creepy it is, to an online call of a satanic sect for wandering the dark paths of Satanism will shed light over our research: "Satan also gives us knowledge. I'm driving on the right track without a book. As we transform and grow, our lives change for the better and we become much happier. Through Satan we learn how to take control of our lives and our destiny, instead of being at the mercy of destiny. We learn to heal ourselves and fulfill our desires, using the powers of our mind and soul. To do the dedication, we perform a formal ceremony. This is done with our free will. We make a choice, as opposed to carrying us to a Christian church and reciting canned prayers (stolen and distorted by Eastern flocks) in front of a bunch of idiots.

With knowledge and research, we can prove without a doubt, that "the Nazarene", "Jehovah" and their ilk, are all fictitious characters, stolen and derived from distorted concepts, in order to remove all spiritual knowledge, so that only some "selected" can dominate in the world using the powers of their mind ...Since too many people have been violently catechized with these characters and whatever they represent (Satan's Enemies), we permanently denounce them at the dedication ceremony. This proves to be psychologically healthy and liberating. The ritual of initiation is very personal, unless you decide to have your friends participated or if many people do it together".[14] On the same website and a little below, a piece of information is provided about the required materials for the initiation ceremony, while a brief satanic prayer is quoted. Reference to such a prayer should be avoided for obvious reasons. More than 10,000 are the daily visitors to the "Church of the Devil". There are websites that praise Satan and give all the necessary information about Satanism and voodoo, while "visitors" have the "unique" opportunity to read the "black book" of the founder of the "Church of Satan".

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[14]    http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:fr64Cd3-Ci4J:satanismgr. webs. com / + & cd=1&hl=el&ct=clnk&gl=gr. (31. Okt. 2015).

## 6   Stage B: Connecting potential members with representative organizations

After the potential victims get the necessary information, we proceed to the following step: The communication, mainly via e-mails, with the representative organizations. Once they win the confidence of the victims-canditates, they make appointments and attend Satanist parties and initiation ceremonies to be accepted by Lucifer. As the head of Cybercrime Prosecution of the Greece Police department general M. Sfakianakis explained in "Thema": "online Satanists make appointments and they meet each other. They have their own clubs and no one can forbid anything. Only human sacrifices are forbidden".[15] At the same time, the general underlined that "the Cybercrime Prosecution does not have the necessary buttons to close profiles and sites"[16], but neither has the legitimacy to do so. Equally important is the reference that as a result of childrens' proselytism by the leading staff of the sect, victims had been derailed in its channels and their parents had lost contact with them, as they only recognized their online parents.[17]

## 7   Why Internet environment is suitable for achieving goals of sects

The internet, therefore, functions as a tool of unique value in the hands of sects, which plays an important role in catching new members, supplying them with the necessary "enlightening" material and their gradual integration into the activities of the sect, decisively contributing to the construction of the first relationship with them. The Internet environment is ideal for achieving the goals mentioned above: First of all, the multimedia language it uses moves from physical materiality to demate-

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[15]  http://www.patrisnews.com/nea-enimerosi/ellada/kyklomata-diakinoyn-satanistiko-yliko-meso-internet (26 June 2014).

[16]  Ibidem.

[17]  Πώποτας, Δ. Ibid.

rialization of the experience.[18] What is said or written in a chat room, a blog or facebook is disconnected from the person who says, writes or expresses it. Communication via the internet is instantaneous and reciprocal. Any computer user may be connected to the Internet to be informed but also to inform, exchanging views through a more participatory and less controlled, often completely non controlled, communicative channel. Proselytizing, in this case, becomes easy and effective. The authority of the online counselor is not controlled or is of no interest for its users. The center of contemporary internet communication moves from reality to virtuality.[19] "Virtual spaces" and "virtual communities" are now being created, where the social and cultural dividing lines that exist in the real world cease to exist. In such an environment of freedom and self-determination, the mystical instructions of a sect leader, who seeks his potential victims, are now supposed to be undeniable and unaffected.

## 8  Orthodox Church's stategy to cope with risks arising from victims' involvement in internet activity of sects

And the question is how a responsible strategy can be planned to cope with all of these risks arising from the involvement of victims, and especially young victims, in the tentacles of these dark internet and non-occult routes. It is obvious that spiritual shielding of the potential victims is the most appropriate method of preventing the negative consequences of the phenomenon. All of those getting involved in solving the problem scientifically emphasize the need for activation and cooperation of

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18    Halabi, E. 2012. ibid, p. 128.
19    "A new powerful social structure has emerged on the Internet, the online society, a new economy, the computer-world economy and a new culture, the culture of real virtuality": M. Castells, *The information age, society and culture. The rise of the network society,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 336

all stakeholders, in order to undertake an effort to inform the potential victims about the relevant risks. And if the solution of all major social problems presupposes the cooperation of all intra-social collectives, the Orthodox Church, with such a great dispersion of its metropolises and parishes, cannot be absent from this effort. So let's put our finger "on the types of nails" and answer the question of how the Church can, through its shepherds, contribute to the effective handling of possible web dangers posed by the online wanderings of young people on occult sites. Let's make an attempt to list some thoughts-suggestions, which could possibly contribute positively to the prospect of solving the problem.

## 9 Providing young people with necessary information about devastating consequences of indiscriminate, reckless and excessive use of the internet

If the addiction of young people to the internet is the cause of their being trapped on dangerous websites, (in the environment of which links to dangerous occult sects act as well), then shepherds have no choice but to cooperate with all interested parties in the context of a responsible effort to protect users and especially young Internet users, from risks mentioned above. As a matter of fact, they constitute his flock as well. It is absolutely necessary and imperative to provide young people with necessary information about devastating consequences of indiscriminate, reckless and excessive use of the internet. The channels of communication between the authorities in charge and shepherds must be constantly open, in order to disseminate the necessary information to the parents and the potential victims, young people, who carelessly, often wander in the vast space of the internet.

The organization of specialized conferences, the preaching during the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, through which the detailed information of the parishioners about dangerous websites (that will be detected and marked) will be achieved by shepherds, the discussion of the problem in catechism circles, the writing

of relevant articles in newspapers and magazines and many other initiatives are indeed vital actions that will serve the purpose of an antiheretical pastoral strategy aimed to protect the flock of the Church from the tentacles of heresies. At the same time, they will respond to the broader purpose of informing free citizens about anything opposes the value of every human person. The Orthodox Church can undoubtedly contribute to the above goal with its pastoral structures. At least in the context of primary prevention, the cooperation of the Church with state authorities in charge can be, in our opinion, particularly valuable.

## 10   The significance of unceasing interest of pastors about the problems of young people

Pastors have to respond to their innate need for meaning in their lives: The spiritual rulers of our society, including the rulers of the Church, must honestly ask themselves some questions that require compelling and  honest answers: Do today's young people, especially in the Greek society of crisis and misery, feel trapped in a world that suspends any prospect of socialization and self-realization? Does their attempt to build another kind of sociability in the internet environment run counter to the non-fulfillment of this need through the institution of family or the erosion of the institution of friendship, which adolescents idealize? Does inner loneliness of  young people make them seek after online friends, who come to cover their innate need to build social relationships and enrich their social experiences? Does society itself, with its insurmountable impasses, instinctively enhance their searches in general and their online searches in specific? Do children have a spiritual thirst that remains unsatisfied as a result of a spiritual and especially pastoral analgesia? After all, is social status of modern reality responsible for the endless online wanderings of young people, who, in their efforts to fill in these gaps, are constantly surfing the Internet without realizing the dangers involved?
If the answers to all of the questions mentioned above is yes, then undoubtedly, the active, continuous and uninterrupted

care of the Orthodox Church for the personal, spiritual and material problems of the young people must be activated immediately. Shepherds need to complete their didactic, enlightening, guiding and generally pastoral work towards young people with their positive and absolutely practical interest in their daily life, their concerns and their personal worries and anxieties. At the same time, the pastoral Church must nourish spiritual pursuits of the young people. And this will be done not only or mainly online, but with an effort to attract and lead them, in addition to other collectives, to the parish life of the Church. There they will find the necessary answers to their spiritual pursuits, not only because they will accept rational-scientific arguments, but also because they will be invited to recapture Church as a loving community and creative spiritual laboratory, which aims to present another life proposal within the modern world.[20] Perhaps the development of their tangible interpersonality within intra-social collectives will contribute positively to their gradual liberation from their endless online wanderings. Unfortunately today, parishes have been transformed into inhospitable places and shepherds, unfortunately, are often indifferent and do not accept the anxieties of young people as theirs. As a result, while leaving the field of their souls uncultivated, other enemies emerge, including members of occult sects, to "cultivate" and poison it. Unfortunately, this is an admission that is often made by the bishops of the Church themselves.[21] Therefore, the question is how the Orthodox Church today will be able to activate a process of reviving the authenticity of the parish. A parish, whose members will be the bearers and transmitters of the genuine interpersonality described above and at the same time, will give their orthodox testimony in modern society context in which they live and move. Thus only the message of the Gospel is updated, trans-

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[20] Α. Κολιοφούτης, Ηθική και ποιμαντική του διαδικτύου. *Ανάλεκτα Πεμπτουσίας 18(2014),* pp. 3-26.

[21] http://imd.gr/site/news/3/514.

forms society fervently and healls ontologically the communica-
tion of intra-social heterogeneities.[22]

The interest and pastoral care of shepherds should be focused
more on the people who are most at risk of victimization. Ac-
cording to research, "everyone is vulnerable to the trap of a
destructive cult or occult sect. Smartness, education or philo-
sophical composition has nothing to do with that. However,
people with psychological problems and weak will or with am-
bitious plans for the future have a higher risk of being trapped.
At risk are also victims of loneliness and uncertainty, as well as
trustworthy and well-meaning people who can be easily per-
suaded that the organization can offer them the secret of hap-
piness, success, or mental and physical health. Suitable victims
are also romantics, idealists and friends of utopia".[23] The crisis
of moral values, the consequences of which we all experience,
the alienation of social institutions, as well as the cultural deficit
of our age, exacerbated by the current economic crisis, extend
the problem even more. Above all, however, sectarian move-
ments are hurting young people. They are going through the
critical phase of their value self-determination and the for-
mation of their self-perception of what they will eventually be
called upon to contribute to society as a whole, within which
they are to live and realize themselves.[24] Young people are be-
ing victimized because, as aspiring members of the organiza-
tion, they will serve its values with enthusiasm and self-denial,
they will idealize their supposed goals, and they will realize the
vision of the longevity of the sect.

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[22] Α. Βαρριάς, *Μοντέλα ποιμαντικής του κοινωνικού περιθωρίου,*
(Θεσσαλονίκη: Πουρναρά, 2005), p. 58.

[23]

http://www.impantokratoros.gr/sectes_katastrofikes_latreies.el.as
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[24] At this age, "the soul is transformed from the objective into the subjective
spirit, and the process of distinguishing the personal 'ego' and discover-
ing the subjective world 'by itself' is intensified": Ι. Κορναράκης, *Θέματα
ποιμαντικής Ψυχολογίας,* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Κυριακίδη, 1998), p. 183.

## 11 The pastoral assistance in the awakening of families as a way of coping with the problem preventively

The application of a family-centered pastoral care on behalf of the pastors of the Church will contribute decisively to the confrontation of incoherent forces that function disruptively of the family unity. Parents need to be aware of the beneficial effects of open communication channels between family members and the devastating consequences of a peculiar family isolation: Family members live on the same roof, but are entrenched in their individuality and systematically avoid sharing their fears, anxieties, or dreams. Shepherds must intervene cautiously and through individualized pastoral counseling to warn parents about the consequences of their total and exclusive devotion to extra-family affairs, which leads to exclusion of their children from their parental range.

When children become the recipients of such an exclusion, then they will seek to fill in the gap that will be caused elsewhere. As a result, online counseling of fake leaders will replace parental care, leading to all the negative consequences entailing this relocation. Pastors need to alert parents to be more careful with their children about what they read online, who they socialize with, what shows they watch, or what sites or blogs they visit during their non-stop surfing. In addition, other parents encourage young children to create profiles on Facebook. Today, research unfortunately confirms that a large percentage of parents do not monitor their children during their online wanderings.[25]

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[25] Ε. Βένιου, 2015. Εκτός ελέγχου τα παιδιά στο διαδίκτυο. *Το Βήμα*. 3/11/2015.

## 12  The need for support and pastoral assistance of suffering parents, who make efforts to bring their children back from captivity within a sect

Finally, there is the need for support and pastoral assistance of suffering parents, who make efforts to bring their children back from captivity within a sect. Shepherds are called to put into action not only a preventive approach to the problem but also a therapeutic one as well. The problem becomes complicated since the victim is on the verge of his adulthood and invokes the right of his philosophical self-determination  as a whole right that derives from his own age. Today, scientists point out that activating the process of a person's liberation from a heresy or sect with an external influence, is a complex process, which is successfully carried out not by one, but by many experts.[26] It most likely involves the participation of a psychologist, assisted by relatives and close friends of the member of the sect that the psychologist himself will have properly trained, a specialist scientist on heresies and religious organizations, as well as former members of the sect itself. The main job of the members of this group is to awaken the critical thought of the sect's member and to invite him to make his choice again, but this time being informed, that is, in a free way. In any case, the Church itself is the ultimate defender of the human independency and Christ himself has called on only those who want to follow him.[27]

At the same time, victim's relatives and close friends should help him get rid of the emotional dependence on the sect and give him true love and compassion in contrast with heretical substitutes. All of these people will need psychological support and spiritual feedback in order to achieve their goal. And here the role of the shepherd begins to become crucial. After all, he is

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[26]  A. Dvorkin, *How to protect yourself and your loved ones from totalitarian sects,* (Moscow: Martyr grand princess Elizabeth Sisterhood, 2006).

[27]  "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me": Mk 8, 34.

the one who will be called upon to interfere alternatively.  In contrast with the spiritual one-way street that the victim has followed inside the sect, he will give prominence to another solution. He is the one that will mystify him from the online community of loneliness and isolation, in a real community, its members of which are connected or must be connected with true and selfless love, which does not fall into a fortunate altruism.

Shepherd is called upon to sympathize with the victim's relatives in all their efforts to free him and at the same time, to become a transmitter in any direction, and especially in the direction of the trapped person himself, of the genuine and insincere Christian love that heals every distinctness and every  arrhythmia.[28]  In fact, he is the one who must help the victims' relatives to liberate him from the prison of Internet, within he has suffered this unprecedented spiritual bombardment. And he is the one who will not allow the suffering human face, any human face, to be left abandoned and marginalized in the sea of the great loneliness that comes as a result of his online isolation. An idiosyncratic isolation that expands his sense of self-denial, especially when he realizes that the rest of his online friends on Facebook, including most likely his companions in the same sect, are not as friendly in the end, as he thought to be. Isolation, which, if not prevented, may make the person receptive even to suicidal tendencies, with unforeseen, unfortunately, consequences.

## Conclusions

As it is easily understood, successfully dealing with many and multiple risks arising from the uncontrolled cyber wandering of young people on sectarian websites goes far beyond the formu-

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[28]  Church promotes as a catalyst for the loving coexistence of  all different creatures: Α. Βαρριάς, *Η ποιμαντική του περιθωρίου. τ. 1., Περιθωριακότητα και Εκκλησία,* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Πουρναρά, 2004), pp. 132-133.

lation of some theoretical thoughts and propositions in an arti-
cle.  The crucial question is how the channels of communication
and cooperation between all the involved bodies will be
opened. How to achieve, in other words, the successful transi-
tion from theory to practice. After all, according to Church Fa-
thers, «Πράξις θεωρίας ἐπίβασις".[29] Pastoral Church is called
and must cooperate with all the institutional authorities and
collectivities, through which individual passes through the
course of his socialization.

We have presented some thoughts of pastoral assistance of the
Church in the perspective of dealing with this problem. Shep-
herds, as spiritual leaders and irreconcilable defenders of the
freedom of the person, can indeed play a significant role in the
preventive treatment of the problem as well as in its therapeu-
tic treatment. After all, "anything that destroys or degrades the
absolute uniqueness of a person, which emerges from his rela-
tionships, turns it into a thing or a midpoint to an end, is unac-
ceptable, even if that purpose is sacred. Because nothing is
more sacred than the human face".[30] The struggle, therefore,
against the entrapment of young people in the tentacles, online
and offline, of parareligious organizations and sects, is, after all,
a struggle in favor of defending the freedom of every human
person. And Orthodox Church cannot be absent from such a
struggle.

The collaboration of Church pastors with all relevant social
factors can lead to providing young people with the necessary
information, against any sense of irrational and excessive use of
the internet tool. The continuous interest of Church shepherds
for all problems of their spiritual children will cancel any kind
of dangerous and irresponsible pedagogical effects of Internet
instructors, including those of sects members. Pastoral counsel-

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[29]  Speech Κ′, about the doctrine and situation of a bishop: PG 35,
1080 Β.

[30]  Ι. Ζηζιούλας, Το δίκαιον του προσώπου, *Πρακτικά της Ακαδημίας Αθηνών,* τ.
Β΄, 72(1997), p. 599.

ing can also be used as a useful tool of awakening parents, who often "lose" their children from their scope of their parental care and thus subconsciously enhance their online wanderings. To sum up, pastoral support to families of sects' victims and pastoral contribution to the effort they make to bring them back in healthy social collectives, including structures of the Church itself, can play a major role to the solution of the problem. Pastoral Intervention has to be not only preventive, but also therapeutic as well.