THE GAME OF INFLUENCE • HOW THE PR INDUSTRY COMPROMISES SCIENCE

SKEPTIC

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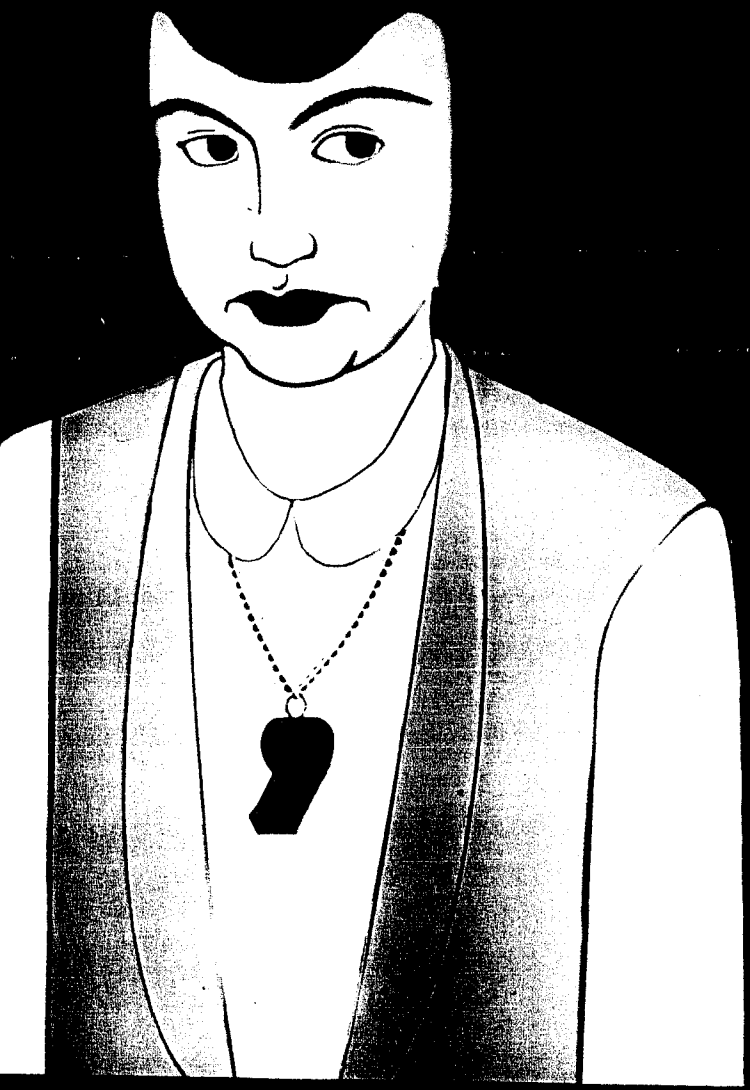

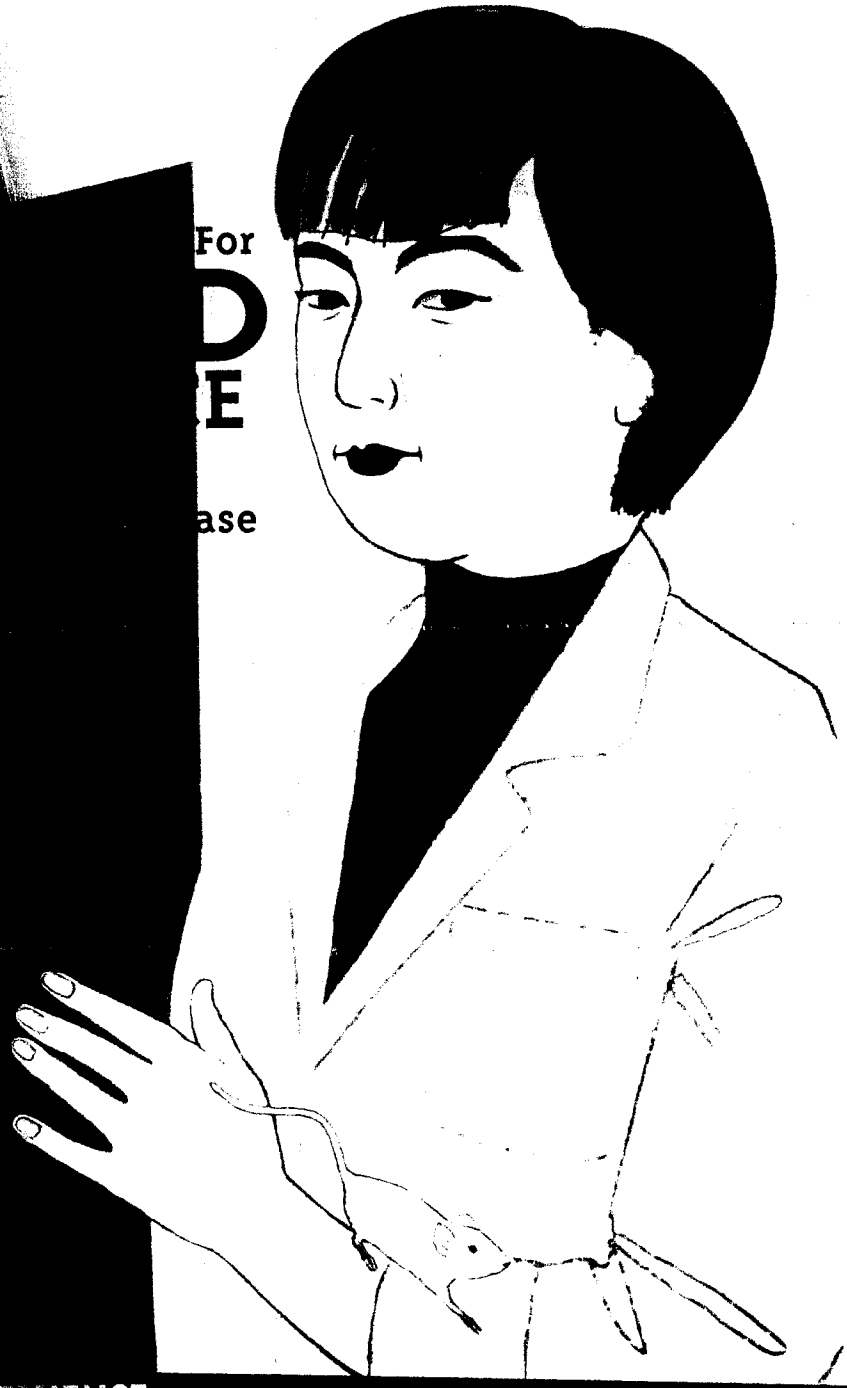

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"When Scholars Know Sin" Forum Debate

Mea Culpa! Mea Culpa! J. Gordon Melton Responds

Regular readers of Skeptic scanning the article by Steven A. Kent and Theresa Krebs, "When Scholars Know Sin" (Vol. 6, No.3, 1998), may have felt as if they were stepping into the middle of a debate without being aware of the stakes behind the arguments placed before them. In fact the paper, in a slightly more sanitized version, previously appeared as part of a set of papers concerning the problems faced by scholars of New Religions who must work in such a highly charged arena and whose every word is scrutinized by both members and critics of the more controversial groups. In that more professional context, one can assume that the readers were up on the issues. But here I begin my response with a little bit of history.

New Religions Studies emerged as a separate field of interest in the late 1960s as a variety of academics began to look at the phenomena surrounding the hippies. Following the passing of the new law concerning immigration from Asia in 1965, teachers from a variety of Asian groups began to arrive in the United States in search of converts. They were joined by a variety of homegrown prophets and preachers who ran the gamut from Moshe Rosen of Jews for Jesus to psychedelic guru Timothy Leary.

At first, the press and public treated the new groups as just additional forms of spiritual exotica. However, by the mid 1970s the climate began to change and charges were leveled that the new groups were disrupting families and diverting young people from their chosen paths to fame and fortune. Borrowing an old term from social studies, disappointed and angry parents began to label the groups "cults" and started utilizing a technique called "deprogramming" to get their offspring out of the New Religions they had joined.

Eventually, deprogrammings which involved the physical confinement of the victim of the person being deprogrammed, landed people in court. It is generally considered illegal to forcefully detain people and keep them locked up for days while subjecting them to a variety of unwelcome advances designed to convince them to change their religious opinions and affiliations. It was also the case that the attempt to locate a defense for deprogrammers coincided with the desire of parents and former members of the groups to discover a rationale for the members' supposedly irrational choice of a bizarre religion in the face of the far superior choice of college and career. The idea of brainwashing, a concept that had been dusted off for the defense in the Patty Hearst case, provided both. Although it did not help Hearst, it enjoyed some success in a series of cases involving New Religions. Not only was it used to justify deprogramming as the lesser of evils when compared to a person spending their life in a "cult," but explained to parents why their offspring had rejected their parental guidance for a guru. It also became an effective offensive weapon in the hands of former members who launched suits against cults hoping to collect money for having been brainwashed.

The brainwashing idea had been floated as a hypothesis by several psychologists but found its true champion in Berkeley psychologist Margaret Singer, who wrote an early popular defense of the idea and subsequently developed it in her testimony in a number of court cases through the mid 1980s. Several of these cases resulted in multi-million-dollar judgments against some of the more well-known groups. Those opposed to "cults" found a popular response from juries to the emotionally charged word and it soon became the keystone of popular prejudice against New Religions (such prejudice being fueled by the events at Jonestown in 1978).

In the meantime, academics aware of the work on brainwashing following the Korean War challenged the new use of the term. Research on Chinese techniques utilized against the American prisoners of war, especially that of Edgar Shein, had concluded that those running the camps had no new sinister psychological techniques at their disposal. Prisoners had been responding to nothing more than simple ancient techniques of deprivation and torture. While their behavior had been affected, their thought processes remained clear. Those who chose to cooperate with the enemy had done so out of fear and physical need (or as Robert J. Lifton discovered in a few cases, a prior ideological proclivity), not because of any subtle mental manipulation. Singer had actually been Shein's student. In picking up the brainwashing hypothesis and using her credentials as his student, during her court appearances, she actually espoused the very idea her mentor had largely destroyed.

In the early 1980s, as social and psychological scientists debated the idea that New Religions used some form of mind control to recruit and hold their members, the American Psychological Association (APA) appointed Singer to head a committee to prepare a report on the ideas she and several colleagues had come to espouse. One could assume that this report included their best statement of the idea of "mind control" or "coercive persuasion," as it was termed, and the best evidence in its support to that point. The committee's report was presented in 1986 and blindly reviewed by four people. It was unanimously rejected. In the very kind reply of the person in charge of setting up the review, the committee's efforts were dismissed as being methodologically unsound and lacking in scientific rigor. The actual reviews were less kind in their assessment. As one of the reviewers, Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, noted: "The term 'brainwashing' is not a recognized theoretical concept, and is just a sensationalist 'explanation' more suitable to 'cultists' and revival preachers. It should not be used by psychologists, since it does not explain anything. (The complete text of Beit-Hallahmi's statement and the other documents relevant

to the APA action may be found on the website of the Center for Studies on New Religions, www.cesnur.org.)

In terms most familiar to SKEPTIC readers, the popular notion of brainwashing was simply pseudoscience. The committee's review concluded, as had the great majority of social scientists who had examined the issue, that Singer's concept of cultic brainwashing lacked a coherent theoretical framework, was supported by only minuscule empirical evidence, and simply did not account for the wide range of observable phenomena, most importantly the large turnover in members experienced by all of the groups, which seemed unable to hold a steady base of adherents.

The response of the APA to Singer had two immediate results: First, it became the basis of a series of court rulings. In 1988, Singer and a colleague, sociologist Richard Ofshe, were kicked out of court in a case involving a Scientologist after the court ruled that the pair lacked the support of a body of science from which to speak. After several other courts followed suit, Singer and Ofshe, complaining that their livelihood had been taken from them as professional witnesses, filed suit against both the American Psychological Association and the American Sociological Association, as well as a number of scholars individually. They charged that there had been a conspiracy to destroy them professionally. They brought suit in federal court. Dismissed, the suit was refiled in California as a conspiracy and defamation action. It was not only dismissed, but Singer and Ofshe were ordered to pay the court costs of the defendants. (This author was a defendant in the California suit, though not of the prior federal case.)

Second, since the ruling by the APA, the study of New Religions has blossomed as an interdisciplinary area of research pursued by hundreds of scholars in North America and Europe, not to mention Japan. (Contrary to Kent and Krebs' complaint that few students take up the study of the field, it had grown tremendously through the 1990s). It now forms one of the most visible tracks of programming at both the Association for the Sociology of Religion and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and has secured a permanent place in the programming of the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion. The annual meeting sponsored by the Center for Studies on New Religions (headquartered in Turin, Italy) attracts several hundred scholars from around the world. These studies, while following a variety of perspectives contributed by the various disciplines (from anthropology to religious studies), have found little value in the brainwashing or related hypotheses and for the last 15 years have been pursued largely without reference to them. They have gone a long way toward mapping our increasingly pluralistic religious community (including those people who are religiously nonreligious).

The loss of the brainwashing hypothesis has, to the contrary, had a tremendous effect upon the popular prejudice against New Religions. Anti-cultists were left without their single most effective argument against the various groups. To charge a group with brainwashing has functioned quite nicely as a way to mobilize negative feelings against a community that had otherwise objectively done nothing wrong. It also knocked out the justification for deprogrammings. Eventually, stripped of the brainwashing defense, one set of deprogrammers was presented with a multi-million-dollar judgment for their attempt to deprogram a member of a Pentecostal church. In addition, the Cult Awareness Network (CAN), the major group supporting an activist approach against cults, shared in that judgment as a result of the court's perception of CAN's involvement in the case. As a result, deprogrammings have all but ended in North America and the CAN was forced into bankruptcy.

In the wake of the rejection of their idea by the APA and the resultant loss of authority in court, Singer and others began to label scholars of New Religions who had refuted her brainwashing theories as "cult apologists." In the face of their inability to mount a convincing argument for their position, they have turned to personal attacks upon their fellow scholars. A host of amateur anti-cultists picked up the refrain, and those who study New Religious movements have become used to complaints that our work does not simply describe the phenomena, but actually advocates the New Religious movements. The attacks have been notable for their lack of analysis of (or, in the case of Kent and Krebs, even seeming familiarity with) the body of work of the people under attack.

In fact, scholars of New Religions do not advocate for the groups (I have quite enough to do supporting my own religious community, the United Methodist Church). Some of us, myself included, do argue for the civil rights of groups and their members, but that is quite distinct from supporting their religious claims or whitewashing individual leaders' and members' actions (some of whose actions are reprehensible and immoral in the extreme). However, it is also the case that the huge body of scholarship that has been built over the last several decades simply does not lend support to the broad anti-cult attack upon New Religions as a whole. While academics have unanimously condemned those groups and individual members of groups who have committed illegal and violent acts, we cannot support public campaigns to condemn the overwhelming majority of New Religious communities in the name of some fictitious ability to control the mind of their members.

Where's the Payoff?

With the demise of the brainwashing hypothesis during the last decade, attacks upon the scholarship on New Religions have largely been confined to gatherings of anti-cultists and their in-house publications. However, within the past year, suddenly the attack has again gone public. It has found its way into several periodicals and can be found on several prominent websites. It became a matter of discussion at the 1997 American Academy of Religion's session on methodology. And as might be expected, there is a reason for this sudden spurt of tabloid scholarship, that goes

far beyond Kent's and Kreb's altruistic concern to save the scholarly community from our biased reporting.

While the debate over brainwashing ended in the 1980s in English-speaking countries, it has arisen anew in continental Europe where several governments, most notably Austria, Germany, Belgium, and France, have invoked brainwashing ideas to support a popular campaign of suppression of minority religions. It is here that the general attack upon the credibility of the work done by those academics who have specialized in the study of New Religious Movements has its immediate impact. Following the incident of the Solar Temple, France, Belgium, the canton of Geneva, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, and the European Parliament established inquiry committees to assess the threat posed by New Religions in their country. Ignoring scholarship in their own countries, France and Belgium led the way with very negative reports that included a lengthy list of harmful groups ("sectes" being the operative term in Europe). Those lists included not only the more expected groups such as the Moonies, Krishnas, and The Family, but a wide array of groups relatively new to both countries including such generally tolerated groups as the Quakers and the Mormons, and even more mainline Protestant churches. Austria and the Canton of Geneva followed suit. The committees of the German government and the European Parliament both sought the testimony of scholars in the field and in the summer of 1998 concluded that no action was necessary. The German report (written in the face of the wave of anti-cult sentiment in the Kohl government) actually included a denunciation of brainwashing, and following the German election, the anti-cult hysteria has quieted.

While Germany was backing off from its campaign against the "sekten" in the summer of 1998 (largely because of scholarly objections to the brainwashing perspective), France and Belgium have moved ahead to fund efforts to monitor and attack a wide variety of religious minorities. (Germany has not backed off on its anti-Scientology stance, which it views as a special case not tied to the rest of the sect groups.)

Kent has been one of the few North American scholars who have staunchly identified himself with the actions of these European countries. So egregious have their actions been that in October 1998, the United States, through the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (the Helsinki Commission), moved to condemn their actions as a violation of basic human rights. The American statement was joined by one from the Netherlands. Independently, in September 1998, Sweden criticized the French stance, and the Swiss Canton of Ticino called for an end to "anti-cult terrorism."

Getting Personal

It is the refusal to give credence to the brainwashing hypotheses that forms the connecting thread in Kent's and Krebs' charge that the book which James Lewis and I edited on The Family (incorrectly tied to AWARE) and the study we led on the Church Universal and Triumphant, which was conducted under AWARE's auspices, were biased. In the case of the volume on the Family, they bolster their charges with the reports of a few former members of The Family, none of whom were around either to observe the research that I and the other scholars conducted, or to possess any awareness of the extensive research on The Family that I and several other scholars have pursued over the last decade. Kent and Krebs have simply constructed a naive fantasy of media homes and managed information. This fantasy is unfortunately supported by Kent's own lack of direct contact with The Family and a rather limited and spotty access to its massive literature. The Family certainly has a few media homes; it also supports other atypical homes that serve a variety of specialized interests, and scholars would indeed be naive if they did not realize the distinct flavor of these distinct homes.

New Religions scholars generally favor studies anchored in direct observation of a particular group (including the reading of its publications) supplemented with outside sources, including the accounts of former members. Both sets of sources have to be handled in a critical manner. This data then has to be placed in the larger framework of what we know about religious groups in general, and New Religions in particular. In the case of The Family, over the past six years the group has opened its doors to the most intense scrutiny. I personally have visited more than 50 Family homes, including all the homes in Eastern Europe. I possess a complete set of its literature published over the 30 years of its existence. I have an extensive collection of material (much of it quite hostile) produced by former members and have interviewed a host of former members. Additionally, I have had the benefit of the insights of a half dozen other scholars who have also given The Family their serious attention. These studies now stand in stark contrast to Kent's own rather shallow studies based as they are almost entirely on the accounts of a small number of hostile ex-members and a very selective choice of citations from the literature. (Quite apart from any attempts at public relations, given the British court's recent three-year in-depth investigation of The Family, it has become next to impossible for The Family to conceal anything of importance from investigators. Both The Family's lurid past and rather mundane present are wide open.)

In contrast to the volume on The Family, the study led by James Lewis and me on the Church Universal and Triumphant was from the beginning an interdisciplinary study project which emerged from conversations between the Church's international leadership and Mr. Lewis, the head of a small organization called AWARE (the Association of Academics for Research and Education) and the Church's desire for some scholarly insights into their community. While the hiring of academic consultants is commonplace for many religious organizations, it was a first for CUT. We involved a variety of scholars, some identified with New Religions studies, and others

not. Following standard practice, to help insure that the results of the study were not tied to the funding, the finances for the study were received before the study was launched.

The study of CUT was conducted in a manner similar to that on other religious groups of other churches with each of a variety of scholars selected to look into an important aspect of the church's life. Unfortunately, between the time when the project was initiated and funded in 1992, and the primary phase of research conducted in the summer of 1993, the incident at Waco occurred. Even though the study was set up prior to Waco, many (especially some of the church's critics) saw it as a part of a church campaign of public relations in light of Waco. The study proved quite the opposite. It turned out to be a significant catalyst for change in the church. As we discovered only several years later, the church's board were startled and even upset by the very different image of themselves offered by the report, and, reacting to the critique of the movement, they initiated a series of changes beginning with the phasing out of their parochial school in Montana. Possibly the primary reaction to the report was their hiring of a management consultant to take a further in-depth look at the church's structure and make recommendations for change. That report has resulted in a wholesale transformation of the church's organization, a transformation as startling as those undergone by The Family through the 1990s.

Kent and Krebs reminded us of the 1983 warning of Louis Horowitz who feared that scholars attending the old Moonie conferences would slip into unabashed support for the New Religions. Happily, Horowitz's fears were never realized. Those same scholars who attended some of those conferences, including James Lewis, Anson Shupe, and myself, have gone on to write some of the most damning critiques of various groups (including the Unification Church) when they seemed called for. Thus Lewis and I remain proud of the work we have done on The Family and the Church Universal and Triumphant and have been pleased that the two volumes have been found useful by our fellow scholars as launching pads for further research and insightful introduction to the groups about whom we have written. It is also our hope that our work will help end the current wave of repressive actions by the several European governments.

A Closing Note: The Realm of the Holy

Amidst the personal attacks upon Shupe, Lewis, and myself, Kent and Krebs do raise one valid and important issue under the heading "Academics and Doctrinal Secrets." (Space does not allow me to comment upon the number of factual errors spread throughout this article that at times become crucial to their argument. I bypass these in favor of trying to focus upon what I see are the key issues raised by Kent and Krebs.) They complain that I signed a document supporting Scientology's efforts to keep its upper level teachings confidential. In fact, I have signed several documents in that regard. Very often when scholars research religious groups, especially if they are esoteric in nature, they become privy to confidential inner teachings. In some cases, these inner teachings and the keeping of their content secret have a significant role to play in the group's life. This is an aspect of the larger issue of being invited into the realm of what a group considers the most sacred and holy aspect of their life.

Not just sociologists, but all researchers —whether they be anthropologists, psychologists, or religious scholars—have to make some personal decisions about how they as outside observers and unbelievers will relate to what is considered most holy by the group under scrutiny. This is an issue about which we disagree. In the case of the Church of Scientology, whose life is structured into a series of ascending steps, the teachings of their higher levels (like most esoteric groups) are held to be their most sacred. While I would like to be privy to those teachings, they have not chosen to share them with me, and those who currently possess copies and/or have attempted to publish them abroad, have been working ultimately from copies taken without permission from the church. Although I have no great love for the Church of Scientology, I respect its right to establish a holy realm for its members. Fortunately, as it turns out in the case of Scientology, there is ample non-confidential material (including accounts of their experience of the upper levels by former members) readily available to the researcher, so that little is lost in not having access to the several secret documents.

Although my position on Scientology's right to keep their inner teachings confidential was set from my having to deal with similar issues over the years with a number of other groups, I cannot help but speculate that Kent's choosing to raise this particular issue in relation to Scientology derives from the broad attack upon it by several of the Church's self-designated enemies. They have been attempting to make Scientology's secret material public, not in any desire to further sociological or religious analysis, but simply to embarrass and hopefully destroy the church. One tactic they have employed has been the dumping of stolen copies of the Scientology materials into public records (from which sources copyright laws could be bypassed, a fact that should send a chill through anyone who lives off their writings). Thus in supporting Scientology on this one matter, like the ACLU supporting any controversial group when a matter of principle is at stake, on those occasions where my particular study and expertise is relevant, I have stepped in as an advocate of the principle, not particularly of the group.

As Kent noted, since 1994, at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, scholars concerned about issues of methodology in the study of New Religions, including issues of bias and objectivity, gather for a lengthy and frank discussion of our work. It is a pity that Kent has, until this past year, not been a part of those discussions. He would have a much better handle on the directions being taken by this growing field.

—J. Gordon Melton, Institute for the Study of American Religion, Santa Barbara, CA

Kent and Krebs' Skepticism Crosses the Line
Anson Shupe Responds

Kent and Krebs' article, in researching religious groups, is both a canard and seriously misleading. I am well aware that there is a fine line around which participants, observers, and interviewers must tread when studying unconventional religious groups. The authors, seemingly unknowingly, do not realize they have transgressed that line in criticizing J. Gordon Melton, James Lewis, and myself for somehow being in bed with, or in the pockets of, cults. We may not be the dream team when it comes to studying unconventional religions, but we're not as stupid or misinformed or naive as Kent and Krebs suggest.

There is a lot of misinformation in Kent and Krebs' article. They put a goofy spin on things. The Jason Scott case—in which an adult Pentecostal was kidnapped, physically and emotionally abused, involuntarily contained for an entire week by deprogramming mercenaries, and whose civil suit financially broke the back of the pernicious Cult Awareness Network—was not, as the authors write, unusual. The Cult Awareness Network, which routinely referred deprogrammers to distraught family members whose family members had joined unconventional religions, was operative at violating civil liberties. This was, as we say in criminology, corporate crime. Kent and Krebs should do better if they are going to champion CAN's cause. CAN was no benevolent, humanitarian, or educational organization.

Contrary to the authors' claims, I have never submitted any article to the Church of Scientology's *Freedom* magazine, nor, I should add, have I ever been a Scientologist. I did write an editorial on the German Republic's neo-Nazi discrimination against Scientologist celebrities and entertainers, but it was for the *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette* and was ultimately picked up a national wire service and reprinted by Scientology. The authors' mention of this article is an uninformed, ad hominem attack.

Anyone who is a professional in the sociology of religion and aware of Steven A. Kent knows that he does not have clean hands in the cult-anticult debate. For example, despite any reliable law enforcement corroboration and on the basis of dubious informants, Kent persists in claiming there are organized Satanists running loose in Canada. Canadian newspapers have questioned his credibility as any kind of expert. And he even presented a paper several years ago at a national sociological conference with a co-author who was a coercive deprogrammer, one who narrowly escaped a prison sentence for kidnapping and assault simply on a legal technicality. Kent's articles, published in anti-cult and mainstream professional journals, defending as he does the discredited views of alleged mind control processes, are sometimes bizarre. There is, however, one irony here. I am currently coauthor of a book under contract on the entire cult-anti-cult controversy at the turn of the next century. Steven A. Kent and Theresa Krebs, their confused views, and the incident of the SKEPTIC article will be in it. They have become grist for my mill.

—Anson Shupe, Professor Indiana University-Purdue University, Fort Wayne
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Let the Scholar Who is Without Sin Cast the First Stone
James R. Lewis Responds

For the past half-dozen years, I have been aware of the personal assault Stephen Kent has mounted against me, both publicly and behind my back. Rather than climbing down into the muck for a round of mudslinging, I have consistently chosen to ignore Prof. Kent's scurrilous attacks. As discussed more fully in Dr. Melton's response, the particular brand of pseudoscience represented by Kent and others of his ilk has been thoroughly demolished by mainstream scholarship. Poor losers, Kent and his cronies—like hollow-earth enthusiasts, big foot believers, and other advocates of the irrational—have responded with *ad hominem* arguments, convinced that any who would oppose their crackpot theories must be involved in some kind of sinister conspiracy against them.

The publication of Stephen Kent's and Theresa Krebs' "When Scholars Know Sin," however, brings Kent's assault to a new and more insistent level. It seems that my silence has been misinterpreted as a willingness to endure the worst kind of misrepresentation. Thus despite my reluctance to engage in this type of exchange, I have decided that it is time to set the record straight.

In the first place we should note the obvious, which is that the "cult" issue is not a purely academic one. Like the 1970's debate over race and I.Q., the current scholarly controversy over new religions and "cult" mind control has real world consequences, as witnessed by the many new religion specialists who have been called upon to serve as expert witnesses. Thus Kent and Krebs bewail the fact that academics may inadvertently produce sympathetic scholarship that helps minority religions overcome their social stigma. Their complaint is, however, disingenuous. As with other issues, the same sword cuts both ways. In the context of the present issue, Kent and Krebs intentionally fail to mention the obvious counterpoint, namely that unsympathic scholarship (such as their own) *perpetuates* prejudice against minority religions. All of us who work in this contentious field are only too aware of these facts.

Based on his restricted interactions with a handful of hostile ex-members, Stephen Kent has concluded that organizations like Scientology, The Family and so forth are terrible groups—like the KKK or the mafia—that merit social censure. Hence any scholar who uncovers favorable aspects of such groups is comparable to a tobacco company scientist who asserts that smoking is not really harmful to one's health. Alternatively, based on our ongoing interactions with a broad spectrum of current as well as former members of such groups, I and my colleagues have concluded that, for the most part, "new" religions are no worse than "old" religions. Thus our scholarship tends to debunk popular stereotypes based upon pseudoscientific notions like "cultic mind control." From our perspective,

academics whose scholarship consistently casts minority religions in the worst possible light are not unlike those who argue that Blacks are less intelligent than Whites based on the scores of culturally-biased I.Q. tests.

To put this disagreement in a larger framework, liberal scholars hold to two distinct systems of value that rarely conflict with one another. On the one hand, we adhere to the ideal of objectivity. On the other, we embrace the liberal ideal that, rather than segregating ourselves into an ivory tower, institutions of higher learning should exert a salutary influence on society. Thus biologists have become involved in the ecology movement, social scientists in the civil rights movement, and so forth, with no sense of thereby abandoning academic objectivity. Furthermore, biologists can accept grants from liberal public interest groups to carry out certain kinds of ecological research and sociologists can accept grants from the NAACP to research racism without thereby invoking the censure of their colleagues. In other words, no one questions the objectivity of a scholar engaged in research impacting a controversial social issue—even when he or she accepts money from a partisan group—as long as the goals of his or her research are in harmony with the liberal consensus on that particular issue.

The situation radically changes, however, when a scholar produces research that supports a position contrary to the liberal consensus. For instance, academics rarely give credence to reports authored by natural scientists who receive grants from big corporations to "prove" that cigarette smoking may not cause cancer or that such-and-such a pollutant may not poison the environment. Instead, they would likely accuse these scientists of having lost their objectivity because of their funding sources. But, and this is the important point, if natural scientists accepted grants from anti-smoking groups or from public interest ecology groups in order to "prove" the opposite position, no one within liberal academia would so much as raise an eyebrow—this despite the fact that, structurally, there is no fundamental difference between these two hypothetical examples.

With respect to this specific point, Prof. Kent accuses me and other scholars of directly or indirectly accepting funds from certain minority religions, as if in doing so we "knew sin," in his quasi-religious turn of phrase. He fails to mention, however, that he has more than once accepted money from a German political party and from the German Lutheran Church to visit the Fatherland—not, it should be noted, for the purpose of attending academic conferences, but instead for the purpose of preaching his pseudoscientific gospel against minority religious groups.

To go back to the larger discussion, the cult controversy does not fit neatly into academia's taken-for-granted ways of dealing with social issues. Because religion has often been a conservative force working against reformist social change, liberals have been slow to defend the rights of religious minorities. Why, after all, expend your energy defending someone on one front who is going to be your opponent on innumerable other fronts? As a consequence, minority religions or new religious movements (commonly referred to as "NRMs" in scholarly literature) have acquired an ambiguous, no-man's land status. It is, therefore, an open question within the larger academy as to whether NRMs are more like persecuted racial and ethnic minorities, or more like sinister tobacco companies. The consensus among NRM scholars is that NRMs are more like persecuted minorities. This is not to say that academics thereby blind themselves to the fact that some NRMs have hurt people or that some have even "gone bad." Where I think scholars are most ready to defend an NRM is on the specific point of how a given NRM's negative actions are explained in public discourse. Let me make this point vividly clear via a few parallels with other viciously pejorative stereotypes:

—A Black man assaulted a woman? That's because Blacks have uncontrollable sexual appetites.

—A Jewish proprietor cheated you? That's because all Jews are dishonest and money hungry.

—A member of a minority religion shot and killed somebody? That's because all minority religions are violent, lawless cults.

What these cases have in common is that they all proffer explanations in terms of biased stereotypes. If I came forward and, in answer to the first item, attacked this statement for relying upon a racial stereotype, that would *not* mean that I was in any way defending either the rapist or the act of rape. Similarly, I would not be defending the act of cheating by criticizing an anti-Semitic assertion. Yet when someone levels the same sort of critique against the cult stereotype, they are accused of being a "cult apologist." In the final analysis, this appears to be the position taken by Kent and Krebs.

The consensus among mainstream NRM scholars is that the cult stereotype must be vigorously opposed. *No matter how guilty* a member of such a group may be of antisocial actions, it is still illegitimate to explain such negative acts in terms of this stereotype. Rather, one must look concretely at individual actions. If such acts are bad, immoral or illegal, then they should be condemned as bad, immoral or illegal—not as "cultic."

Kent and Krebs misrepresent me and my work so severely that a point-by-point rebuttal would consume a half-dozen pages. Gordon Melton has already addressed the points raised by Kent and Krebs about the integrity of our scholarly work. In the balance of this response, I will, therefore, focus on setting the record straight regarding Kent's paper, "The Lustful Prophet" (a title that aptly reflects the author's "neutral" approach to the subject).

In early 1993, Prof. Charlotte Hardman, who had been doing research on The Family in England, contacted a Family representative there and conveyed an urgent message: She had either heard a presentation by—or been in a conversation with—Prof. Kent at an academic meeting, and was convinced that his forthcoming publication on The Family's founder would be a hatchet job. The sense, if not the exact wording, of Prof. Hardman's message was that Kent was "out to get" The Family. She further suggested that The Family contact the publisher and lodge a protest.

At the time, I was doing field research on The Family. During a visit to a Los Angeles area home (which served as U.S. HQ for The Family), I was asked to examine Prof. Hardman's alarming communication. I was also informed that Prof. Kent had approached The Family a year or two before, representing himself as a scholar researching the 1960's counterculture. He requested copies of some of The Family's early work under the pretext of his "study." In an act of magnanimity (and trust), The Family's leader/founder, David Berg, supplied Kent with a complete set of the group's literature—including early material that was highly controversial and no longer representative of The Family's mature views on certain sensitive issues.

Prof. Kent never composed a paper on the counterculture. He also received information from certain ex-members of The Family who had actually *stolen* materials from a group home in the Philippines—ex-members who, furthermore, were wanted by the Philippine police. Finally, it turned out that the only Family members he was interested in interviewing were the ones with negative tales to tell—an approach roughly comparable to focusing one's research solely on information gained from ex-spouses experiencing difficult divorces.

I examined this data and concluded that Prof. Kent had, indeed, violated the canons of academic research methodology as well as the ethical standards of mainstream scholarship. Acting on Prof. Hardman's suggestion, I then proceeded to write the editors of the *RSSSR* a cautiously worded letter in which I suggested that they take a closer look at Prof. Kent's ethics and methodology. I did *not*, however, send a copy of that letter to the publisher. Instead, it was The Family's lawyer who wrote the publisher, and it was on the basis of the latter communication that the publisher—not the editors—decided to pull "The Lustful Prophet." In other words, I had *nothing* to do with the non-publication of Kent's paper, and he knows it, although precisely the opposite impression is conveyed by "When Scholars Know Sin."

In point of fact, Prof. Kent fails to mention a great number of things. In addition to my having offered him a full apology "for my letter to the editors of *RSSSR*" (an apology I made only because certain colleagues urged me to do so), over the past six years I have several times offered to publish any paper he cared to send me as a way of burying the hatchet between us. Again, none of these efforts to mend fences were ever acknowledged by him in the course of his public and private campaign to defame me, certainly not in "When Scholars Know Sin." I can only surmise that Kent self-servingly concluded he could get more mileage out of his artifically inflated tale of woe than from my offer of collegial reconciliation—certainly his touting of himself as a victim of a "cult conspiracy" has brought him more recognition than his otherwise unremarkable scholarship would ever have attracted.

Finally, to give the reader a fuller sense of the way in which Prof. Kent conducts his research, I would like to point out that his accusation about my lacking a Ph.D. degree is based solely on the fact that I hold my Master's degree from the institution he mentions. He is either oblivious to the fact that I attended more than one graduate institution, or he purposefully misrepresents my academic background. This means that Kent is thus either a slipshod researcher or that he selectively presents his data so as to serve his personal biases.

While I cannot claim to understand the deeper motives underlying Kent's assault, it is nevertheless a truism that success elicits criticism. In academia in particular, it is an unfortunate fact of life that leaders in any field of study always seem to become points of attack for their less successful colleagues. In the case at hand, Gordon Melton, Anson Shupe and I are prominent scholars in the specialty of new religious movements. This status is reflected in, among other things, our publications: beyond the volumes mentioned by Kent and Krebs, Dr. Melton is the author of

The Handbook of Cults and Sects in America, the monumental *Encyclopedia of American Religions* (now in its 6th edition), and other standard reference books. Prof. Shupe has authored or co-authored numerous influential volumes, including *Strange Gods*, *The New Vigilantes*, and other "classics" in our field. As for myself, I am the author of *Cults in America*, the definitive *Encyclopedia of Cults, Sects and New Religions*, and the author/editor of over a half-dozen other scholarly volumes. In sharp contrast, Kent's work in the field of new religions consists of a handful of articles—articles, it should be pointed out, that have been thoroughly trashed by other scholars. I leave it to the reader to draw her or his own conclusions regarding the ultimate source of Kent's animosity.

If Prof. Kent ever decides to abandon his personal polemics and return to the arena of academic debate, I will be the first to embrace him as a fellow scholar. I also hope that in the future SKEPTIC will take a less gullible and more "skeptical" approach to material left on their doorstep. When baseless accusations that potentially harm the livelihoods of academics are printed in a respected magazine, it does a great disservice, not only to those who are slandered, but also to the larger cause that SKEPTIC represents.

CLARIFYING CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

A REJOINDER TO MELTON, SHUPE, AND LEWIS

STEPHEN A. KENT AND THERESA KREBS

Our SKEPTIC article (which the editor named, without either our knowledge or consent, "When Scholars Know Sin,") raised at least five issues that had direct relevance for Gordon Melton and that he could have addressed. His peculiar discussion about brainwashing—not a topic that we raised—obfuscates very important points that we made in the essay. We shall refocus the discussion back to those substantive issues, and by doing so examine the few points that Melton makes in direct response to our analysis.

First, Kent and Krebs agreed with sociologist Robert Balch's critical summation (Balch, 1996) that James Lewis and Melton's edited volume on the *Children of God/The Family* (Lewis and Melton, 1994a) disregarded the group's efforts to sanitize and manage its public image. We pointed out the group's implementation of Media Homes whose hand-picked members rehearsed answers to expected questions, and we indicated our knowledge of the group's destruction of controversial sexual material involving children. Melton boasts about both the size of his collection and his numerous visits to Family homes. He does not however, marshal any of this material to refute our statements (from Family literature, reinforced with our interviews) that Media Homes not only had question-and-answer rehearsals in preparation for researchers but also had destroyed crucial documents about the group's encouragement and facilitation of child sexual abuse. (See Melton's own reference to two book chapters from a 1978 teen training book that The Family expunged by the early 1990s [Melton, 1994, 91].) He claims that we incorrectly state that The Family study was tied to AWARE, but he neglects to mention that seven of the 16 authors published in his co-edited book on the group were either AWARE directors or on its Academic Advisory Committee.

Second, we mentioned that several academics had spoken favorably about The Family on a public relations video that the group produced in 1994, which should have caught Melton's attention since he was among the academics who appeared on tape. He also appeared as an expert witness on behalf of The Family in a British court case (which was decided in October, 1995 and which Melton refers to in his response). Combined with his 1994 essay entitled "Sexuality and the Maturation of The Family" that appeared in his co-edited volume, we have three opportunities to compare Melton's comments within a relatively close period of time about the crucial issue of child sexual abuse.

In his 1994 essay, Melton indicated that "[a]llowed, even encouraged, behavior" in a 1979 Family publication "included nude mixed bathing, nude mixed play, self-sexual examination, experimentation and/or interplay when playing or sleeping together. Allowing children to watch adults engage in sexual intercourse is allowable, but each case must be judged on its own merits according to the child's reaction" (Melton, 1994, 83). When he discussed the publication, *Child Brides*, Melton indicated that The Family's leader, David Berg, "suggested that those teens [aged 13 to 15] who wanted to should be allowed to marry" (Melton, 1994, 84). From 1981 to 1987, some Family homes made videos of nude women dancing, and "[i]n a few cases, at the home in Greece, minors, both teens and pre-teens, were allowed to participate in making a video" (Melton, 1994, 86). In the early 1980s, some Family members took the discussion of adults pleasurably manipulating the genitals of children "as encouragement to begin doing it" (Melton, 1994, 88). Also in the mid-1980s, some teens in The Family's teen training camps "paired off and were into heavy petting short of sexual intercourse" (Melton, 1994, 90). Referring, apparently, to pre-1980s incidents, Melton indicated, "[e]arlier incidents of adults having sex with children (there were no youth) brought strong reprimands. They were plainly wrong," he added, apparently referring to such sexual contact (Melton, 1994, 91). In 1989, after "[w]omen in their late teens" found themselves working with older men, Berg's partner, Maria, threatened excommunication to anyone found in adult-teen sexual arrangements. Part of Maria's fear apparently was that "younger women are both attracted to older

men and on occasion might attempt to use their attractiveness as an entrée into power" (Melton, 1994, 91-92). By 1991, however, child abuse accusations by some former members caused The Family to issue "an even stricter policy on teenage sexual activity" (Melton, 1994, 92). At several places in the footnotes, Melton was critical of another scholar's statement that many of the contentious documents mentioned adult-child sex (Melton, 1994, 275).

As these (often understated) observations stand, and without analyzing the doctrines themselves, Melton's comments about child sexual abuse might appear to support his claim that he is among those who "have gone on to write some of the most damning of critiques of various groups...when it seemed called for." Indeed, regarding the British court trial, Judge Ward indicated, "[w]hen cross-examined [Melton] felt able to go further than he had in his written report and his evidence was clear and unequivocal namely that he was in no doubt at all that oral or manual masturbation and full sexual intercourse had occurred between child and adult [sic] within The Family and that the incidence of this having occurred was higher in The Family than outside it." He also "did not shrink from expressing his horror at the excessive punishments meted out to the children." The judge indicated that, despite Melton's "reputation for being a defender of small religious groups and a defender of the freedom of religion," he found Melton "to be independent and objective..." (Ward, 1995, 217).

With these observations about Melton's findings in mind, it is exceedingly difficult to understand how he could have made the statements about The Family that he provided on the group's public relations video—a production entitled *Insight: Experts Comment on The Family and Other New Religious Movements*. He pronounced, for example, that Family members "have a very positive view of sexuality. This is something that mainstream, particularly liberal Protestants, articulate but rarely act upon, and The Family has been the one group that we know of that doctrinally fit[s] into mainstream Christianity that's tried to act upon its ideas of positive sexuality—ideas that have gotten them in trouble at various times and places" (The Family, 1994). Speaking specifically about The Family's children—including teens who presumably had been both targets and participants in The Family's sexual activities—Melton concluded, "I think The Family teenagers compare with certainly the best of what we're turning out in mainstream society today. They are alert to what's going on in the world. They've been given a strong, loving environment within which to grow up in [sic]. They are aware, trained in terms of their formal education. They have had the benefit of living in a drug-free environment, and they've had the benefit of giving—been given a fairly strong moral code, so that they have something to face life as an adult" (The Family, 1994).

In light of what Melton knew about the group, these statements about positive sexuality, a strong moral code, and a loving environment are extraordinary. Melton objects to the fact that some critics label him and others as "cult apologists"—a term, by the way, that we did not use. With these kinds of inconsistencies, however, in his own work, it is easy to see from where the label comes. Claiming dismissively (as Melton does) this "apologist" charge as a personal attack is to avoid the more logical conclusion—Melton has brought the pejorative label upon himself.

Let us move quickly through a few other points. While we reinforce the criticisms that Balch and Langdon (1998) levelled against Lewis and Melton's Church Universal and Triumphant study (1994b), Melton tries to credit it with "a wholesale transformation of the church's organization." Almost certainly, however, that transformation is attributable to factors having nothing to do with Lewis and Melton's book (see Church Universal and Triumphant [CUT], 1997, 6). CUT suffered a financial crisis in the mid-1990s (*Billings Gazette*, 1997; Church Universal and Triumphant [CUT], 1997, 16), and recently the organization's leader announced that she (allegedly) is suffering from Alzheimer's disease (*New York Times*, 1998).

As a fourth issue, we pointed out that Melton had been involved with an identified Scientology public relations front group called APRL. Melton, however, never responded to this issue, so we will say no more about it. Fifth and finally, we challenged the wisdom of Melton's efforts to help Scientology keep secret its upper level doctrines, and on this issue Melton said a great deal.

Melton should not doubt our academic interest in these documents, since the confidential ones relating to supposedly secret (but actually widely known) doctrines (see Kaufman, 1972, 157-164) likely shed light on crucial issues involving ideology and (possibly) claims about physical healing. (Melton insists, by the way, that all of the currently circulating confidential material had been stolen from Scientology, but he must realize that some of these same documents could have entered private hands in the late 1960s, when people signed out the confidential "Operating Thetan" documents and took them home [Kaufman, 1972, 161].) Essential to acknowledge, however, is that many of Scientology's confidential documents have nothing to do with its members' belief in a supposedly sacred realm. Instead, some documents outline the operation of its forced labour and reindoctrination program for members—the Rehabilitation Project Force (RPF). Melton is familiar with this program, since he heard Kent present an academic paper on it in 1997 (Kent, 1997a).

The RPF apparently operates in at least four American locations, as well as at sites in the United Kingdom and Denmark. Its combination of forcible confinement, physical and social maltreatment, forced confessions, and intense ideological study makes it a classic "brainwashing" program. Moreover, its operation raises serious issues about human rights abuses, and Kent has spoken about these issues to German parliamentary officials in 1997 (Kent, 1997b). (Extraordinarily, James Lewis managed to twist my discussions about

these alleged human rights abuses into "preaching my pseudoscientific gospel of hatred against minority religions.")

None of the human rights commissions and groups that commented on Germany's response to Scientology knew about the RPF. Nor did the Board of Social and Ethical Responsibility for Psychology (BSERP) of the American Psychological Association (APA) when, in 1987, it rejected a final report on mind control theories as applied to 'new religions' prepared by the Task Force on Deceptive and Indirect Methods of Persuasion and Control (DIMPAC). The memorandum forwarded to members of DIMPAC stated that the BSERP "does not believe that we have sufficient information available to guide us in taking a position on this issue" (APA, 1987)—a crucial admission that Melton omitted in his summary of the brainwashing debate in the social sciences. Viewed in this context, an effort by a researcher to introduce new material into the scholarly arena should have been a welcome event. Apparently, however, it was not a welcome event to Melton, who prevented Kent from presenting such material in a conference that Melton's Institute for the Study of American Religion (ISAR) co-sponsored with the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR) in late 1996.

The conference's "call for papers" (ISAR/CESNUR, 1996) indicated that one theme was "violence in the life of new religions." Kent submitted an abstract entitled "'Brainwashing' and Membership Maintenance: Confinement Systems in Two Nontraditional Religions," to Melton and stated that he would examine "physical, psychological, and socio-emotional punishments in confined or guarded camps" (Kent, 1996a). In a highly unusual response, Melton faxed back to Kent a page-long set of comments about brainwashing, and concluded them with the statement, "[y]our paper should anticipate such objections and you should be prepared for these to be raised in the discussion period" (Melton, 1993 [sic: 1996]). Kent replied with a note indicating that he was "conversant with the existing academic literature on the subject," and assured Melton that his "presentation will fit within appropriate social scientific parameters. In any case, you may find it most economical to respond to the completed paper so that you can see how I use data to unfold and support my argument" (Kent, 1996b). Only when Kent contacted Melton again shortly before the conference did he learn that Melton had ommitted him from the program without notifying him that he had done so.

Melton concludes his piece indicating that "it is a pity" that Kent (supposedly) has attended only one discussion about "new religions" at the American Academy of Religion, when it is really a pity that Melton conveniently forgot that Kent actually has participated in three of them! Kent's impression from these discussions is that other colleagues also share his concerns about the objectivity of some of Melton's work. These concerns only will increase with Melton's recent announcement (in his response) that "finances for the [CUT] study were received before the study was launched," since he should have provided and elaborated upon this funding in the published study. This admission, coupled with actions such as endorsing controversial organizations like The Family, casts shadows over what often is impressive scholarship.

Rather than focusing and furthering this debate, Andy Shupe's response inflates it, and we regret that we must spend so much time correcting his overstatements and outright mistakes. We did not say that he is "stupid" (and we certainly do not think so), and we did not say that he is "somehow in bed, or in the pockets, of cults." Indeed, Krebs remains grateful to Shupe for his inclusion of her article in his edited volume on clergy malfeasance (Krebs, 1998). Her findings, however, about a religious organization's attempts to manipulate and control information about clergy pedophilia interested her in analogous information control processes among alternative religions, which culminated (in co-authorship with Kent) in articles in SKEPTIC (Kent and Krebs, 1998b) and the more traditionally academic *Nova Religio* (1998a).

We did say that the trust Shupe put in Scientologist, lawyer, and unindicted co-conspirator Kendrick Moxon was "unwise" (Kent and Krebs, 1998b, 42) and "may have been misplaced" (41). We also raised questions about the quality of his information-sources about CAN, and we raised questions about whether he had expertise concerning CAN during the time of the Jason Scott kidnapping incident in 1991. For reasons that only he knows, Shupe did not address these issues in his response. Nor did he speak about his association with AWARE—an organization directed by a person who lied about his credentials, and whose ruse fooled Shupe. (See *Scott v. Ross et al.*, 1995a, 134.)

These questions are legitimate ones—some of which, presumably, were behind a district court judge's query to CAN's counsel about why it had not objected during the trial to any of Shupe's testimony. Failure to have done so seems to have been a significant strategic error on the part of CAN's counsel. Indeed, during the trial but when the jury was out of the room, the district court judge expressed curiosity regarding "why there were no objections to Dr. Shupe's testimony" by CAN's attorneys. The judge stated, "[a]bout 90 percent of what I heard there [in Shupe's testimony] I would have sustained objections to" (*Scott v. Ross, et. al.*, 1995b, 54; see *Scott v. Ross, et. al.*, 1998, 3223-3224). In other words, had CAN's counsel objected to Shupe's answers, then the district judge may have struck most of them.

Shupe's inattention to detail in his response to our analysis in SKEPTIC led him to explain how, presumably, an article of his on Germany's (alleged) discrimination against celebrities wound up in Scientology's public relations and attack magazine, *Freedom. This article, however, is not the one that we mentioned!* In two *Freedom* publications, Shupe's photo appears next to an article that discusses alleged "cult experts" whose expertise he disputes (Shupe, [1994/1995?], 1995). While both of the publications that we cited include the statement "[r]eprinted by permission,"

neither identifies the originating source nor from whom *Freedom* received permission to reprint. Perhaps Shupe is unaware that this article appeared in two issues of *Freedom* publications, yet we are very clear about them in our SKEPTIC article.

Serious issues exist with Shupe's statements about Kent and his research. Kent's published works about satanism, for example, that appeared in a highly respected, Anglo-American academic journal, *Religion*, is cautious and balanced, in stark contrast to Shupe's allusions to it. In the first of three articles, Kent wrote, "[w]ithout, of course, definitive independent confirmation of ritual abuse stories I cannot make a scientific claim that such accounts accurately represent abusive events" (Kent, 1993b, 231). Likewise, Kent concluded his third article with the caution, "[c]areful research, balanced discussions, and thoughtful presentations of evidence are the only techniques that advance scientific enterprises. We must keep these principles in mind during the debates about satanic ritual abuse.... Not only are fundamental social and scientific issues at stake, but also people's lives are affected profoundly by our conclusions" (Kent, 1994, 371-372). Especially after Shupe's response to our initial article, we hope that he takes this caution to heart in his forthcoming book on the anti-cult controversy.

Shupe should rethink the implications of Kent's co-presentation of a paper with a person (Joe Szimhart) who formerly had performed some forcible 'deprogrammings,' since Kent worked with Szimhart on the paper specifically *because he had renounced those practices* and was involved in the "voluntary exit counselling" movement, about which academics know very little. Rather than endorsing violent or illegal deprogrammings, Szimhart and Kent's paper described in part how voluntary exit counselling had become the dominant paradigm within the "countercult" movement (Szimhart and Kent, 1996).

Moreover, once again Shupe got basic facts wrong about a crucial court case in which Szimhart had been involved. In 1993, Szimhart faced charges over his involvement in a "failed deprogramming" of a Church Universal and Triumphant member. Contrary to Shupe's incorrect statement that Szimhart "narrowly escaped a prison sentence for kidnapping and assault simply on a legal technicality," the press reported at the time that "[t]he jury in a kidnapping trial here [in Boise, Idaho] found two of the defendants, Kenneth Paolini and Joseph Szimhart not guilty of aiding and abetting a second degree kidnapping.... The jury decided not to find any of them guilty of a lesser charge of false imprisonment, a misdemeanor, which it had the option to do" (Dvorak, 1993). A subsequent press report revealed that "[t]he 12-person jury that found two of three religious deprogrammers innocent of kidnapping charges in Boise, Idaho, last week did so because they eventually came to believe that what the deprogrammers did was right.... [I]n the end, the jury believed that while Paolini and Szimhart may have broken the law, it was probably necessary in this case" (Dvorak and Ronnow, 1993). While we do not want readers to believe that Kent and Krebs necessarily hold this position about forcible deprogramming, Shupe erred when he wrote about what had occurred to a person with whom Kent had worked as co-presenter at an academic conference.

Concerning yet another factual error, we specifically and publicly challenge Shupe to provide the SKEPTIC editor either with copies of "Canadian newspapers [that] have questioned [Kent's] credibility as any kind of expert" or to retract and apologize. We doubt that Shupe will accept the challenge, since no such questioning by any Canadian newspaper about Kent has ever taken place—unless Shupe considers Scientology's *Freedom* publication a legitimate newspaper! In June, 1998, two Canadian newspapers (in Edmonton and Toronto) carried a 16-page *Freedom* insert that had a two-page attack specifically targeting Kent. Scientology seemed particularly upset about Kent's persistent discussion about alleged human rights abuses in the organization's forced labour and re-indoctrination programs called the RPF (which we have mentioned earlier in our response to Melton; see also Kent, 1997b). (Both newspapers subseqently printed a correction or apology indicating that they were not aware of any factual foundation for Scientology's allegations [*The Edmonton Examiner*, 1998; *The Globe and Mail*, 1998].) When a newspaper queried Kent's place of employment about any possible response the educational institution might have been contemplating regarding Scientology's attack, the University of Alberta Vice-President (Academic) responded, "I guess people will just have to judge the reputation of the Church of Scientology versus Stephen Kent and the University of Alberta. I'm not terribly concerned about the outcome" (in Rusnell, 1998). Neither are we terribly concerned about the outcome of our public challenge to Shupe.

James Lewis' attempt to "set the record straight" contributes little to the contentious issues we raise in our SKEPTIC analysis. Most of what he attributes to us are statements that we simply did not make. We analyze Lewis' scholarship in the context of arguing "that, on crucial social issues, controversial religious groups have courted researchers in order to enhance their public images, and some social scientists have participated in these efforts at the expense both of legitimate endeavors to advance knowledge according to accepted scientific standards of objectivity and of due attention to the use of their scientific expertise" (Kent and Krebs, 1998b: 36). Lewis' evasive response to our analysis only reinforces our conclusion that his advocacy on behalf of alternative religious groups at times has compromised his scholarly judgement.

Let us be clear about what we *did not* say. We did not accuse Lewis or others of "directly or indirectly accepting funds from certain minority religions." However, his co-editor, Gordon Melton, told SKEPTIC readers about receiving "finances" for their study of Church Universal and Triumphant. We neither accuse Lewis (or any other researchers) of being "cult apologist[s]" nor do we claim that Kent is a "victim of a 'cult conspiracy.'" (Indeed,

throughout our analysis we avoid use of pejorative labels against either individuals or groups.) Moreover, we did not conclude that "Scientology, The Family[,] and so forth are terrible groups like the KKK or the mafia that merit social censure." These are Lewis' words, not ours. Nor did we "misrepresent [Lewis] and [his] work" or his credentials. We specifically state that he had falsely identified himself as "James R. Lewis, Ph.D." when interfering with the publication of Kent's article on David Berg in 1993, and he only discusses his attendance at "more than one graduate institution" (about which we knew, since we had communicated with university officials at two institutions). He does not identify from which institution he received a doctorate, nor when he received it, since he certainly did not have one prior to or during 1993.

In the context of Lewis' credentials, we discussed his pre-publication intervention against one of Kent's peer-reviewed articles to the editors of *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*—an intervention he made *without having read the article itself* (Kent and Krebs, 1998b, 37). The investigation (conducted by the publication's co-editors) into his claims revealed no basis for Lewis' "concerns and allegations" (Lynn, 1993). Only the publisher himself can say what, if any, role Lewis' intervention had in blocking publication of Kent's article. Lewis' unwarranted intervention, however, merits examination on its own, especially when placed in the context of other advocacy positions he has taken for controversial religions. Even now, Lewis continues his advocacy of the Children of God/The Family by implying that Kent received Family material stolen from the Philippines. Because of the questionable circumstances under which former members removed material (and in which Kent played no role whatsoever), he has avoided using or owning any of that information. He (and the University of Alberta Library collection that he oversees) have obtained their Family sources from legitimate donations. He and others have used these sources to substantiate statements made by former members.

It is true (as Lewis claims) that Kent received material directly from The Family in 1989. Lewis neglects to mention, however, that Kent *purchased the documents with his own money.* Moreover, Lewis wrongly states, "Prof. Kent never composed a paper on the counterculture," since Kent already had published two articles on the topic before he received the material from The Family (Kent, 1987; 1988, revised reprint in 1992), and a third article after the material arrived (Kent, 1993a).

Returning to the larger question about compromised scholarship, SKEPTIC readers will want to know about another major incident (not involving The Family) in which Lewis' research and/or judgement was seriously flawed. In the introduction to his co-edited volume on Church Universal and Triumphant, Lewis prophetically stated, "[m]any scholars of stigmatized religions, myself included, have a secret fear that they will one day examine a controversial religious group, give it a clean bill of health, and later discover that they had defended the People's Temple, or worse" (in Lewis and Melton, 1994b, viii). His secret fear came true when he defended Aum Shinri Kyo.

Following Aum's March 20, 1995, Tokyo subway sarin gas attack (and another poison gas incident in 1994 that killed seven people), Lewis and three other Americans (including Melton) traveled to Japan on tickets that Aum had purchased for them. After spending three days interviewing Aum leaders and others, Lewis told a gathering of Japanese reporters that "the cult could not have produced the rare poison gas, sarin, used in both mass murder cases. Lewis said the American group determined this from photos and documents provided by Aum" (Reid, 1995, A8). Subsequently, observers around the world of the events following the Aum subway gassing gasped as investigators revealed information that contradicted the assessments offered by "prominent scholars in the specialty of new religious movements" such as Lewis and Melton.

Japanese Studies expert Ian Reader observed, "Melton had earlier made the comment that, when the media reports scandal stories about religious movements, the substance of such stories normally proves to be less than the extent of the allegations." As, however, information became available about the actions of Aum, "the evidence showed the actions of the movement to be greater than had originally been rumored." Reader concluded, "[a]s a result of all this, not only has the reputation and image of religion in general been damaged, but so has that of its scholars..." (Reader, 1995, 2). Lewis' advocacy on behalf of what he calls "persecuted religious minorities" has contributed to this damage because, in some instances, he has allowed his research to be compromised by the very groups that he is defending.

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PSYCHOTHERAPY FORUM DEBATE

Confused By Dineen

I'll admit to being a bit confused by Tana Dineen's "Psychotherapy: The Snake Oil Of The '90s?" I've been a therapist for several decades and though I can relate to her frustration regarding the clinical incompetents and money-makers in the profession (as can be found anywhere else), I find no reason to dismiss the entire profession.

While the first part of the article portrays therapy as a field that "has no effective agent," the second half argues that brief therapy is more effective than long-term therapy, attempting to prove, it seems, that a little snake oil is better than a lot. Which perspective should the reader buy into? Either it doesn't work at all, or the first sessions are the most effective. If the latter is the more accurate assessment, it perfectly represents a current point of emphasis in the field. Unquestionably, far too many clinicians have kept clients in therapy too long, either from financial greed or an inability to work toward specific goals. Those days are coming to an end, thanks to requirements made by insurance companies and clinically sound administrators.

An almost universal requirement when seeing clients for therapy at any level is the creation of an individual treatment plan: a very specific, goal-oriented, observable and measurable means of specifying both what constitutes progress and the point meriting treatment discharge. The treatment plan is a scientifically-based means of identifying progress (or lack of) agreed upon prior to therapy by both the client and clinician. The treatment plan, it should be noted, is not a recent innovation.

Many of the major influences on the field of psychotherapy are also interested in observable, measurable outcomes: behaviorism's patriarch, B. F. Skinner, dismisses the vagueness of emotional and cognitive elements in favor of distinct behavioral changes; Carl Rogers, the founder of Person-Centered Therapy, back in the '70s insisted on measuring specific client progress as either validation or invalidation of his approach; and Albert Ellis's Rational Emotive Therapy adamantly insists that without observable behavioral changes no progress has been made. These three theoreticians are the primary names in Learning Theory, Phenomenology, and Cognitive-Behavioral therapy, respectively.

In Dineen's opening paragraphs, she presents a client who "is still unhappy with her life" but she is "happy with her therapy." This