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Cults and the False Debate on Human Rights

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A History of cult defenders and their allies protecting cult groups and the Neglect of Human Dignity to those who are truly victims

I would like to thank the organizers of this special 20th anniversary FECRIS conference for inviting me to speak and address you today on this conference theme and topic so many people need to adequately understand and assist those who have been hurt due to negligence and serious misunderstanding. Thank you for being here today and I appreciate your labor and interest in this topic that effects so many people impacted by cult organizations and their supporters who avoid damage and abuse caused by defending the indefensible. My own journey in to the world of the cults began in 1972 when I was not seeking to join a cult but nonetheless became a member of one. Little did I know, what a life altering experience would bring me more than 40 years of direct cult exposure to my life from around the world. Even though I left my own cult in 1974 due to a suicide of a close friend who was group member that introduced us to this new organization. I encountered other new youth oriented cult groups through recruiting efforts to my friends and encounters on college campuses. Even though these sects had very different doctrines from each other the group characteristics had traits that were eerily similar to the cult I was a member of for approximately two years. I did not beat the bushes looking for trouble but I encountered patterns of behavior that drew my attention to a mental and psychological process that was harmful to the individual. The surrender of autonomy and critical thinking to the group's will was a matter of compliance and lack of conformity caused punitive penalties without perceived legitimate alternatives or options. These cult environments isolated members from the outside world whether it is physical or mental and set up the new recruit for the indoctrination process that ends up creating the us versus them adversarial relationship towards relationships of a life time.

It was my contact with friends and families that led me to other cults near where I lived in the northeast corridor of the United States of America. Other families in the area were looking for their loved ones in these new cults and I was known for debating some of those cult leaders and missing family

members needed to be located and parents asked me if have I seen them. One family in the Pennsylvania area was looking for their missing daughter and I was invited to attend United States Senator Robert Dole's gathering about the new cult phenomenon in the United States of America referred to as a "Day of Affirmation and Protest" February 18, 1976 at the United States Russell Senate building as a former cult member myself. I shared my own testimony on February 17, 1976 of this two day gathering. Senator Dole responded to the 14,000 named petition to pursue an investigation into harmful cult groups. It was my first exposure to experts that were for and against cultic organizations from an interdisciplinary perspective including doctors, legal experts, mental health professionals and clergy. What really impressed me was the thematic similarity from families and former cult members from all over the country of the harm, deception, exploitation, authoritarian control and abuse these diverse groups share in common.

As I listened to the professional experts that testified about the harm caused by cults and I began realizing the true power of cult mind control could be expressed in such clear terms. The cults also testified with their representatives and professional supporters but the major difference I noticed was the selection process chosen by the cults and their witnesses did not reflect the daily reality common with most cult members I had direct observation with in the trenches of sect life. The cult groups' focus was on religious and civil liberties issues that our first Amendment of the United States Constitution is guaranteed to protect and we had no problem with that issue. Abuse and harm were the problem and we needed investigative tools and formal evidence that required responses where responsible authorities could assist hurting families who need help.

As time progressed I began developing relationships with cult afflicted families and former members where individual new organizations had grown out of the "Citizens Engaged in Reuniting Families" and Ad-Hoc Committee that met in Washington, DC in February of 1976. I was also introduced to Dr. Margaret Singer who addressed John Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland after the Senator Dole's gathering. Author Dr. Walter Martin, the world class scholar on cults in his world renowned classic book, "Kingdom of the Cults" was also a seminal experts on cults that mentored me about the cult brainwashing issue. He stated in his audio tape series about "The Way International" concerning brainwashing that you do not get rid of a term which is valid because someone misuses or abuses the term and he would not stop using the it. I also encountered the legal work of Law Professor, Richard Delgado and his California Law Review publication titled, "Religious Totalism: Gentle and

Ungentle Persuasion Under the First Amendment" (1977) that became a repeated primary legal tool in court cases involving *coercive persuasion* arguments. Many cults in court cases uniformly attacked this legal position and hired professional defenders along the lines of civil and religious liberty protections. They promoted academics in religious studies and sociology who had relationships with certain organizations in various cases. What I encountered over the decades of observation was that the cults had networked with these hired professionals that actually became top officials of very influential organizations in especially social science and religiously oriented associations. Under the banner of objective and impartial academic or even scientific studies we encounter professional advocacy relationships that have a vested interest and many are affiliated with ideological groups where conflict of interest could be seriously argued. A number of these hired experts aggressively try to prohibit the submission of valid factual evidence that provides proof of damaging harm and abuse that injure the minds and lives of cult victims.

I also went to Washington, DC to attend the 1979 U.S. Senator Dole joint Congressional hearing on Jonestown after the Jim Jones cult tragedy. Cult members surrounded the Russell Senate building before sunrise to prevent former cult members and cult afflicted families from being in the hearing room. The cult members who did occupy the hearing room would create noisy outbursts during testimony given they opposed. The human rights of American citizens who died needlessly in Jonestown whether by induced suicide or coercive murder had to be addressed by our government. The murdered California Congressmen Leo J. Ryan was on a fact finding mission in Guyana about the People's Temple due to over 1000 of his constituents seeking help for loved ones who they seriously worried about in this very dangerous organization. One of the new religious movement's leading expert stated that Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple was not a cult but a mainstream Christian Church. As time moves on more and more "new religious movement" academics emerge on the scene and the issue of fundamental human rights worldwide become abused and neglected in the name of religious liberty and constitutional protections. It was Dr. John Clark,Jr.,MD., Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School, before the state of Vermont Senate Committee and the Joint United States Congressional hearing on Jonestown that help lay the groundwork for "health hazards were extreme"[1] towards cult members endangering the welfare of it's citizens before legislative bodies. He testified that coercive persuasion and thought reform techniques practiced on uninformed subjects led to "disastrous health consequences". Human rights

of cult members were of primary concern and review of applicable legal processes needed to be addressed. Dr. Clark testified, "The destructive cults are numerous and include very well known ones such as Hare Krishna, the Unification Church, the Scientologists, and the Divine Light Mission, all of whom use the same basic techniques." These organizations objected to the use of the word "cult" as being pejorative and derogatory and had professionals whether legal, academic or religious scholars who defended the idea that this was prejudicial terminology. Hare Krishna had distributed professional published literature entitled, "Don't Lump Us In" concerning the cult/sect label. The strange irony is when you read the terminology chosen by published "new religious movement" academics and even the new cults publications. They refer to former members as "apostates" that is normally used by the mainstream orthodox religious organizations. Another designation they applied towards first hand testimony of cult members was "atrocities" and other terminology to discredit valuable information that could expose hidden details cults protect from outside examination.

In the early 1980's I had the opportunity to testify before the White House Conference on Families in Washington, DC in front of Coretta Scott King, the wife of the late Dr. Martin Luther King about the destructive impact of cults on the American family. It was the same time period of Transcendental Meditation, Hare Krishna, and Charles Manson were featured in the Washington Post our newspaper for the nation's capitol city about the Cult Controversy. I learned from Coretta Scott King about her interest in the TM due to the Federal Court Case against T.M. for deceitful fraud claiming it was simply a relaxation technique and it was not religious in nature. I informed Coretta about the federal court decided that T.M. was indeed religious and could not receive tax dollars. This event demonstrated to me where we have obtained legal accomplishments we should share this with appropriate authorities for their consideration. I have found consistently over the decades around the world that legal success cases can benefit future defense of human rights of cult victims and their families.

As we transition from the 1980s into the 1990's cult legal defenders and their academic "new religion movement" sympathizers focused heavily in the United States of America on the first amendment free exercise of religion clauses of the USA constitution. This approach provides general immunity from legal "tort liability" that is rooted in religious beliefs. Religious studies and sociology academic publications sympathetic to the "new religious movements" provide serious amount of attention to this legal and alleged objective scientific information. We in the counter cult community have responded to the other

side of the legal argument where courts have legally stated, "while religious belief is absolutely protected, religiously motivated conduct is not". This has become the great divide concerning human rights when dealing with cults/sects and their defenders commonly called "cult apologists", a term they find objectionable. Let the factual record speak for itself and brainwashing expert Harvard Professor Robert J. Lifton, author of "Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism" recommends restoring terms to their original meanings. We should not deny descriptive terminology especially when it is accurate.

We should consider some of the legal history concerning the human rights when addressing "coercive persuasion" "thought reform techniques" and "brainwashing" and the documented damaging, harmful and abusive effects including suicide and deaths in destructive cult organizations. The Manson Family, Patty Hearst and the SLA, Jonestown, Heaven's Gate, WACO, Aum Shin Rikyo, Solar Temple and other cults demonstrate the human rights of the cult members were truly violated resulting in the violent deaths of their members. The legal community has truly become a battlefield over the protection of these victims from very preventable harm but sad to say this battle is not always an honorable one.

Let us consider some of the legal and academic examples of this struggle and false debates. When trying to prove legal harm in court a number of cases have been lost due to the successful defense of the free exercise clauses of the first amendment must be protected. The false debate issues arise from inaccurate information gaining legal standing and legal cases expose some of these deficiencies. When reading cult publications and their academic and legal supporters you may think that deprogramming was always illegal. Law Professor Richard Delgado wrote, "some courts have permitted the creation of guardianships or allowed criminal actions against cults as appropriate methods of protecting children." Concerning this, "The Way International" deprogramming case, "conduct which is religiously motivated may be limited when there is a substantial public interest." This was applied to the recruiting methods of that organization providing a distinction between beliefs and process.

Another legal example was Alexander versus the Unification Church of America.

Wendy Helander, a member of the Unification Church brought a lawsuit against her parents. Ms. Helander's lawsuit was in name only because the Unification Church was paying all legal expenses and would receive any financial judgment that would have been granted to Wendy Helander by the court.

Along with other legal cases was part of a general policy to destroy so-called deprogrammers and others who had the courage to oppose the viewpoints of the Unification Church. The court held the fact that the suits against deprogrammers might be successful is irrelevant to their claim that the defendants [UC] are liable for abuse of process." Some other cults have used similar funding approaches. The Minnesota Supreme Court gave parents a license to forcefully restrain their offspring according to the Akron Law Review- Volume 15:1.

As the decades have progressed from the latter end of the twentieth century into the twenty-first century the courts, scientific and academic research have moved toward greater accountability for actions while protecting religious beliefs in the process. The research provided by the late Dr. Paul Martin, Ph.D, the Founder of Wellspring in Ohio, USA is a good example of this effort. The "new religious movements" supporters have actively introduced information alleging persecution of minority beliefs and religion and fact checking the allegations can be a very daunting task. The false debate continues and is rooted in suspect information when you examine the real history behind it.

One of the main tools of this alleged persecution of minority groups has been by the anti-cult movement. Because they have supported the concept that brainwashing, coercive persuasion or mind control are used by cult organizations has a legitimate foundation to it that cult supporters consistently deny. Rutgers University Sociology professor Benjamin Zablocki, Ph.D. author of "The Blacklisting of a concept: The strange history of the brainwashing conjecture in the sociology of religion" [October, 1997] "To justify the charge of blacklisting requires that there be some degree of collusion within the established power structure of a discipline to defame, ridicule, or ignore the theory or marginalize its adherence. I want to show that this has happened...." And so the false debate continues especially when the human rights of cult victims are a serious consideration.

Irving Louis Horowitz early warning of the corruption of the scientific community of lavish funding of NRMs [New Religious Movements] is relevant to this issue. ... With regard to finances, a major obstacle toward the sort of progress desired is the cloud of secrecy that surrounds the funding of research on NRMs. The sociology of religion can no longer avoid the unpleasant ethical question of how to deal with large sums of money being pumped into the field by the religious groups being studied..."

Academic scholar Stephen Kent, a Professor in the department of Sociology at the University of Alberta in Canada and was also granted a Ph.D. in religious study in 1984. He authored, "When Scholars Know Sin Alternative Religions

and Their Academic Supporters". This critical evaluation exposes "Informational "Front" Groups", when the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation or FBI raid against Scientology offices and Washington, DC...confiscated documents from the Guardian's Office with one undated memo entitled "Secret PR [Public Relations] Front Groups" Leading the list was APRIL, Alliance for the Preservation of Religious Liberties" in 1977. Friends of Freedom followed APRIL created after my exit counseling intervention with a member of The Bible Speaks member who won a United States Supreme Court victory judgment of over 6 million dollars moving the organization into bankruptcy. Because the group used deceitful duplicity and caused diminished mental capacity harm was successfully argued in the legal outcome. Two other United States Supreme court victories by former cult members from two other cults where Dr. Margaret Singer was the expert witness concerning cult mind control damage and both cults were unsuccessful in excluding her testimony on religious or civil liberty objections.

The Maryland Task Force on Cults, a government body legally defeated cult organizations' lawsuit where religious liberty motions against the task force were argued unsuccessfully. Guidelines against deceitful recruitment, harm and abuse to university students prevailed.

Legal expert David Bardin Esq, LLP of Ardent FOX legal firm. CSJ published, "Psychological Coercion and Human Rights: Mind Control ("Brainwashing") Exists. -- Mind Control exist." Yet misguided academics like Professor Nancy T. Ammerman are still trying to pretend otherwise. In a report to the Department of Justice and the Treasury...Dr. Ammerman said that cult followers "need" and "seek" what Koresh [of WACO Texas] offers and that "cult brainwashing" is a "thoroughly discredited" concept.

United States Supreme Court Justice Brennan and Marshall described mind control aka (psychological coercion) in 1988 when they explained "as a factual matter" why the use of threat of physical or legal coercion" are not the only methods by which a condition of involuntary servitude could be created. False debates in court rooms only harm sect victims who need help not deceit.

In closing I would direct my attention to the United Nations and the work of FECRIS towards annual official published statements in six worldwide UN languages we produce defending human rights and dignity of cult victims in society since 2011 through 2014. Thank you for your indulgence and permitting me to represent you in New York.

Viva la FECRIS,
David Clark