

## STATEMENT FRANK K. FLINN OF JULY 14, 1985

I am currently self-employed as a writer, editor, lecturer and consultant in the fields of theology and religion. I am also a Senior Religion Editor at the Edwin Mellen Press of Toronto and New York.

I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy (1962) from Quincy College Illinois; a Bachelor of Divinity degree (1966), magna cum laude, from Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts; and a Ph. D. in Special religious Studies (1981) from the University of St. Michaels College, Toronto School of Theology, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. I have also done advanced study at Harvard University, the university of Pennsylvania, and the University of Heidelberg, Germany. At the University of Heidelberg, I was a Fulbright Fellow, 1966-67. At the University of Pennsylvania, I was a National Defense foreign language Fellow, Title VI, 1968-69.

Since 1962, I have devoted intense study to religious sectarian movements, ancient and modern. A portion of my doctoral studies was focused specifically on the rise of new religious movements in the United States and abroad since World War II. That study included the investigation of new religions in terms of their belief systems, lifestyles, use of religious language, leadership, motivation and sincerity, and the material conditions of their existence.

Prior to my present position, I taught at Maryville College, St. Louis, Missouri, 1980-81; St. Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri, 1977-79, where I was Graduate Director of the Masters Program in Religion and Education; the University of Toronto, Ontario, 1976-77, where I was Tutor in Comparative Religion; St. Johns College, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1974-75, where I was Tutor in the Great Books Program; LaSalle College, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Summers 1969-73, where I was Lecturer in Biblical Studies and the Anthropology of Religion; Boston College, Boston, Massachusetts, 1967-65, where I was Lecturer in Biblical Studies; and Newton College of the Sacred Heart, Newton, Massachusetts, where I was Lecturer in Biblical Studies.

I am a member in good standing of the American Academy of religion, the Religious Education Association, the College Theology Society, the Council on Religion and Law, and am an associate member of the Christian Legal Society. I am a practicing Roman Catholic at All Saints Parish, University City Missouri.

Since 1968, I have lectured and written about various new religious movements which have arisen in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the United States. In my lecture courses "Anthropology of religion" (LaSalle college), "Comparative Religion" (University of Toronto) and "The American Religious Experience" (St. Louis University), I have dealt with such religious movements as the Great Awakening, Shakerism, Mormonism, Seventh Day Adventism, Jehovah's Witnesses, New Harmony, Oneida, Brook farm, Unification, Scientology, etc. I have published several articles and been general editor of books on the topic of new religions. It is my policy not to testify about a living religious group unless I have long-term, first-hand knowledge of that

group. I have been invited to testify on various aspects of the new religions before the U.S. Congress, the Ohio legislature, the Illinois legislature, and the Kansas legislature. I have delivered lectures on the topic of the new religious movements at colleges and universities in the United States, Canada and Europe.

I have studied the Church of Scientology in depth since 1976. I have sufficiently sampled the vast literature of Scientology (its scriptures) to form the opinions expressed below. I have visited Scientology Churches in Toronto, Ontario, St. Louis, Missouri, Portland, Oregon, Clearwater, Florida, Los Angeles and Paris, France, where I familiarized myself with the day-to-day operations of the Church. I have also conducted numerous interviews (spiritual biographies) of members of the Church of Scientology. I am also familiar with most of the literature written about Scientology, ranging from objective scholarship to journalistic accounts, both favorable and unfavorable.

In the course of time certain religious and ecclesiastical practices of the Church of Scientology have come under criticism by outsiders and disaffected members. These include the "disconnection" of Church members from their natal families.

I will discuss this issue below. But, first, some general remarks are in order. As noted above, religions are constituted not simply by beliefs, however unintelligible to the non-believer, but also by acts and practices (ethical norms and rites), both of which serve to shape a way of life for a community of believers. In general, a great amount of attention has been given to the varieties of belief among the religions of the world, while religious acts have been subordinated to those beliefs. Most definitions of religion focus on the belief system to the detriment of the religious practices and community. Hence, the attention given religious acts has tended to be either minimal or slanted. When religious acts are noticed, that attention has frequently been prurient, that is, religious rites elicit interest only in so far as they are odd, bizarre or quaint. Both beliefs and religious acts, however, are like two gears which make the transmission (the way of life) of a community of believers go around. All three--beliefs, acts, and way of life--need to be looked at both separately and in conjunction.

Many critics of the new religious movements, in general, and of Scientology, in particular, have claimed that converts have been deliberately induced to alienate themselves from their families and to devote themselves heart, mind and soul to their new-found religion. This claim and the tension between an older generation and new converts are neither as simple nor a new phenomenon.

I will address the complexity of the issue first. Here we are dealing, first, with a matter of media bias. Scholars of new religious movements have noted that newspaper, television and radio coverage of religion-related events keep pertinent information about mainline religions in the background while underlining that of the new ones. If, for example, two men, one an Episcopalian and the other a Jehovah's Witness are arrested for murder, the news headline about the Episcopalian will read "Man Kills Wife," while the one about the Jehovah's Witness will read "Jehovah's Witness Slays Mate."

Secondly, the media often lump all new religious movements together such that the practices of one are attributed to another which has completely different practices. Media coverage of innovative religious movements frequently falls into the age-old trap of the sweeping generalization: "If you have seen one, you have seen them all." Immediately after the Jonestown massacre—indeed a lamentable tragedy—the media started carrying articles about "suicide pacts" and "suicide drills" in other "cults" and ceased so doing only when evidence proved absent. So, too, alienation of new converts from parents and other relatives, while true about some new religious movements under some circumstances, quickly became attributed to all. My study of the new religious movements showed that "disconnection" between members and their relatives occurred the least among Scientologists.

Thirdly, my interviews with new converts of several new religions showed that friction between the young adult member and his or her parents--an often enough occurrence throughout American culture--often preceded the membership. Thus conversion to a religion, whether old or new, becomes the occasion but not the primary cause of the surfacing of long-standing family conflicts.

My studies show that contact with parents and others by members of new religions was nearly normal, even when the parents disapproved of membership in the religion, until "deprogramming" became common. Because the new religions could not predict whether or not their members would be abducted when meetings were sought on the part of relatives, they naturally became guarded. Even on this score, Scientology was an exception for few of them were in fact "deprogrammed" at the instigation of their parents or other relatives.

Keeping in mind the complex factors sketched above, I can note that friction, tension, alienation, lack of communication between members of new religious movements and their parents is no more nor less than the same rifts that take place in every family known to me. Nor, in fact, are these rifts anything new in the history of religion. In his quest for spiritual enlightenment Gautama Buddha, born a Hindu prince, not only abandoned his parents, much to their dismay, but also his wife and children, Moses, reacting to the bondage of Israelite slaves under Egyptian domination, slew one of their persecutors and fled the cohorts of the Egyptian court to encounter God in the desert of Midian. In the Middle Ages, both Thomas Aquinas, offspring of Neapolitan nobility, and Francis of Assisi, son of a wealthy Umbrian merchant, abandoned as youths their lives of ease and privilege, joined the urban youth movement known as the Mendicants (Latin for "beggars"), and took vows of absolute poverty, chastity and obedience. Both Thomas and Francis were kidnapped and imprisoned by their parents and relatives who, to no avail, used methods remarkably like those used by modern "deprogrammers" in order to get them to abandon their ways. St. Thomas received the title "Angelic Doctor" by the Catholic Church because he resisted the blandishments of a prostitute employed by his brothers to get him to break his vow of chastity. Orthodox churchmen labeled members of the new mendicant orders, known today as Dominicans, Franciscans and Augustinians, as "dementes" (Latin for "insane") and "filii diaboli" ("sons of the devil"). St. Thomas even wrote the first anti-deprogramming treatise, entitled

**"Contra pestiferam doctrinam retrahentium homines a religionis ingressu"** ("Against the Pernicious Doctrine of Those Dragging Youth Away from Entering Religious Life").

Martin Luther instigated a lifelong alienation with his father, who wanted him to become a lawyer with a lucrative income, by joining the Augustinian order. In turn, Luther created a rift within Christendom itself by attacking the practice of indulgences and holding to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Similar rifts and alienations have occurred in American religious history, especially in the events surrounding the Great Awakening, which American historians recognize as a primary source for the rise of the democratic sentiment in America and the principle of freedom in religious conscience and practice. The Great Awakening was the beginning of Revivalism in America; a religious tradition still espoused by many, most notably the Rev. Dr. Billy Graham. As noted by Jonathan Edwards in his "Faithful Narrative" (1737), the New England revival of religion began among the youth. This resurgence of piety among the young stirred such staid Harvard divines as Charles Chauncey to score the revivalists for "a certain wildness...discernible in their general look and air." Today deprogrammers attempt to convince parents that their offspring, often well educated and legally of majority age, display "glazed eyes" or have been "zapped" into being "zombies" by the single glance of a guru's eyes. The religions have changed but the charge remains the same.

In past and present religious history alienation from family and kin has been not only an unintended and seemingly unavoidable byproduct of the conflict between the old and the new but also a fundamental tenet of religious practice. Thus the monks and hermits of the third century onwards practiced "withdrawal from the world" because the world and its ways were believed to be "corrupt" and "under the dominion of the Prince of Darkness." The eremites of Asia Minor not only withdrew from the world but also their fellow monks, living alone in prayerful solitude in caves still to be seen in present-day Turkey. Members of contemplative orders, both in the West and the Far East, enter monasteries where rules of silence and solitude are so great that phone communication and letters to and from relatives are prohibited or restricted to a few feast days. As a member of the Franciscan order from 1955-64, I was allowed no phone communication with my relatives for the entire year of my novitiate, was not allowed to attend my grandfather's funeral, and received only one letter a month, which was subject inspection by the master of novices.

The "disconnection" between parents and adult offspring in the new religions appears to be part and parcel of the immemorial conflict between the old and the new. Though the conflict may be immemorial, it is not immutable. My acquaintance with enduring members of the new religions, including Scientologists, suggests that over time familial rifts and disagreements become healed, especially as the member assumes positions of responsibility, gets further higher education, or marries and has children.

**Frank K. Flinn, Ph. D.**  
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