

Letter From:  
Dr Stephen Kent

September 17, 1998

To:  
Ms. Julia Noble  
Allen Overy Solicitors  
1 New Change  
London, England

Dear Ms. Noble,

I am a sociologist of religion, specializing in the area of alternative religions. Scientology is among the groups that I have studied. One of my articles on Scientology has appeared in a peer reviewed journal, and I refer often to the organization in other articles that I publish on related 'sociology of religion' topics. I continue to write and research on this group and others. In 1997 I made invited presentations about Scientology before the German parliament's commission to study "sects and psychological groups," as well as presentations at conferences sponsored by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and the German Lutheran churches. Details of these talks appear on my resumes, and expanded copies of my talk in Germany appeared on the Internet. Furthermore, in November 1997, I presented an academic paper on Scientology's forced labour and re-indoctrination program--the Rehabilitation Project Force--at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion conference in San Diego, California, and this paper, too, is available on the Internet. Some people posted and placed these papers on their websites. I am pleased when people place my work on the internet, since wide circulation on my work in this manner leads to feedback and additional contacts. I. PICKETING AND LEAFLETING AGAINST ME ON MY UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

In September, 1997, what I consider to be an active "fair game" campaign began. First, local Scientologists picketed the area where thousands of students were registering for classes. Within days thereafter Scientologists picketed again on campus at the Students Union Building, and released an "Event Notice" (a copy of which I include). Reports from numerous students indicated that the Scientologists carried placards that accused me of religious intolerance, but I do not have pictures and did not see them myself. Also students brought me copies of the leaflet that the Scientologists distributed against me (a copy of which I also include, with my handwritten note on the bottom about when and where it was distributed). Please note the following:

1. The "Events Notice" accuses me of "inciting government intolerance of German Scientologists." This is not true. I was speaking about issues related to Scientology that would be of interest to German government officials and citizens, especially the organization's operation of Rehabilitation Project Force (i.e., forced labour and re-indoctrination) programs.

2. The flyer against me referred to my "outrageous and malicious comments" that were "inciting government intolerance against German members of the Scientology religion."

3. A local Scientology member, Yvette Shank, offered a quote which said that I "pour[ed] gasoline on an already inflamed situation with his paranoia and poor research."

4. She also indicated that I had not been in a Church of Scientology since 1988 (which probably was true), but added incorrectly that I had "refused for years to meet with Church representatives." That is not true.

a. When I was intensively interviewing people in Canada, I met with Scientologists in their facilities in Montreal, Toronto, and Los Angeles. I actually had several meetings with Scientologists at the Toronto office, and attended a special gathering after a large Scientology event. The Los Angeles meeting was with Heber Jentsch, who I believe at the time was President of the Church of Scientology International.

b. In Edmonton, I once had a Scientologist present to a class, and I attended a local event sponsored by Scientology's elite Sea Org[anization]. c. A former Edmonton Scientologist (who subsequently to Toronto), Al Buttner, dropped into my department two or three times over various summers (I know for certain in 1994 and 1998), but I was never there and he never made prior appointments. In 1994, I tried three times to reach him, then sent a letter asking that he write me. I enclose copies of the correspondence.

5. The flyer indicates that I had been the only North American representative at "an anti-Scientology conference in Bonn." The conference was entitled, "How to Deal With Scientology--An International Comparison," sponsored by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. I presented on "Scientology in Canada" and "Scientology in the United States," and the Foundation has published my comments in a booklet (that I enclose. Please note the typo in the first paragraph of the Canadian piece, but I did not receive page proofs prior to publication). My comments are factual and not inflammatory. I was the only North American representative because I covered both the U.S. and Canada in my presentation--the conference did not need anyone else.

6. The flyer referred to alleged comments of mine in an article in Canada's national newspaper, The Globe and Mail, that Scientology was a "'threat to democracy' which church members call insane and ludicrous." The entire passage, however, that the newspaper printed revealed why I made the statement (which the Scientology flyer got slightly incorrect). The passage reads: But Stephen Kent, a University of Alberta sociologist who has long studied Scientology, believes it to be a totalitarian organization that should be feared by all democracies, including Germany, because of its alleged use of forced labour and indoctrination programs. 'The overall issue of Scientology's threat to the democratic state is certainly worthy of investigation'" (Alan Freeman, "Germany Presses Case Against Scientologists," The Globe and Mail, July 17, 1997: A8). Note that the flyer gave no context to my (slightly inaccurate) quote. I also note that Scientologists called Kent's comment "insane," which is a word that Scientologists apply to enemies.

7. The flyer quoted a passage of a letter that Scientologist Reverend Shank sent to the President of the University of Alberta (where Kent is a Professor) in which Shank stated that Kent's views were "'unscholarly, dangerous and promot[ing of hatred.] She has asked Dr. Fraser to review the situation and Kent is an embarrassment to the University of Alberta and to Canada.'"

8. The pamphlet concluded by stating: 'Stephen Kent appears to be to Scientology, what Ernst Zundel and Jim Kiegestra [sic] are to the Holocaust. He should not be using his position as an academic to promote intolerance and hatred,' concluded Reverend Shank.

Ernst Zundel is a notorious German-Canadian Holocaust-denier who distributes a wide range of anti-Semitic literature. Jim Keegstra was a high school teacher who taught his students anti-Semitic views and received a criminal conviction in an Alberta court for doing so.

9. On September 10, 1997, The University of Alberta's Vice-President (Academic), Doug O'wram, responded to Yvette Shank on behalf of the University President. The crucial part of his letter said, "[t]he University holds, however, that the free development and exchange of academic ideas, even controversial ones, is essential to the principle of academic freedom. Faculty will express many varied opinions and the administration's responsibility is to maintain an atmosphere in which discussion may take place."

## II. RADIO CAMPAIGN

10. At the same time that Scientologists were picketing me on campus, apparently the organization contacted local radio stations with an announcement of some kind that it had written a letter of protest against me to the University administration. A secretary reported to me that she heard a piece about Scientology's protest against me on a morning news program.

11. Scientology also used its "fair game" action against me to get on a radio news and talk show that is broadcast in my province's two largest cities--Edmonton and Calgary--both of which have populations of over 700,000 people. On radio station CHED--the Leslie Premo show--local Scientologist Yvetter Shank spoke about Scientology (and then I followed on the second part of the show). On that program (which took place on September 16, 1997), Ms. Shank stated that I had said in "the newspapers," that "cults, like pornography, are easy to spot but hard to define". She then went on to comment on these alleged comments of mine. She said that I was comparing religion to pornography, and that the cult term was "derogatory," "rude," and "bad manners". The term also "incites hate, which then creates violence." Ms. Shank, however, had manufactured--made-up-- that alleged quote. I never made that statement, and when I challenged her later in the show to produce the statement for me, she could not (nor has she subsequently).

12. Ms. Shank also got on the campus radio show, and I followed. I only have a copy of her statements--by the time I contacted the radio station, it had erased the program that I was on (and I did not hear it myself since I rarely listen to campus radio). Ms. Shank spoke on the show and stated that she objected to my portrayal of Scientology as "a threat," and that she "has talked to some of his colleagues, and they don't respect his viewpoint on new religions or so-called cults." Typically, she never identified who these colleagues supposedly were. She also claimed that I had "a whole list of so-called cults. So it's whatever--if you don't like something you can label it a cult, you see." Again, this statement is false. I do my best to avoid the "cult" word, since it is a pejorative term lacking clear social scientific meaning. I do not have a "whole list of so-called cults," and Ms. Shank has not produced one.

13. I believe that the campus protests, apparent media announcements, and provincial radio appearance were attempts to ruin my reputation in the communities in which I work and live.

### III. DISTRIBUTION OF "FAIR GAME" MATERIAL AGAINST ME IN A 'FREEDOM JOURNAL' NEWSPAPER THAT WAS DISTRIBUTED IN TORONTO, ONTARIO AND EDMONTON, ALBERTA

14. In early June, 1998, 3,000 home-delivered copies of The Edmonton Examiner (a local, community-oriented newspaper in my city) contained a 16 page insert. The insert was printed on fairly high quality newsprint, and was entitled, Freedom. This same insert also appeared in Canada's national (and respected) newspaper, The Globe and Mail, on June 12, 1998, in some-delivered copies of the newspaper. Previously The Globe and Mail had circulated the insert in newspapers distributed in Toronto, Ontario. It is not clear how many copies of the insert The Globe and Mail distributed, but an Edmonton radio show on the Canadian Broadcast Company stated on June 15th that the newspaper had distributed 10,000 copies--a figure that may or may not include the Toronto distribution. Small print in capital letters beneath the title stated, "FREEDOM JOURNAL: INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST," along with the statement, "PUBLISHED BY THE CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY SINCE 1968." (A small header [also in capital letters], however, on all of the pages of text except the first call the publication FREEDOM MAGAZINE.)

15. On pages 8-9 of the issue (identified as Volume 2 Issue 1) was an article (without an author) entitled, "Sowing the Seeds of Intolerance," with smaller letters stating that "[t]he intolerant and unorthodox views of University of Alberta sociologist Stephen Kent take on their full odor when viewed in context." (The previous article in Freedom, entitled "Mass Suicide or Mass Media," also mentions Dr. Kent, and refers readers to the major article about him.)

16. In my opinion, numerous statements in the Freedom insert are libelous, and I have filed "Intent to Sue" notices with various Scientology organizations over the publication. These "Intent to Sue" notices simply give me two years in which to file a formal libel lawsuit, if I choose to. On advice of my attorney, I cannot give you a copy of the libelous Freedom publication, but you can get some idea of its contents from an article that my city's major newspaper ran (and which I attach). Note, if you will, that the insert compared me to the "neo-Nazi hatemonger Ernst Zundel," as did the first leaflet that Scientologists distributed against me on campus. The article also quotes the insert as saying that my "support of discrimination and intolerance which has led to human-rights violations and even violence--in Germany as well as in Canada--should disqualify [Kent] totally from government support or funding" (Charles Rusnell, "Church of Scientology Targets U of A Professor for Criticizing its Practices," The Edmonton Journal, June 13, 1998: B7).

17. The distribution of the libelous Freedom insert--Toronto and Edmonton--intended (in my opinion) to discredit me in the major city in English-speaking Canada as well as in my home city, and to do so through the prestige of Canada's national (and respected) newspaper.

18. Since I launched my "Intent to Sue" papers, I also have submitted an "expert witness" statement to an Alberta court on behalf of a Canadian police officer who has sued a prominent Canadian Scientologist and various Scientology organizations for a variety of charges.

19. Scientology officials have been pressuring, unsuccessfully, various University of Alberta Library officials to gain access to the restricted collection of alternative religions that I oversee (but that the University owns).

#### IV. MY INTERPRETATION OF SCIENTOLOGY'S ATTACKS AGAINST ME

20. In my opinion, the various attacks that Scientology has launched against me represent a continuation of the "fair game" policy (without the use of the term *per se*) allowing members to (attempt to) destroy me.

21. Primarily Scientology is trying to destroy my reputation on a campus level, a community level, and a national level.

22. I note that none of the printed or spoken statements about me address the fundamental issues that I raise in presentations--that Scientology is a totalitarian organization that runs a forced labour and re-indoctrination program called the Rehabilitation Project Force (RPF) in East Grinstead, Sussex, U.K., the United States, and Denmark.

#### V. IMPACT OF THE "FAIR GAME" ACTIVITIES ON ME

23. The overall feeling that I have about the "fair game" activities is dread. As a researched Scientology over the years and learned more about its probable human rights abuses, its aggressive posture against perceived opponents, its harassment of those perceived opponents, and the blindness of almost all deeply-socialized members into an ideology that defines critics as enemies, I knew that as I wrote more and spoke more I would become a target. When the attacks began against me on campus, I worried about how they would effect my personal and professional image among my colleagues. I know, for example, that some of my colleagues make frequent jokes about me and letter bombs, sabotage of my office, etc., so I know that they are aware of the at least the broad dimensions of the attacks against me. Although I hasten to add that I have not received any letter bombs, one staff member prohibited the office secretaries from opening my mail (fearing letter bombs) when I called in from off-campus to check on correspondence.

24. The sense of dread lingers, because I know that the organization cannot simply stop the harassment and discuss my critical statements in a rational manner. True, I have been on the radio with Scientologists many times, but never have they taken the primary documents from Scientology that I quote and provide different interpretations from the ones that I provide. Instead, they attack my character, my scholarship, colleagues' supposed opinions of me; etc. When they fail to silence me with each level of attack, they escalate. So, at first a Scientologist was writing against me to my department chair. Then the attacks against me elevated to include the campus community, my city, and my province. Then it escalated to include the most influential city in English-speaking Canada, where my country's most prestigious University (The University of Toronto) is located. I hate to think what is next.

25. Now Scientology officials are demanding access to the research collection on alternative religions that I have built and donated to the University of Alberta Library. The collection covers a wide range of ideological organizations, and material exists in it about Scientology. For security and preservation reasons (as well as for keeping the identities of donors confidential), the University Library has agreed to keep this as a closed collection for the foreseeable future. Some graduate students and honours students have access to the information, but these persons are under my supervision, pose no security risk, and need information from the collection for their research projects, so the collection does play a part in appropriate university life. (Indeed, the University receives benefit from a collection like this because it provides students with unique research and publishing opportunities.) Some of the collection's contents are irreplaceable. Moreover, I am in charge of organizing the information, but I must do so amidst all of my other professional responsibilities. Consequently, the collection is far from being sorted, organized, and catalogued, as I had hoped that it would be by now.

26. Scientology officials, however, want access to the Scientology information, probably as part of its "Snow White" program to remove "false data" about the organization and its founder. The history of the organization indicates, however, that its operatives consider anything negative as "false" and subject to removal or destruction. Consequently, Scientologists make poor historians, at least about their own organization. I expect continued demands of access to this collection over the ensuing years.

27. I also dread thinking about how the personal attacks will escalate. When will the organization begin going after my family? I do not know, but I consider it inevitable. What about my neighbourhood? I expect that, too. Without going into details, I have elaborate security systems in my places of dwelling and work, and I had them installed primarily with Scientology in mind. I take a number of other precautions (that I will not discuss for obvious reasons) because I am concerned about possible Scientology retaliation.

29. In addition to the constant sense of dread that I have, the time commitments that I expend dealing with Scientology's harassment of me is extraordinary. When the pickets occurred against me in 1997, for example, I spent hours in preparation for media interviews--researching documents to support my statements; dissecting the false claims about me; explaining to colleagues and friends what was going on; etc. Stress levels during this period were especially high.

30. When I filed "Intent to Sue" papers against various Scientology organizations, I simply lost count of how many hours I spent preparing background material for the lawyers. It easily could have hit 60 or more hours. Money, too, becomes an issue, with my legal filings so far costing at least \$6,000.00 and growing all the time.

31. I expect criticism from Scientology--that is not at issue. As an academic who works on controversial material involving allegations of abuse in reputedly religious contexts, I expect intense debate about some of my findings. The character assassinations, the harassment, the libel, and the attempts to ruin my professional reputation for speaking truthfully about Scientology's abuses, however, reinforce my conclusion about the organization posing threats to democracy. Among the reasons that I continue to research, write, and speak about Scientology is because I fear it, and I also fear its implications for civil society and for the lives of many of its members.

Sincerely, Stephen A. Kent Professor

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