

Sectarian functioning and violence towards children: The case of the Baptist Church of Windsor

Fonctionnement sectaire et violence envers les enfants : le cas de l'Église baptiste de Windsor

Sectarismo y violencia contra los niños: el caso de la Iglesia Bautista de Windsor

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article vise, par une analyse de cas unique, à étudier l'évolution d'un groupe religieux minoritaire du Québec, l'Église baptiste de Windsor, vers un fonctionnement sectaire particulier qui l'isola de son environnement social et donna lieu à une grave situation de violence contre des mineurs. Les enfants du groupe y ont été soumis à de sévères punitions corporelles qui furent jugées comme constituant des sévices physiques par les services de protection de l'enfance et par le bureau du procureur général. Grâce à une analyse documentaire exhaustive à laquelle se sont ajoutés des témoignages d'anciens membres du groupe ainsi que des entretiens avec des informateurs clés, la reconstruction de l'histoire du groupe, de sa fondation à sa dissolution, a été rendue possible. Quatre moments dans le développement du groupe ont été identifiés ; leur analyse a permis de cerner les éléments qui ont contribué à la mise en place d'un contexte groupal et doctrinal qui légitimait le recours généralisé aux sévices physiques des enfants y vivant.

Sectarian functioning and violence towards children: The case of the Baptist Church of Windsor

Adriana Pacheco and Dianne Casoni

Abstract

A case study of the Baptist Church of Windsor, this article looks at the church's evolution from a dissident religious group in Quebec into an isolated sectarian group that believed in corporal punishment for children – punishment so severe it was considered child abuse by both the Quebec Office of the Attorney General and Quebec child protection services. The group's history from foundation to dissolution was reconstructed through an exhaustive documentary analysis as well as the testimony of former members and interviews with key participants. Four stages in the group's evolution were identified and analyzed, highlighting the elements that contributed to the development of a sectarian doctrinal context in which severe physical punishment against children was generally accepted as legitimate.

Introduction¹

A case study of the Baptist Church of Windsor, this article looks at the church's evolution from a dissident religious group in Quebec into an isolated sectarian group that believed in corporal punishment for children – punishment so severe it was considered child abuse by both the Quebec Office of the Attorney General and Quebec child protection services. Studying the evolution of this church provides useful information about the process that leads a leader to impose a doctrinal orientation that favours violence directed at the group's children and parents

¹ Original article published in *Criminologie. Les organisations dites sectes, les lois et la société*, vol. 41, no 2, Fall 2008. Pacheco, A. & Casoni, D. (2008). Fonctionnement sectaire et violence envers les enfants: le cas de l'Église baptiste de Windsor. *Criminologie*, 41(2), 53-90. <https://doi.org/10.7202/019433ar>.

of the children involved to endorse the resulting actions.

Study of this church was particularly interesting because, unusually, documents and key actors were available for consultation, making it possible to study the group's evolution, including its excesses, from its foundation to its dissolution. Sectarian excesses have been examined largely, if not exclusively, through case studies, as such phenomena are rare, particularly in Canada. Bromley (2002) contributed significantly to knowledge on sectarian excesses through a study of five cases that involved what he called "dramatic denouements." Within a context where knowledge related to these issues is limited, any new contribution is useful as it can aid in prevention of this type of violence against children.

Before discussing the theoretical framework employed in this study, the terminology and its most relevant theoretical models for contextualizing the historical reconstruction presented here are discussed. A partial historical reconstruction of the group's evolution is then provided, followed by discussion and conclusion.

Terminological clarifications

It is useful to clarify the meaning attributed to a number of ideas associated with the broader doctrinal orientation of the Windsor Baptist Church not only to avoid misunderstandings but also to provide the reader with the tools to understand the information presented in the historical reconstruction and its analysis. There are two primary doctrinal orientations in Protestantism, broadly categorized as liberal and conservative. The conservative orientation, followed by the Baptist Church of Windsor, is defined by adherence to precepts understood to be foundational to Protestantism, such as the belief that the Bible is the direct word of God and is therefore infallible and the fundamental source of all authority. It follows from this that the Bible's instructions should not only be strictly enforced but should govern the conduct of human beings in every sphere of their lives. While conservative Protestantism is not associated with a specific religious denomination, Baptist, Evangelical, and Pentecostal churches generally, though not necessarily, follow its doctrines (Bergeron, 1987 ; Ellison and Sherkat, 1993 ; Chartrand, 1995), with the degree of conservatism varying according to the strictness of biblical interpretation: the more a group attempts to follow the Bible's instructions as revealed by a strict interpretation of its text, the closer its association with fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism is the most conservative position within conservative Protestantism. It first appeared in the United States towards the end of the 19th century after conflicts between conservative and liberal Protestants over, in part, the position Protestant churches took on evolution and was characterized from its beginnings by its radicalism both in doctrine and in basing social order on biblical precepts. At the doctrinal level, this transconfessional movement is based on approximately twenty principles, considered to be the “foundations” of the faith, the most important of which are a belief in the absolute inerrancy of the Bible as well an acceptance of bibilism – the belief in the literal interpretation—and consequently, the literal application—of precepts found in the bible. Also important are the conversion experience, the duty to engage in vigorous proselytizing, and the presence of a strict moral rigor that strives to restore virtue in society. Fundamentalism is also characterized by a catastrophist millenarian eschatology that seeks to bring about the return of the Kingdom of God to Earth, as well as by the conviction that it has a messianic role to play in the final battle between the forces of good and evil (Bergeron, 1987 ; Hervieu-Léger, 1988 ; Ben Barka, 1998 ; Chartrand, 1995 ; Woodberry and Smith, 1998 ; Fath, 2004).

Theoretical contextualization

The symbolic universe

Berger and Luckmann (1966) point out that the institutionalization of practices within groups is made possible by legitimizing discourses and propose several forms of legitimation. Legitimation by virtue of a symbolic universe, such as religion, is the most successful in ensuring that practices are maintained in a social group. It provides justification for group practices by appealing to an order that transcends everyday life (in the case of religion, a supernatural order) and attributing to it a meaning that goes beyond its pragmatic utility. Even if a practice is ineffective, it will nonetheless be maintained thanks to belief in the symbolic universe that justifies it. Practices that contribute to maintaining the symbolic universe are privileged: the meaning given to a practice will tend to be positive if it serves to strengthen a group’s belief in a symbolic universe, which in turn will favour its eventual institutionalization, whereas practises that weaken belief in the symbolic universe will be seen as negative (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Corporal punishment discourse² in conservative Protestantism

The discourse about corporal punishment in contemporary conservative Protestantism rests on the negative idea of the child inherited from Calvinism and based on the idea of original sin (Illick, 1974 ; Waltzer, 1974). Children are seen as corrupt, inclined towards evil and therefore predisposed toward selfishness and rebellion against all forms of authority. However, because children are also seen as divine creations, a parent's first responsibility is to save them from the evil within them. This leads to the idea of a permanent war between the forces of good and evil in a child's soul. Dobson (1976, 1987), one of the conservative Protestant scholars actively involved in institutionalizing the practice of corporal punishment in the United States, emphasizes that parents must address the child's rebellious spirit from an early age. He exhorts them to strike energetically, in order to chase away stubbornness and reverse children's propensity for sin. The best way to accomplish these goals, according to Dobson and other conservative Protestantism theorists such as Jerry Falwell or Beverly and Tim LaHaye, is to practice "diligent discipline" using corporal punishment administered via an implement. In conservative Protestant discourse, the rod is seen God's first solution—transmitted by the Bible—for countering childhood rebellion (Dobson, 1976, 1987 ; Falwell, 1981 ; LaHaye, B., 1977 ; LaHaye, T., 1980).

Conservative Protestants base their practice of corporal punishment on a handful of biblical proverbs, including Proverbs 22:15 and 23:13-14:

Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child ;
but the rod of discipline shall drive it far from him.

(Proverbs 22:15, The King James Bible)

Withhold not correction from the child:
for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.

Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.

(Proverbs 23:13-14, The King James Bible)

² The terms corporal punishment and physical punishment are employed interchangeably, as both describe the act in question. Both reflect the punitive nature of the act, as well as the fact that it involves injury to the child's body, with the intended purpose of inflicting pain. In order to distinguish their practices from those not inspired by a biblical justification, conservative Protestant scholars prefer the term corporal discipline, arguing that corporal punishment not inspired by the bible can be harmful to a child, due to the excesses to which it can lead (Despatie, 2005).

Parents are reminded that their child must be compelled to obey, so that he/she come to submit first to parental authority and then to the will of God. Corporal punishment is also as the best way to remove Satan's influence from children's hearts. Finally, the use of corporal punishment is seen as evidence of parental love, clearly illustrated by frequent reference to Proverbs 13:24:

He that spareth his rod hateth his son,
but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.

(Proverbs 13:24, The King James Bible)

Studies have shown that such discourse by conservative Protestantism's leading lights has a great influence on parents.³ Corporal punishment of children is greater and more frequently employed by parents belonging to conservative Protestant groups than those belonging to other religious groups or to no religious group (Erlanger, 1974 ; Grasmick et al., 1991, 1992 ; Ellison and Sherkat, 1993 ; Bartkowski, 1995 ; Ellison, 1996 ; Ellison et al., 1996 ; Danso et al., 1997 ; Wilcox, 1998 ; Woodberry and Smith, 1998). Ellison and Sherkat (1993) note that the more literally parents interpret the Bible, the more likely they are to employ corporal punishment as a means of correcting their children.

Ellison et al. (1996) note that the corporeal punishment administered by conservative Protestants tend to be harsher than of parents in other groups, in part because they use implements to strike their children. Conservative Protestants also tend to view a host of behaviours other parents consider age appropriate as manifestations of childhood rebellion and therefore in need of correction via corporal punishment. Behaviours such as fatigued crying, excess motor activity, and even signs of irritability, such as whining or sleepiness, that may result from illness are seen as expressions of a rebellious spirit. Ellison (1996) notes that the tendency towards interpreting common behaviours as signs of rebellion favours the frequent use of corporal punishment, which, in turn, leads to an escalation in the severity of this punishment, while Bartkowski and Ellison (1995) suggest that using implements to administer corporal punishment significantly increases the risk of injury. In this way, it appears that the conservative

³ The majority of this research was carried out in the United States, where conservative Protestantism originated and is also most widespread. However, two studies were conducted in English-speaking Canada by Danso et al. (1997), whose results agree with those in the American studies. To the best of our knowledge, the only comparable study conducted in Quebec is one undertaken by Casoni based on a large sample of university students, available in Despatie (2005).

Protestant discourse in regard to corporal punishment most certainly helps to reinforce the symbolic universe of certain congregations, including certain Baptist ones, such as the one in this study. More precisely, this practice of corporal punishment has long been positively sanctioned, seeing as it is perceived as the preferred means for God to drive evil forces out of the child's soul.

Group philosophies

The group philosophies model proposed by Casoni (2000) to help understand the types of conduct adopted by dissenting religious groups is particularly appropriate for the study of the Baptist Church of Windsor. Casoni describes four distinct types of conduct that favour violent excess and outlines specific aspects of group life that characterize such groups: these include the type of leadership favoured, the kind of members sought, the treatment of children sanctioned, the nature of doctrine, the types of rituals practiced, and the types of spatial and social organization favoured. By characterizing her model as dealing with the philosophies of these groups, Casoni refers to a particular way of understanding life – of interpreting one's own conduct or the conduct of others. The sixth definition in the *Nouveau Petit Robert* (1994) defines philosophy as “a set of philosophical conceptions common to a social group”.⁴ Although four distinct philosophies are isolated and described in Casoni, 2000 and Casoni and Brunet, 2005, only the two relevant to the analysis of the collected data – the philosophies of separation and of purity – are discussed here⁵.

The philosophy of separation refers to the group practice of continuous demarcation – of ensuring that group members are always easily distinguished from the *other*. All members are expected to maintain group cohesion by constantly filtering out behaviours that belong to *us* from behaviours that belong to *them*, not only as pertains to themselves but also with regard to their children, family, neighbours, and friends. By doing this, such groups encourage their members to maintain a high degree of doctrinal and behavioural orthodoxy. For example, when leaders introduce doctrinal changes, members are expected to accept them without any questions as to their merits. Leadership responsibilities are often shared by a small elite whose members act as social control agents within the group. Beyond conformity to orthodoxy, a uniformity in the expression of

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations originally in French have been translated by the authors.

⁵ The philosophies of survival and indulgence will not be expanded upon. In order to limit the length of the theoretical contextualization, only those elements deemed relevant to the current study will be described.

individual personality traits is observed: individuality is openly discouraged because it is seen as a sign of vanity, or selfishness, and therefore of human weakness. The strong social cohesion found within these groups is linked to the renunciation of the expression of the members' own individuality (Casoni, 2000).

Groups that adopt continuous demarcation are usually quite accepting of geographic promiscuity with non-members and are often located in urban settings or small towns. While social immersion is not the norm, minimal contact with non-members is seen as acceptable. This social promiscuity is tolerated because the distinction between *us* and *them* can be guaranteed by the many obvious signs that characterize the group. Social organization is usually patriarchal and strict differentiations between male and female roles and responsibilities is often the norm. Women are often forced to adopt a servile position that is restricted to meeting family obligations. Although a hierarchy of power usually exists, political struggles remain a pervasive reality within the social organization. Conflicts over issues related to power can break out between influential members and can lead to major crises, including schisms (Ibid).

The philosophy of purity is an exacerbation of the philosophy of separation. In these groups, everything, material or spiritual, is judged according to criteria focused on purity and impurity. Members are expected to seek to attain this absolute in every act and thought, and during every moment of their existence. Human characteristics – such as expressions of emotion, sexuality, and the satisfaction of bodily needs – are a favourite target, considered from the outset as signs of failure to achieve the sought after ideal of purity. Leadership is often in the hands of a single person, who is sometimes self-appointed. Restricting control of the power structure to a single person often leads to a totalitarian regime, with arbitrariness the norm in the exercise of power. This is especially true when power has been consensually attributed to the individual judged to be the purest and therefore also the wisest.

Children are valued for the role they can play in transmitting the group's faith and traditions. Typical childish behaviours and immaturity are considered unacceptable and seen as attitudes and actions typical of the *other*—that is, of people outside the group. In certain groups, children who fail to follow group expectations, even if only slightly, are subjected not only to public humiliation but also to sometimes frequent corporal punishment. This strong pressure to

comply can lead to child abuse as many of these groups, particularly the most strict, consider the use of corporal punishment, even if excessive, justified (Ibid.). Children can also be neglected, suffering from lack of food, water, sleep, warmth, or medical care, because they, like adults, are expected to ignore bodily needs. Asceticism, in all its forms and for everyone in the group, is valued. Groups who adopt a purity-based philosophy often isolate themselves from others in order to avoid undesired contact and often choose to establish themselves in isolated areas. They may seek out increasingly isolated geographical locations in order to protect themselves from any contact with *others*. Similarly, such groups will tend to value self-sufficiency, with self-reliance being the norm (Ibid).

This theoretical contextualization provides the background for the present study, which focuses on understanding three areas: a) conservative Protestantism's discourse regarding the corporal punishment of children, a discourse that features in the symbolic universe of the specific church being studied ; b) the type of leadership exercised by the leader of the group being studied ; and c) how these elements affected the Baptist Church of Windsor's evolution toward excessive use of corporal punishment against children.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was employed, based primarily on documentary analysis and complemented by interviews with key players. The initial document sample contained approximately 100 documents, including 60 legal documents – 37 from the Saint-François district of the Superior Court of Quebec (criminal, penal, and civil chambers, Youth Tribunal, and Office of the Prothonotary), as well as 23 from public and para-public bodies (Ministry of Justice, Childcare Services Office, Central Enterprise Database, Richmond Registration Division, and the Canada Revenue Agency). The sample also included every newspaper article published in Quebec that dealt with this church between April 19, 1985, and March 15, 1990, as well two documentaries produced by Radio-Canada (the French-language national broadcaster) initially broadcast on April 12, 1985 and October 28, 1986.⁶ In addition, testimonies from several former members were studied and interviews were conducted with five key players, including the police

⁶ The authors thank the Info-Secte organization for having granted them access to both Société Radio-Canada audiovisual documents and the Baptist Church of Windsor's memoranda of association.

inspector who conducted the investigation into this religious congregation, a pastor who knew the Baptist Church of Windsor's leader, a former member of the group, and an official from the City of Windsor. Two field trips were also undertaken to help situate the environment in which the events in question took place.

Although the historical reconstruction carried out for this study covers twelve years (Pacheco, 2002), only the eight years of the Baptist Church of Windsor's existence (1978-1986) are analyzed in this article. Information relevant to the use of corporal punishment was classified into subtopics, including types of punishment, frequency, severity (number of strikes and presence or absence of redness, marks, or sores), person administering the punishment, and the age of the child at the time of the first corporal punishment. This data was then cross-referenced with the information obtained from the interviewed contacts, for purposes of validation. The data was later compared with the group's characteristics during each of the studied time periods in order to better understand how the use of physical punishment might have resulted in physical abuse. Finally, the results of the analysis from each stage were cross-referenced with data from other sources to limit the impact of bias that such a study inevitably involves.

This research has limitations related to the kind of information collected. While many of the documents employed come from legal sources, others are from interviews with, and testimonies from, former group members, whose discourse may be biased by a tendency to present a version of events that diminishes personal responsibility while emphasizing the responsibility of the group leader. In order to reduce the possible impacts of such bias, information from former members that rested on blaming others was used only when confirmed by another source.

Historical summary

First period: from foundation to schism (1978-1980)

The Pastor

Born in 1947, Pastor S.⁷ was a former resident of Windsor, a small municipality of around 5,000

⁷ The decision to withhold the name of the pastor who led the Baptist Church of Windsor was made in order to avoid possible stigmatization.

inhabitants in southeastern Quebec. In the mid-1970s, he and one of his brothers joined the Baptist Evangelical Church of Lennoxville (l'Église baptiste évangélique de Lennoxville) and shortly thereafter began training to become a pastor at a theological school in Danville.⁸

According to testimonies from former members of his church, Pastor S. was a kind, devoted man, with a warm personality. He brought a number of converts to the Baptist Evangelical Church of Lennoxville, which led that congregation to support his plan to found a new church in Windsor.

The founding of the Windsor congregation

As an independent corporation, the Baptist Church of Windsor was not a part of any religious grouping or association. Its sole executive was Pastor S., assisted by four directors. The Baptist Evangelical Church of Lennoxville purchased two properties in Windsor and loaned them to Pastor S. for use as his temple and rectory. Their involvement meant that the Lennoxville church had a say in how the Windsor church was run in terms of both finance and doctrine.⁹ (The Windsor church was so successful in attracting new members that the Lennoxville church sold it the two properties on May 15, 1979.)

The Windsor church began official operation on July 6, 1978. Known initially as the Baptist Evangelical Church of Windsor, the congregation grew rapidly and by 1980 had 70 adult members. Thirty of these had come from the Lennoxville congregation, with the remainder new converts. Members were primarily young low-income couples with children and included unskilled workers, those in the service industry, and people on welfare.

Norms

The church subscribed to the conservative viewpoint in which man, by divine right, exercises familial authority over his wife and children, who owe him absolute obedience. Church couples were encouraged to have children and exhorted to educate them in accordance with conservative biblical interpretations. A child's education was believed to be the responsibility of the father,

⁸ The Danville school only operated for one year. According to an pastor who had studied there at the same time, Pastor S. had not had any further training before becoming a pastor. This is uncommon, as most pastors undertake several years of study, including internships.

⁹ It should be pointed out that although Protestant churches do not have a central governing body and are in this sense independent, they are often part of denominational associations. They also collaborate unofficially, the most common form of this being invitations to preach in each other's churches.

who has the obligation, before God, to educate them within the faith and correct any straying from what is considered the correct path. The instruction to physically punish children was often part of Preacher S.'s sermons. He recommended corporal punishment, often referred to as "correction," as a disciplinary measure for children as young as one year of age. During this first period of the church's existence, there were no rules regarding the administration of punishment, with each family deciding which conduct should give rise to punishment. Similarly, although corporal punishment was actively recommended, there were no specific guidelines for how to administer it. The use of an implement, although suggested, was not mandatory; spanking was the primary disciplinary measure employed.

It appears that very few aspects of everyday life were formally regulated during this initial period. The only formal rules of conduct were a ban on drinking alcohol and the obligation to tithe. However, customs in this area were soon established, with new members modelling their conduct on that of the older members in order to obtain their approval, while the older members attempted to follow, to the letter, all the pastor's recommendations.

The schism

Despite the church's success in recruitment, throughout 1980 there were disputes between the pastor and certain members over biblical interpretation. According to testimonies from former members, the pastor was very rigid about the interpretation of biblical verses and was unwilling to discuss these interpretations, which were fundamentalist in orientation. Members were expected to incorporate, in the most literal manner possible, certain biblical verses, including those relating to corporeal punishment, into their everyday lives to avoid betraying God's will. Following Pastor S.'s decision to undertake the training of young men who wished to become pastors, approximately half of the congregation, the majority of whom were long-time members who had previously belonged to the Lennoxville church, left the Windsor church. Moreover, according to a former member of the group, several Baptist communities in the region also cut ties with both the Windsor congregation and Pastor S. as they felt the pastor had become too rigid. The Windsor church thus found itself isolated from other Baptist groups in the area.

Second period: The rise of the Baptist Church of Windsor (1981-1982)

The break with the Baptist Evangelical Church of Lennoxville left the management of the Windsor church, now called the Baptist Church of Windsor (BCW), in the hands of S., his brother, who was an assistant pastor, and four directors. Although only approximately 40 followers remained after the break, two years later, thanks to active proselytizing, the church had grown to between 120 and 150 members.¹⁰ The influx of so many new members forced Pastor S. to make previously informal rules explicit, which had the effect of making them even more rigid. Behaviours that had previously only been verbally discouraged were now explicitly prohibited. In addition, new directives prohibited additional behaviours, such as watching television, purchasing decorative or superfluous items, or even eating candy. Although dating non-church members was not prohibited, it was frowned upon, except in cases of proselytization. This multiplication of rules also gave rise to several control mechanisms: the pastor, with the help of a small circle of associates, including his brother and the directors, kept a close watch on members' conduct and any failings were followed by threats of expulsion and eternal damnation.

Between the time required for proselytizing, volunteer work, and religious services, the time available to members for non-church activities was considerably reduced, leading to further isolation from the outside world. This isolation was further accentuated by the pastor's fear that members of his church would be contaminated by contact with those from outside the group, whom he sometimes referred to as "pagans," and sometimes, with contempt, as "pigs." This fear of contamination grew to the point that Pastor S. eventually forbade all contact with people outside his congregation.

Doctrine

The pastor's fundamentalism escalated during the second period. Reflecting this, the rules of conduct also grew progressively stricter, which increased the difficulty of enforcing them, especially with regard to children, who were treated with increased severity and more frequent physical punishment. In addition, the pastor decreed that physical punishment had to be administered using an implement. A great deal of attention was thus paid to the ways in which children were educated and, more specifically, punished. For example, the pastor projected slides

¹⁰ We were unable to establish the exact number of members ; our approximation is based on testimonies from members.

illustrating the correct manner to administer corporal punishment ; in one case, five strikes to the bare buttocks with a rod-like implement (a wooden stick). Founding a church school and daycare centre led to further modifications in punishment.

Daycare centre and school

To remove children from the corrupting influence of the outside world, in 1981 both a daycare centre and a school were created. All members' children were required to attend and Pastor S. appointed monitors and teachers from among the church's members. The attention paid to children's discipline increased significantly based on the explicit desire to transform them into model, even perfect, children. The oft-repeated goal of forcing the child to renounce his perverse nature now merged with an idealized representation of a perfectly pure child, that is, one without most childlike characteristics. The curriculum reflected an ideal of perfection: for example, passing grades were set at 80%, with children required to maintain an average superior to this. As a result of such requirements, certain children were quickly identified as being particularly perverse and impure, which in turn justified their more frequent corporal punishment. Because every effort had been made to remove the children from negative influences, any performance judged unsatisfactory, whether academic or behavioural, was interpreted as a sign of malevolence, a sign of Satan at work in the child's soul. This interpretation was used by Pastor S. to justify increased severity in punishment. For example, three reports from a teacher of misconduct meant that the father was required to administer five strikes using a rod-like stick.

To ensure that these punishments were actually administered, Pastor S. decided that they would occur at school, with parents notified the day prior to the planned punishment. A special instrument was created to inflict these punishments – a kind of ferule, or oak stick, measuring 45 cm long, 6 cm wide, and 2 cm thick. Although school children were the first to be punished, this punishment soon extended to all children over one year of age attending the daycare centre. Anything that could be interpreted as a sign of rebellion or disobedience was subject to physical punishment, whether it was failure to develop bowel control or inability to sleep during naptime. For children attending school, looking at a classmate, getting a below-average grade, or even asking to use the bathroom outside the times allocated for that purpose were all considered conduct worthy of corporal punishment.

Third period: isolation (1983-1984)

Beginning in 1983, the BCW's membership stopped growing, in part because the church was now seen as being particularly rigid but also because the time and effort put into proselytizing had considerably diminished. Some of the BCW's recruitment strategies had been criticized by representatives of the Catholic Church, particularly the practice of organizing highly publicized shows for children whose main objective was the conversion of accompanying parents. There were also rumours about financial transactions that the pastor had undertaken for own benefit or that of the church. Pastor S.'s social reputation, according to former members, shifted during this period, and became more negative.

The role the pastor played in the everyday life of church members increased considerably from 1983 onwards. For example, he now negotiated members' car insurance premiums, had vehicle repairs completed in a garage belonging to him, and selected and distributed foodstuffs to members. Several members worked for companies he owned. He also came up with the idea of building a self-sufficient estate where only BCW members would live. To raise the funds to carry out this project, members had to increase their donations, take out loans, and even sell their assets. In September 1984, the church acquired a parcel of land that the members cleared to begin the estate's construction.

The emissary of God

Pastor S. now described himself as the emissary chosen by God to fight against the forces of evil, a vision that led him to declare he was infallible. He also demanded absolute submission, enjoining members to "enter into the joy of their master by being faithful slaves".¹¹ He demanded more and more work from the members, as well as more money, arguing that the Bible dictated that everything that belonged to them belonged to him. From the pulpit, he labeled members of his congregation as stingy and hypocritical, and ridiculed them if they attempted to defend themselves. Although it was difficult for many members to leave the BCW, as all their possessions had been handed over to the church, which had invested them in the development of

¹¹ Excerpt from a sermon given by S., which appeared in the *Le Point* documentary of April 12, 1985 (Société Radio-Canada, 1985).

the future estate, many did left, some because they felt exhausted and exploited¹². Others invoked the treatment of children. It is noteworthy that only men used this latter reason, particularly as, when leaving the church, some of these men also left behind their wives and children.

Intensification of corporal punishment

The discourse related to corporal punishment intensified during this third period with emphasis now placed on the need to correct children as early as in order to exorcize Satan's hold on them. Pastor S. believed the older the children got, the harder it would be to reform their natures and drive out evil. He therefore ordered punishment to be administered to children under the age of one. Infants in daycare were now struck if they did not sleep at scheduled times or if they cried. The previous standard of five rod strikes was abandoned: for all children, the number of strikes was now left to the discretion of the adult administering the punishment. In addition, a child's attitude during punishment counted towards the number of strikes administered: children who tried to escape punishment by covering up their buttocks with their hands, for example, were beaten until they adopted the expected attitude of submission.

Another change in 1983 was the introduction of public corrections. The father was now to administer strikes the rod during religious services. If the father was not present, Pastor S. would take his place. The punishment was normally decided in advance but sometimes resulted from a breach of discipline during the service itself. The number of strikes administered during these public sessions was usually greater than that at school, going as high as 50. It was thus not uncommon for administered corporal punishment to leave marks. So-called light punishment left small red marks in the form of lines. More severe punishments left bruises equal to the length of the ferule. When the child had been corrected several times over a short period of time, the bruises on their skin became black.

Testimony by BCW members before the Director of Youth Protection of the Estrie region and the Youth Tribunal or reported in the media show that the members accepted their pastor's statements that the punishments they administered were necessary to ensure the child's salvation. Certain members confessed to occasionally being shocked by the severity of punishments but

¹² Former members who undertook civil litigation against the pastor characterized the treatment they allegedly received from him as exploitative.

added that this did not alter their conviction that administering such corporal punishment was proof of their love for their children and their obedience to God's will. Although some expressed awareness that these punishments would have been considered excessive by people outside their group—and some even knew that they could be considered criminal, including a member who was a police officer with the Sûreté du Québec (the province's police force)—this did not lead them to question their convictions about the merits of such punishments. Testimony also revealed that fear of being misunderstood or brought before a court of law was low, given that parents, and especially children, had very little contact with people outside the church.

Fourth period: towards dissolution (1985-1986)

Despite the group's isolation, rumours about its treatment of children began to circulate outside the church. Former members, without specifying the nature of the physical correction, possibly for fear of being held responsible for it during the time they had spent as church members, contributed to making its existence known. Police authorities were aware of these rumours as early as 1984, though it was not until January of 1985 that an investigation was opened after a woman whose five-month-old baby had been beaten at the daycare centre was persuaded by her husband, who had already left the group, to file an assault complaint against Pastor S. Alarmed by the punitive practices described by the complainant, Windsor's municipal police expanded their investigation and reported the matter to the Director of Youth Protection of the Estrie region (DYPE) as a potential situation of generalized maltreatment.

The police and DYPE investigations

The police investigation was initially met with silence, not only by BCW members but also former members. Current members were seeking to protect their way of life and felt that they were accountable only to God for their actions. Former members were afraid of incriminating themselves and their loved ones. However, after two months of investigation, the police reported about ten additional cases to the DYPE. The head of the DYPE at the time felt that the sectarian context in which the abuse had been reported should be taken into account and planned a broad intervention rather than assigning individual cases without consideration of the wider context. In conjunction with the Social Services Center of the Estrie region, he formed a team composed of social workers, lawyers, and psychologists, as well as other experts, to address all aspects of the

case. As early as March 1985, social workers began contacting parents from the BCW to assess their children's situation.

Pastor S., who had not been contacted by police during the investigation, did not appear particularly concerned, telling church members that the police and the DYPE could not prove anything and that the investigations would quickly come to an end. However, as parents still had to meet with social workers for fear of having their children taken away, the pastor ordered members to lie about corporal punishment and decreed its temporary suspension for fear that the DYPE would have the children examined and find marks. Social workers had been advised to exercise great discretion in their investigation to avoid provoking a situation that would put the children at risk of being punished for having disclosed the type of discipline used.

The unveiling of the BCW's practices

On April 12, 1985, the Radio-Canada program *Le Point* aired a television report about the BCW, centred largely on testimonials from former members. Their lives were described as being under the pastor's control, with the corporal punishment administered to their children presented in the same light. Two girls, aged five and seven, and two teenaged girls were interviewed about the punishments they had received. The report drew the attention of the regional press, which began publishing more articles about the case. The televised report, in which the director of the DYPE was also interviewed, appears to have led the DYPE to act swiftly. On April 19, 1985, the head of the DYPE announced to journalists that approximately 20 cases would be submitted to the Youth Tribunal, because: "[the investigation] concerns cases of excessive violence. Beating a child for half an hour over a trifle is not reasonable".¹³ In addition, he also addressed the irregular situation regarding the group's schools, which were operating without a permit. As a result, the Office of Child Care Services (OCCS) sent inspectors to the daycare centre but they were denied entry. A few days later, daycare operations ceased and the OCCS closed the file.

While the pastor presented a serene appearance to his members regarding the police and DYPE investigations, he grew more worried after the Radio-Canada documentary and news

¹³ These comments were published by the Sherbrooke newspaper *La Tribune* on April 20, 1985, in an article by Gilles Dallaire, "Within the Windsor Baptist community. The Youth Tribunal could deal with cases of abuse". The article in question was the last in a series of four written by Dallaire about the BCW.

articles about the BCW. He decreed that the church's door should remain locked, even during services, to prevent journalists from filming his sermons. In addition, he forbade members from speaking to the media and ordered that any contact that might still exist with individuals outside the church, including former members, who were now designated as spies and deserters, should be cut off. He maintained that any actions taken against the church were the fruit of a conspiracy hatched by former members, now corrupted by Satan and determined to destroy his congregation. Pastor S. also labelled intervenors from the DYPE and the OCCS, as well as journalists, as pawns employed by Satan, who was acting through the "deserters". News reports, as well as the actions of employees of social services, were described as trials from God to test their faith.

Although members initially echoed their pastor's words, the fear of losing custody of their children became more important as the DYPE investigation progressed. This led many members to express themselves more personally, while also distancing themselves from Pastor S.'s teachings regarding corporal punishment. A number of members left the congregation to demonstrate their lack of approval of educational practices they had themselves only recently employed. The media's portrayal of their group led some members to recognize that they had been completely under the authority of their pastor, which led them to question their affiliation with the BCW. Pastor S. left Windsor and only returned to the church to conduct services, during which he insulted members, calling them whistleblowers. Although he had ordered the cessation of corporal punishment at the beginning of the investigations, he severely punished a number of children during this period. For example, a six-year-old child was beaten three times in one week during religious services.

The dissolution of the BCW

By December, 1985, the DYPE had received 84 complaints, mainly related to the practice of corporal punishment as detailed in section 38 (e) of the Youth Protection Act. Related to this and because the extreme isolation in which the children lived was seen as likely to compromise their development, all the group's children were placed under the protection of the law, even if there was no evidence that they had been beaten. Parents were told that they could avoid their children's cases being dealt with in the legal system if they agreed to modify their approach to disciplining their children as well as reintegrating them into society. Psychological follow-ups were recommended for children who were evaluated as being unlikely to improve only with the

proposed social- and family-based measures. Most of the parents accepted these voluntary measures but seven children were referred to the Youth Tribunal when their parents refused to accept the voluntary measures proposed by the social workers.

Although the Office of Child Care Services (OCCS) closed its file in 1985, believing that the BCW daycare center had closed, the centre had continued to operate and was only officially closed in January, 1986, under the provisions of section 3 of the Educational Childcare Act. Anticipating that some BCW members would refuse to accept the closure, the OCCS requested the assistance of both Windsor's municipal police and the Sûreté du Québec's. The DYPE also sent intervenors in case some children required support. However, the center was closed without problems. The pastor was not on site when the daycare centre was closed and shortly afterwards relocated permanently to a farm in another region, from which he continued to manage his congregation. Many BCW members saw this as his abandoning them, which considerably diminished his authority over them and both greatly facilitated the social workers' work and contributed to the church's dissolution.

The OCCS's intervention was aimed solely at closing the daycare centre but ultimately marked the end of the church's regular activities. Although the DYPE investigation and the media coverage surrounding it had already led to a number of departures, the fact that the OCCS actions were undertaken with the cooperation of a major police force had a definite effect on the remaining members of the church. Throughout 1986, members continued to leave the church and by December of that year, only a few remained. By that time Pastor S. had permanently left Windsor and the church buildings were up for sale.

The Office of the Attorney General of Quebec granted immunity from prosecution to all members of the Baptist Church of Windsor, except for Pastor S., who faced charges of having assaulted six BCW children as well as two civil suits brought by former members.¹⁴ On March 15, 1990, he was sentenced to 90 days' imprisonment, to be served intermittently, and to two

¹⁴ The arrest warrant against S., issued on October 8, 1987, cited eight counts of assault causing bodily harm under section 245 of the Annotated Criminal Code & Related Legislation (Canada, 1987: 224), offences punishable by 10 years' imprisonment.

years' probation, during which he was prohibited from holding any position in a religious congregation.

Justice André Fauteux set a legal precedent in his judgement in one of the cases heard before the Youth Tribunal of the Estrie region concerning a teenager who was mentally challenged and had been the victim of physical and sexual abuse by the group. The judge raised the question of the relative standing of the provisions of the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms' provisions regarding religious freedom and those of the Youth Protection Act. He concluded that the provisions of the Youth Protection Act should prevail, regardless of sections 1 and 2 of the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. In his judgement he stated:

Freedom of religion is not absolute. It does authorize anyone to deny a child the free exercise of their right to protection, life, respect for their person, mental and emotional development, and safety. Nor does freedom of religion authorize anyone to violate the rules of law that ensure a child's free exercise of its fundamental rights.

(Recueils de jurisprudence du Québec, 1986: 2712 ; our translation)

Discussion

As the historical reconstruction makes clear, the children's situation became worse over time. Dividing the history of the BCW into four periods makes clear that the use of corporal punishment as the primary means of discipline became increasingly systematic and intense in connection with changes in church beliefs and gradually spread to all children in the church, from infants to adolescents. At the time of the BCW's founding, corporal punishment had not been codified as part of church doctrine and was administered solely by parents, without use of an implement. Subsequently, an oak rod was mandated and the punishments began to be administered by persons other than the parents. Punishment gradually became daily and was extended to infants. Finally, punishments were administered publicly and prescribed for actions described as faults that were, in reality, appropriate behaviour given the children's ages.

Various elements appear to have played a role in the escalation of corporal punishment to abuse in the case of the Baptist Church of Windsor. First, the abusive situation was facilitated by the church's conservative Protestant orientation, given its doctrine that recommends both the use of corporal punishment and the use of an implement in administering it. As noted by both

Bartkowski and Ellison (1995) and Ellison (1996), favourable attitudes toward corporal punishment and the use of an implement to administer it are the combination of factors most likely to result in physical abuse of children. Although the congregation had seen corporal punishment without an implement – spanking with a hand – as acceptable before the schism, after it Pastor S.'s attitude shifted with regard to both prescribed norms of conduct and the educational approach to be adopted towards children. The pastor's increasingly fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible following the schism led him to a literal application of biblical verses, resulting in codification of the use of corporal punishment with an implement as well as a protocol for determining not only the faults that should give rise to punishment but also the number of strikes to be delivered.

To justify the use of corporal punishment, Pastor S. often invoked his desire to make good Christians of his congregation's children. Several authors (Illick, 1974 ; Walzer, 1974 ; El Mountacir, 1994 ; Casoni, 2000) point out that dissentient religious groups often overinvest in children as they see them as their only chance for long-term survival. The collected data show that the survival of the church was a definite concern for the pastor, given his commitment to training his successors. Willaime (1992) notes that for Protestants, with their belief in free choice, the absence of confessional continuity at birth makes the transmission of faith to children a constant concern and an imperative objective.

This factor became increasingly important when BCW membership was halved at the time of the schism and later during the third period when the church experienced a further drop in membership due to a decrease in proselytizing activities and voluntary departures. Tension between the negative portrayal of children specific to conservative Protestantism and the need to save them via corporal punishment in order to perpetuate their parents' faith made it all the easier to justify the intensification and systematization of the use of corporal punishment. The codification of corporal punishment during the second period coincided with a greater isolation of the group from both the outside world and other Baptist groups in the region and isolation could have hampered the exercise of judgement by members who, faced with changes stemming from their pastor's fundamentalist biblical reading, no longer had the opinions of others available as support if they questioned the new practices.

As long as proselytizing efforts were significant, contact with people outside the group

was frequent and their views of BCW members, as well as of their ways of being and behaving with children, could have led members to acknowledge different norms, specifically, those that excluded the use of corporal punishment. During the third period, the reflective function provided by the gaze of the other ceased. One member commented on this, noting that by the time they were living exclusively with each other he only very rarely asked himself how someone outside the group would interpret their way of treating children. Paradoxically, the more isolated members became, the more they may have been tempted to support church practices as a way to diminish doubts or anxiety regarding their appropriateness.

It is conceivable that by identifying people outside the group as sources of contamination that threatened members' faith Pastor S. was seeking to eliminate exposure to different norms, those represented by the gaze of the other. Doing so diminished members' capacity for individual judgement, judgments that might have threatened belief in his biblical interpretations. The desire to protect members from contamination was also used to justify prohibiting contact with people outside the group (Casoni, 2000). Pastor S. described his congregation as spiritually superior not only to non-members but also to members of other Baptist congregations and emphasized how the way they lived their faith was particularly pleasing to God. As early as the third period he claimed both his infallibility and a position as God's emissary in the fight against the forces of evil. Members participated in this glorification of their congregation and the idealization of their pastor and, by association, themselves. From the moment they granted his infallibility, they bound themselves to him in a reciprocal self-fulfilling relationship, in which the greatness attributed to the pastor reflected upon the entire congregation (Casoni, 2001).

The changes in the BCW gradually transformed the congregation's operation into what could be described as a sect. In the beginning, the group operated with flexible standards, a relative sharing of authority, and a certain openness to the outside world. However, six years later the group was engaged in a project to establish complete self-sufficiency on a private estate (Casoni, 2001). Several members were willing to defy civil laws if they contravened those of God as revealed through Pastor S.'s biblical interpretations, thereby demonstrating an unequivocal radicalization and distancing from the larger society (Casoni, 2001 ; Casoni & Brunet, 2005). Beyond the group's need to simply differentiate itself from non-members through the adoption of distinct language, dress standards, and codes of conduct characteristic of a philosophy of

separation (as was the case from the first to the second period, from 1980 to 1982), the church's evolution led members to adopt a philosophy of purity as early as 1983 (Casoni, 2000). The members of the BCW came to view the world in terms of their absolute moral superiority, a characteristic associated with the adoption of a philosophy of purity. Pressure to achieve the ideals associated with spiritual purity justified the repressive excesses – such as restrictions in the amount of food provided – revealed by this historical reconstruction.

Concern with avoiding contamination through contact with the outside world also led to the increasing segregation of the children, who, according to testimonies, were almost entirely separated from the surrounding world. As is the case with other such groups, children were over-invested in as guarantors of the group's faith and lifestyle (Illick, 1974 ; Walzer, 1974 ; El Mountacir, 1994) but also closely watched because of doctrinal need to correct their unhealthy natures (Dobson, 1976, 1987) and the ideological need to rid them of impurity (Casoni, 2000). These concerns were the object of vigilant attention, such that any conduct or attitude that deviated, even minimally, from the ideal projected on them, were severely repressed. At the same time, the inability of children to meet group ideals led to a gradual escalation in the severity and frequency of punishment.

The Manichean process of dichotomizing the world into pure and impure, characteristic of a philosophy of purity, leads to rigid depiction of elements in each category. For instance, the evil nature of the child was countered by representations of pure beings, purged of impulses, needs, and normal human bodily characteristics. The more negative the first depictions, the more idealized the counter representations. Corporeal punishment was intended to eliminate evil and the quest for this absolute could motivate a parent to both increase demands and identify an increasing number of proscribed behaviours. Given that satisfaction of physiological needs and expression of emotional and psychological needs was seen by Pastor S. a sign of weakness, and thus as a path of entry for Satan, it is difficult to see how children could have met the expectations outlined in church doctrine. This exacerbated dichotomization played a role in the escalation of child abuse. Ultimately, for certain parents, physically punishing their child was not equivalent to hitting them but rather was freeing a possessed being from the devil (Falwell, 1981 ; LaHaye, 1980).

The idealized portrayal of the child became, over the course of the church's evolution, an

ideal shared by members of the BCW that supported the injunction to systematically punish children. The founding of the daycare and the school furthered pursuit of this ideal, whatever the cost, which is typical of social organizations associated with a philosophy of purity (Casoni, 2000). Extending the use of corporal punishment to infants, and thus to behaviours that are clearly manifestations of immaturity, such as crying from fatigue or illness, or are associated with individual differences in temperament or biological rhythm, such as not sleeping at the prescribed time (Ellison, 1996), and making delivery of some punishments public, suggest that the pursuit of the ideal of purity may have contributed to the abusive situation by affecting BCW's members capacity to make reasonable judgements (Casoni, 2000 ; Casoni and Brunet, 2005).

At a certain point in the group's evolution, members demonstrated considerable inability to exercise individual judgment. They no longer seemed able to distance themselves from Pastor S.'s discourse or to free themselves from group pressure and question what truly served the best interests of their children. It should be noted, however, that the representations of children that underlay the repressive actions against them were stressed by the pastor in his role as a leader. He insisted on a particular and literal interpretation of biblical verses that supported these representations and not only regularly preached about the need to punish children but forced members to comply with a particularly harsh protocol regarding corporal punishment, demanded that all children attend the church daycare and school, frequently administered corporal punishment publicly, and gradually eliminated any possibilities for members to encounter other viewpoints by increasingly isolating them from the outside world. Pastor S.'s insistence on negative representations of the child and the morally imperative for parents to act as he demanded—under threat of public humiliation and expulsion in case of refusal—greatly influenced the group dynamics that developed to support the regime of corporal punishment. The combined effect of all these elements could only lead to deadlock, since it was impossible for children to respond satisfactorily to either the doctrinal expectations or the ideal projected upon them and this failure was unlikely to lead to anything but an escalation in the severity and frequency of punishments.

The idealized representation of the child that emerges from the data corresponds to what Illick (1974) and Waltzer (1974) describe in similar contexts, that of a child whose complete subordination to parental authority is taken as a sign that, free from the forces of evil, they can

move to recovery and transformation. Subordination is then not only reassuring for parents but constitutes a marker of their parenting skills in the eyes of those who share the same beliefs. Social pressure to be part of the group of parents viewed as “competent” was undoubtedly important not only in why parents did not oppose corporal punishment—even when it became obviously excessive—but also why they actively participated in it.

Finally, it is important to add that the establishment of the school and daycare centre increased the number of individuals who had the right to administer corporal punishment, potentially increasing not only its frequency but also its severity as there was no affectionate link with the child to play a mitigating role. The use of corporal punishment was offset neither by affection for children nor by the influence of third parties, vectors of social values that could have acted as a counterweight to, or even a brake on, the severity displayed by members who held themselves accountable only to the pastor. There was no counterweight to the pastor’s doctrinal orientation or to the rules put in place to punish the children. In the first period of the BCW’s history, characterized by the sharing of doctrinal authority, the pastor’s fundamentalist tendency was diminished by the doctrinal position of long-time evangelicals as well as by the Lennoxville congregation’s control over the Windsor congregation. However, when Pastor S. became the owner of the church buildings the Lennox church ceased to be a counterweight. In fact, the pastor was even able to challenge the oldest members of the group, those who had come with him from the Lennoxville church. The schism that followed gave Pastor S. even greater leeway as the fact that the BCW did not belong to any religious group, association, or religious hierarchy that could have exercised a supervisory role over doctrinal interpretations and related practices helped increase both the pastor’s influence on members and his room to maneuver with respect to orientations and practices. There was no arbitration mechanism or any higher authority that sought to prevent abuses of power, interpretation, or regulation. The pastor was therefore free to interpret doctrine and impose standards and sanctions without being held accountable for his initiatives. Centralization during the second period of the BCW increased his authority over members, first with regard to doctrine, then to work, and, by the third period, most aspects of their everyday lives. This made it difficult for the faithful to question his authority, because in addition to sanctions on the spiritual level, members also ran the risk of losing either their jobs or their investments in the church’s residential project. In the fourth period, however, the pastor’s hold weakened as counterweights appeared. The joint investigation by the police and the DYPE

forced him to order a stop to corporal punishment and fear of having their children taken away led members of the group to agree to participate in the DYPE's investigation and to accept measures opposite those prescribed by their pastor. The journalistic investigation by Radio-Canada also seems to have had an effect by leading to the departure of some members, contributing to the church's dissolution. Although Radio-Canada's journalist investigation seems to have influenced the social control agencies involved in the case, particularly in terms of when they chose to visit the group, the data does not allow us to comment more precisely on the role it played in influencing the decision to intervene or the type of intervention chosen. Nevertheless, there is every reason to believe that it contributed to public acceptance of the level of the joint intervention by police/youth protection services, given the seriousness of the maltreatment allegations presented.

Conclusion

The possibility of child abuse was present from time of the Baptist Church of Windsor was founded, given its acceptance of the conservative Protestantism position that promotes a particularly negative representation of the child while also emphasizing the importance of saving children through corporal punishment. The importance attributed to children as continuators of their parents' faith leads to an overinvestment in the child that, by contradicting their negative representation, accentuates the need to transform them. The institutionalization of corporal punishment is then justified by the symbolic universe shared by the group and by the belief that the power of that universe will be increased in its continuation in the next generation (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

This does not mean that all groups who share similar symbolic universes also commit excesses similar to those of the BCW. In the church's case, the centralization of power in the hands of the pastor allowed a shift from a moderate conservative interpretation of the Bible to a fundamentalist one. This in turn led to the use of implements to administer punishment, as well as to a strict codification of their use that gradually shifted from corporal punishment towards abuse. The evolution toward a sectarian mode favoured adoption of a philosophy of purity, which accentuated the overinvestment in the children as bearers of the group's ideals. This in turn contributed to an increase in the frequency and severity of punishments, due to the inability of children to achieve the ideals projected upon them. This type of philosophy also led to the

isolation of the congregation from its surrounding society, producing a group dynamic in which the doctrinal discourse regarding corporal punishment was not be confronted by any other points of view. This contributed to undermining the exercise of personal judgement. Finally, the important position given the pastor played a decisive role in the implementation, maintenance, and aggravation of the situation of physical abuse of the children, particularly as there was no counterweight to his injunctions.

These elements gave rise to a microsocial context in which serious acts of physical abuse were no longer seen for what they were – assault. Only when a third-party function, in this case exercised by social control agents—social workers, police officers, judges— was reintroduced were members of the BCW able to sufficiently distance themselves from their leader’s discourse as well as their idealized autarchic project. Only with such distance could they stop seeing their children as beings whose souls had been possessed by Satan. The interventions of social control officers helped put an end to the abuse of the group’s children and prevented the realization of the church’s autarchic project, which would have isolated the members and their children to such a degree that it would have become difficult, if not impossible, to intervene to protect them. The example of the evolution of the Apostles of Infinite Love, established in a secluded area of Quebec, suggests what might have developed. It is difficult for social control officers to intervene to protect children whose security or development may be compromised through isolation from society, especially when this break is associated with the pursuit of an ideal of purity. The DYPE’s intervention allowed children to remain with their parents while still putting an end to a harmful group dynamic.

Case studies such as this contribute to knowledge about dissentient religious groups, which, particularly given the problems associated with gaining access, are both difficult to research and poorly suited to quantitative empirical research. This study highlights the complex and important interactions between leadership style, symbolic universe, and sectarian functioning with regard not only to the use of corporal punishment on children but especially its exacerbation to abuse, making it possible to identify a process that is likely to lead to violent excesses.

The limitations of this study should be noted. Foremost are those inherent in any historical reconstruction (Aron, 1938 ; Bloch, 1949). Although all necessary steps were taken to ensure the validity of the results as well as the accuracy of the proposed analyses, this study, like any other

historical reconstruction, cannot be completely neutral nor completely disregard the context in which it emerged. Without invalidating the analyses presented, this tempers the explanatory power of such studies, since the possibility that researchers will have a blind spot in their reconstruction work cannot be eliminated. This makes it more important in such studies than in other forms of research reports to be exhaustive in presenting data to ensure that the reader has all the information necessary to evaluate the work.

Interesting avenues of research emerge from this study, including the value of further research involving BCW members to gather their stories regarding both their life in the church and their exit and return to life in the wider society. Research that included the perspectives of BCW children who have become adults would make it possible to better understand both the ways in which they make sense of the corporal punishment to which they were subjected and the effects they feel this experience had on them and their life trajectories. Previous research suggests that children who are subject to corporal punishment in a religious context tend to identify with the “forces of evil” that are presented as acting within them (DePATIE, 2005) and it would be interesting to see if this is the case for BCW children. A better understanding of the effect of the corporeal punishment they experienced would help make it possible to identify therapeutic interventions that are useful under such circumstances.

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Résumé

Cet article vise, par une analyse de cas unique, à étudier l'évolution d'un groupe religieux minoritaire du Québec, l'Église baptiste de Windsor, vers un fonctionnement sectaire particulier qui l'isola de son environnement social et donna lieu à une grave situation de violence contre des mineurs. Les enfants du groupe y ont été soumis à de sévères punitions corporelles qui furent jugées comme constituant des sévices physiques par les services de protection de l'enfance et par le bureau du procureur général. Grâce à une analyse documentaire exhaustive à laquelle se sont ajoutés des témoignages d'anciens membres du groupe ainsi que des entretiens avec des informateurs clés, la reconstruction de l'histoire du groupe, de sa fondation à sa dissolution, a été rendue possible. Quatre moments dans le développement du groupe ont été identifiés ; leur analyse a permis de cerner les éléments qui ont contribué à la mise en place d'un contexte groupal et doctrinal qui légitimait le recours généralisé aux sévices physiques des enfants y vivant.

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo estudiar, a partir de un caso único, la evolución de un grupo religioso minoritario de Quebec, la Iglesia bautista de Windsor, hacia un funcionamiento sectario y autoritario que lo aisló del ámbito social. Los niños de dicho grupo eran sometidos a severos castigos corporales que fueron considerados como maltrato físico por los servicios de protección de la infancia y por la oficina del procurador general. Gracias a un análisis documental exhaustivo acompañado de testimonios de ex miembros y de entrevistas con informantes clave ha sido posible reconstruir la historia de este grupo de su fundación a su disolución. Cuatro momentos en la evolución del grupo fueron identificados y su análisis permitió identificar los elementos que contribuyeron al surgimiento de un contexto grupal y doctrinal que legitimaba el recurso generalizado al maltrato físico de los menores del grupo.