

# The New York Times

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## Scientology's Star Roster Enhances Image

By DOUGLAS FRANTZ

LOS ANGELES — John Travolta stood in the parking garage below City Hall, waiting for his sleek black Jaguar. He had just accepted an award on behalf of the Church of Scientology from the public works commission for a renovation project, and he was talking earnestly about what the religion means to him.

"Through Scientology, you learn to examine your life and be more productive," Mr. Travolta said as three senior church officials hovered nearby. "You can make sure you avoid any pitfalls and you can face your challenges and handle them."

Mr. Travolta, referred to within the church hierarchy as J. T., is the brightest star in Scientology's galaxy of celebrities. He is a box-office draw whose value as a public representative of the much-debated group has soared along with his rejuvenated career.

But the star of "Pulp Fiction" and other movies is far from alone in stumping for Scientology. More than any church that has begun on the religious fringe, the Church of Scientology has cultivated a potent roster of celebrity members — in-



John Travolta on the cover of a Scientology magazine.

cluding the actors Tom Cruise and Kirstie Alley, the musicians Isaac Hayes and Chick Corea and the television legal analyst Greta Van Susteren — in its struggle to win acceptance as a mainstream religion and spread its message at home and abroad.

Other celebrities also become visible spokesmen for their religions, like the actor Richard Gere,

who has pushed Buddhist causes. But Scientology's use of celebrities is part of a calculated, three-decade effort that religious scholars and others say is extraordinary for a religious group.

Scientology has established separate facilities, called Celebrity Centres, that cater to prominent members by offering private counseling and courses and even emergency health services. Although the facilities are open to all Scientologists, internal church documents show that their primary purpose is to recruit celebrities and use the celebrities' prestige to help expand Scientology.

In turn, some of those celebrities have become prominent advocates for Scientology. Last fall Mr. Travolta criticized the German Government's stand on Scientology before Congress and spoke out against a British television documentary that was highly critical of the organization's founder, the late L. Ron Hubbard.

In its March issue, *George* magazine quotes Mr. Travolta describing a conversation last April in which President Clinton promised to try to help ease the treatment of

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# Church of Scientology Uses a Roster of Powerful Stars to Enhance Its Image

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Scientologists in Germany, where the church is locked in a fight with the Government over accusations of discrimination. At the time, Mr. Travolta was starting to film "Primary Colors," the upcoming movie in which he portrays a Southern governor seeking the Presidency.

Ms. Alley is the spokeswoman for a drug treatment program affiliated with Scientology and founded a church in her Wichita, Kan., hometown. Mr. Cruise wrote to Congress last fall on behalf of German Scientologists, and he and his wife, Nicole Kidman, praise Scientology's founder in a display on Mr. Hubbard's life at a church center here.

Anne Archer, who had a leading role in "Fatal Attraction," among other movies, has appeared at pro-Scientology rallies in Germany. Isaac Hayes attacked newspapers articles critical of the church on his New York radio show and joined Lisa Marie Presley in opening a Scientology church in Memphis.

"Scientology works for these people, and they just want to give to others what works for them," said Marty Rathbun, a senior church official. "We don't give them a badge and send them out. They do it on their own."

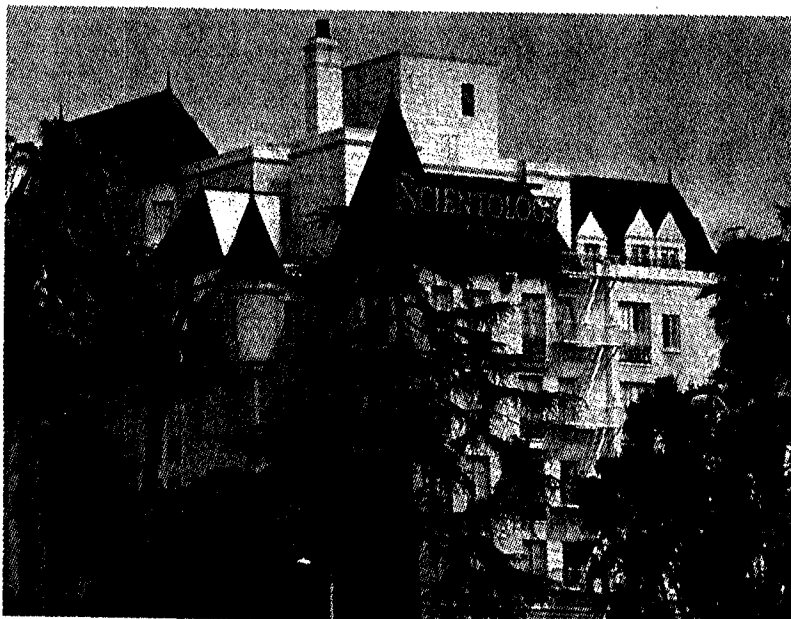
## Seeking Legitimacy In Troubled Times

For an organization fighting to win mainstream acceptance in an atmosphere of suspicion, association with celebrities in the public mind can be very beneficial. "These groups are often crying out for legitimacy, and they seek it any way they can, especially if they are under duress in public," said James T. Richardson, a professor of sociology and law at the University of Nevada at Reno. "What's phenomenal is the success that Scientology has had with the entertainment industry."

Scientology has needed any help it could get in presenting a positive image to counter the often-negative public perceptions.

In 1993, only after a bitter campaign and a two-year Government inquiry did the Internal Revenue Service grant the church the tax-exempt status accorded other religions. Church staff members remain under criminal investigation in connection with the death of a Scientologist at a church facility in Clearwater, Fla., in 1995. Many critics and some governments, including Germany and France, still question whether Scientology is even a religion, saying instead that it is a moneymaking enterprise because of the high fees it charges members.

In response, Scientologists argue that they are victims of religious intolerance. In Germany, for instance, church officials have docu-



Jim Wilson/The New York Times

The Celebrity Centre near Hollywood Hills is Scientology's largest and most successful center. Members can stay there while being counseled.

mented nearly 1,000 instances of what they say is discrimination against their members.

It was Mr. Hubbard himself who recognized the value in having celebrity members. Mr. Hubbard, a writer, composer and painter who founded Scientology in 1954, saw early on that recruiting prominent people could bring quick recognition to his new religion. Beginning in the late 1960's, Scientology built Celebrity Centres specifically to cater to artists and actors.

"The purpose of Celebrity Centre is, to forward the expansion and popularization of Scientology through the arts," Mr. Hubbard wrote in a church policy letter in 1973.

## Safe Environment For Those in Public Eye

There are 10 Celebrity Centres around the world, with the largest and most successful located in the former Chateau Elysee hotel near the Hollywood Hills in Los Angeles. The ornate hotel and its grounds were restored by the church to offer accommodations for members and sites for Scientology courses.

The Celebrity Centre is open to all Scientologists, and on any given day members with backgrounds of all varieties can be seen taking the counseling and courses that constitute Scientology's religious philosophy. But its special clientele is celebrities.

In interviews and testimonials printed in *Celebrity*, a Scientology magazine, Scientologists praised the center as a spiritual retreat. "Celebrity Centre is truly an oasis in this town for every artist on any level in their career," Mr. Travolta told the magazine in a recent issue. "This is an ultra-safe environment. It is the safest place in town for me. This is a

place where I know I have friends I can trust."

In several interviews arranged through church officials, prominent Scientologists talked about what they see as the special appeal of the church philosophy to people in creative fields. They described techniques that help them communicate better and focus more clearly on their lives and careers.

In many ways, the descriptions echoed the criteria of what scholars have called a world-affirming religion. These are groups that stress philosophies and techniques intended to help people be more successful in the world in which they live, rather than concentrating on the afterlife.

Like most religions, Scientology embraces a creation myth. According to its scriptures, people are immortal spirits who have lived through many lifetimes after being

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banished to Earth 75 million years ago by an intergalactic ruler. Scientology counseling is designed in part to remove obstacles accumulated over those lifetimes.

Less baffling to those outside Scientology are what adherents say is the philosophy's ability to provide tools to identify and solve problems.

"Through its drills and studies one may find the truth for himself," says an introductory text. "The technology is therefore not expounded as something to believe, but something to do."

Mr. Travolta is a veteran among Scientology celebrities. He joined the church in 1975, after an actress gave him a book on Scientology and just before he got a breakthrough role in the television series "Welcome Back, Kotter." Although his career waned in the 1980's, he said he stuck with Scientology because it taught him to overcome challenges.

"I'm a high school dropout, but when I applied Scientology study techniques I was the best jet pilot to ever go through the school that American Airlines runs for civilians," said Mr. Travolta, who owns three jets and is licensed to fly all.

Jenna Elfman is on the way up, the star of the 20-something sitcom "Dharma and Greg" and playing opposite Richard Dreyfuss in a new movie. She credits Scientology with teaching her to focus on her goals.

"What it really does is give you your self determination back," said Ms. Elfman, who joined in 1991. "Scientology clears away the noise so you can be certain of your point of view."

Mark Isham, who has composed scores for more than 20 feature films, was searching for spiritual guidance in the early 1980's when a friend who was a Scientology minister gave him a copy of its original text, "Dianetics."

"It had a very practical side," Mr. Isham recalled. "As an artist you are

very involved in doing something. There is a craft to putting the first note on the page. There was a craft in back of Scientology, too."

Mr. Isham said Scientology's techniques have helped him communicate better with film directors and others who are critical to his work and also to understand his own spiritual side. "It opened up whole concepts of what it is to be an artist, what is the purpose of being an artist," he said.

## Acceptance Isn't Easy, Despite All the Effort

With help from its celebrity members, Scientology has clearly moved toward the mainstream in Hollywood, where the church was often the target of jokes in the 70's and 80's. But celebrities have had mixed success in helping the church outside the entertainment industry.

Mr. Travolta's appearance before Congress did not sway enough votes to win approval of legislation asking President Clinton to express new concern about the treatment of Scientologists in Germany.

Likewise, the opening of the Scientology church in Wichita by Ms. Alley brought some early press attention but stirred a lingering dispute in the religious community.

Ms. Alley grew up in Wichita and says she moved to Los Angeles to overcome her addiction to cocaine through Narconon, a drug treatment program supported by Scientology. She said the results were so effective that she became the program's spokeswoman and has begun an effort to expand Scientology by financing new churches.

"This is a personal thing," said Ms. Alley, star of the sitcom "Veronica's Closet." "It's fun for me. It's my hobby. I want to do something for the world."

Ms. Alley, with Mr. Travolta and

other Scientology celebrities on hand, cut the ribbon on the Wichita church three years ago. She received a proclamation from the City Council and spoke at a luncheon of Inter-Faith Ministries, which represents more than 80 religious congregations in the Bible Belt city.

The church opening gave Scientology a profile in Wichita, and its local officials have participated in some citywide religious events since then. The inter-faith organization also has discussed offering membership to the group, although Scientology has not yet applied.

"If they want to be a member, let them be a member," said the Rev. Samuel Muyskens, executive director of the ministries group. "What harm can they do?"

Plenty, say ministers of some established congregations. Mr. Muyskens said several prominent ministers have made clear to him that they would withdraw from the Inter-Faith Ministries if Scientology was given a seat at the table.

The Rev. Keith Koch, pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Wichita, said Scientology is a religion "like gambling is a religion."

"The larger churches," he said, including his own, "would be adamantly opposed to Scientology becoming a member."

The leaders of Scientology say that such remarks reflect the intolerance the church faces in many quarters. "Bigotry is born out of ignorance, and that statement evidences an ignorance of what Scientology is and does," Mr. Rathbun said.

For now, however, the mansion in Wichita that Ms. Alley helped refurbish stands as an outsider in the religious community, a testament to the difficulty that Scientology encounters, despite its celebrity friends.

# The New York Times

18 FEB 1998

OP-ED

Journal  
FRANK RICH

NY TIMES  
2/18/98

## Clinton's Travolta Fever

The Clintons' first overnight guests in the Lincoln Bedroom were Harry Thomason and Linda Bloodworth-Thomason, creators of the sitcom "Designing Women." Who would've guessed that there was nowhere to go but down?

Many Streisand and Spielberg soirées later, Bill Clinton's show-biz-entranced Presidency has reached a nadir in which Sandy Berger, the national security adviser, must take time out from saber-rattling with

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Grease is  
the word.

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Saddam Hussein to field questions about John Travolta. On last Sunday's "Meet the Press," Mr. Berger testily explained just why he had wasted his time and taxpayers' money to brief a movie star's delegation, at the President's behest, about the Administration's defense of beleaguered Scientologists in Germany. Mr. Berger's answer — "I was trying to get an autograph for one of my kids" — is as revealing as it is pitiful. Imagine if a nobody requested a meeting about Christian persecution in China.

Mr. Clinton personally took on Mr. Travolta's pet cause after meeting the actor at last spring's conference on volunteerism. Time broke that story last September, but it was ignored until it resurfaced in the new *George* magazine. Now that both Bill Clinton and Scientology are defending themselves against scandalous headlines, a question arises: Could the President have offered to pimp for Scientology, currently battling a nasty wrongful-death suit in Florida, in exchange for a more favorable portrayal in the screen version of "Primary Colors"?

I think not. "Primary Colors" was always going to be kind to Mr. Clinton: Hollywood simply does not cast the beloved Travolta — or Tom Hanks, the original choice for the Clintonesque hero — as heavies. (If Tommy Lee Jones or John Malkovich had been rumored to star, then the President would have cause to worry.) But even without a supposed quid pro quo, the fact that Mr. Clinton would blithely do a movie star's flaky bidding is typical of an Administration whose worship of Hollywood money and celebrity has made

it blind to avoiding appearances of impropriety. If stars routinely hang out with groupies, why not Presidents with interns?

The most damning recent document from the Clinton White House doesn't have to be subpoenaed: it's the published guest list for the dinner for Tony Blair. This gala celebration of American-British amity was full of moguls and movie stars and Disney employees (six from Disney's ABC News alone) but bereft of American artists: no novelists or painters or poets. How soulless can a White House get? No point in inviting a Nobel laureate, apparently, when you can have the actor James Brolin, who took the occasion to instruct the press, "He's the most fun President we've ever had — I think we can all agree about that."

The most incriminating recent White House photo was taken on that same occasion: a Time shot of the Dreamworks mogul Jeffrey Katzenberg hugging Al Gore from behind as Elton John and Hillary Clinton looked on. Don Imus is right to call this smarmy synergy of money and power "troubling," "revolting" and "worse than Sammy Davis Jr. hugging Richard Nixon"; it shows a level of sycophancy between the Vice President and a campaign contributor that is even more revealing than that photo of Mr. Gore and the Buddhist nuns. Mr. Katzenberg may not be pushing Scientology, but will the White House lend its imprimatur to the hype for Dreamworks's potentially make-or-break new animated film, "Prince of Egypt"?

Mr. Clinton and Mr. Gore are in such thrall to their Hollywood patrons that they have no sense of how their infatuation plays or to what embarrassments it can lead. At the Blair dinner, the evening's entertainers, Mr. John and Stevie Wonder — whose services were "said to have been procured by Jeffrey Katzenberg," as another dinner guest, Tina Brown, tellingly put it in *The New Yorker* — concluded their show by singing the old Motown-Beatles hit "Money." Remember its lyric? "Gimme money, that's what I want!"

If you have a show-biz Administration, you are asking to get stuck with "Money" as your theme song, even at the height of scandals that include bags of possibly ill-gotten campaign cash. In this crass atmosphere, Mr. Clinton's alleged gift of Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" to Monica Lewinsky may be as close to a cultural Camelot as his White House gets. □

## REVIEW &amp; OUTLOOK

## The Secrets of the Universe

There's no particular reason for the world to worry about a smallish cult that believes invisible 75 million-year-old thetans are floating around our skulls. The search for the meaning of life in the vastness of the universe preoccupies most people at some time or another, though they usually find their way into houses of worship, therapeutic counseling or the local liquor store.

When instead they come calling on the National Security Adviser, it may be time for a reality check. Some of the weirdest conversations of the day concern Sandy Berger's meeting with John Travolta, along with Tom Cruise the chief ornaments of the Scientology movement. Scientology's founder, L. Ron Hubbard, professed to believe the evil galactic overlord Xenu shipped frozen thetans to Teegeack, better known as planet Earth, dropping them down volcanoes and pulverizing them with hydrogen bombs and setting their souls adrift. By now it seems you can't understand the universe without plumbing thetan influence in the White House, the halls of Congress, and the murky heart of the IRS.

Mr. Travolta brought the cult to our attention again thanks to an article in *George* magazine describing how the actor and the President of the United States enjoyed an apparently mutually beneficial meeting last spring at a volunteerism conference in Philadelphia. The actor was there to deliver a speech about Scientology's educational materials. What concerned the President, Mr. Travolta suggests, was the big screen filling up with Jack Stanton, the Clintonesque President in "Primary Colors"—the movie Mr. Travolta was just then making, having eaten himself into a properly presidential profile. It's probably unlikely that a film directed by Mike Nichols would ever treat Stanton/Clinton as anything but a charming rogue and shrewd manipulator. But the prospect of a wide screen valentine became ever more probable as Mr. Clinton took the moment to feel Mr. Travolta's pain. And told him he would try to make it go away.

Who is hurting Mr. Travolta? The German government, that's who. Like the U.S. prior to a 1993 tax settlement mysteriously upgrading the cult to the status of a tax-exempt religion, Germany considers Scientology a business run by extremists and has put the church under surveillance. Assisted by frightened escapees, the Germans make the case that Scientology exploits the weaknesses of its members for profit that at the very least should be taxed. This creates the worst kind of pain for Scientology, which reaps millions from "auditing," cleaning a "preclear" of repressed memories. With millions of years of memories, getting cleared and achieving ever higher levels of purity can be a

lengthy and costly experience. It also yields intensely private information that is carefully stored in files.

For some, the process has also been dangerous. Earlier this month, German police searched five Munich locations of the sect after the suspicious death of a cult member. In Clearwater, Florida, a young woman mysteriously died after being held at a Scientology hotel. Maybe Mr. Clinton could send down Janet Reno for an investigative weekend in her old neighborhood.

But back to Mr. Berger, who found Presidential whim expanding his duties to include stilling an actor's pain. Asked by "Meet the Press" about his briefing of Mr. Travolta last September, the National Security Adviser looked like he might eat his tie as he downplayed the meeting as a normal response to reports of religious persecution by the German government. His real goal, he said, was to get an autograph for one of his kids; we note he didn't ask for educational materials.

Mr. Berger is not the only official caught up in Scientology's web. Senator Alfonse D'Amato, about whom no movie we know of is being made, has scolded Germany at a hearing organized by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. And by the time the House finally defeated a resolution criticizing Germany late last year, a flabbergasted Madeleine Albright had already endured several ludicrous discussions with Germany's equally flabbergasted foreign minister, Klaus Kinkel. A federal immigration judge added to the surreal merriment by granting asylum in November to a preposterous German woman who feared returning home because she is a Scientologist.

But if that is all weird, it is nothing compared with the mysteries surrounding the decision of the IRS to suddenly grant Scientology a tax-exempt status after years of litigation. Our Elizabeth MacDonald reported that in the secret settlement the IRS dropped its position that "auditing" fees were not deductible, a position that had been upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court. In return it got \$12.5 million and a promise that the cult would drop its numerous lawsuits against the IRS and its agents. The IRS says it is investigating the leak.

Meanwhile, Scientology is litigating with everyone else in sight; why not, after having intimidated the biggest gun on the block? The IRS has lately announced its desire to turn itself into a friendly agency. How about an auditing session? Leading off with this question: Is there anyone at the IRS who seriously thinks that the unbelievable sums of money Scientology spends on lawsuits meets the agency's requirement that a charity spend its funds only on charitable purposes?

City/Canada

# Church of Scientology targets U of A professor for criticizing its practices

CHARLES RUSNELL  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER  
Edmonton

The Church of Scientology has launched a countrywide personal attack against a University of Alberta professor who has publicly criticized some of their practices.

Sociology professor Stephen Kent was the subject of a scathing article in a 16-page Freedom of Scientology supplement entitled *Freedom* that was distributed with the *Globe and Mail* newspaper Friday.

In the two-page article, Kent is compared to well-known neo-Nazi hatemonger Ernst Zundel and is referred to "as the academic point man for the voices of hate against new religions."

The article also questions the validity of Kent's academic research and suggests he should be disqualified from receiving any more government research grants.

"Freedom of speech demands that Stephen Kent be permitted to hold his unorthodox views of religion, in the same vein that Ernst Zundel does," the article states. "But his support of discrimination and intolerance which has led to human-rights violations and even violence — in Germany as well as in Canada — should disqualify him totally from any government support or funding."

The attack appears to be related to Kent's work as an expert witness for a German parliamentary committee. Many German government officials believe Scientology is not a

*"Scientology has policies, which are public and well known, to undertake character assassination against their perceived enemies and this article is simply a demonstration of that Scientology policy."*

— U of A professor Stephen Kent

religion, but rather a business based on what they perceive as dangerous totalitarian ideology. In response, the government ordered close monitoring of the organization while a commission gathers information about its activities in Germany and around the world.

Kent travelled to Germany three times last summer to speak to German legislators and mainstream church groups about Scientology practices, including forced labour and a form of brainwashing.

Kent expected some kind of attack from Scientology for his work in Germany.

"Scientology has policies, which are public and well known, to undertake character assassination against their perceived enemies and this article is simply a demonstration of that Scientology policy," said Kent, adding that he was never interviewed for the article, and that it doesn't quote from any of his published work.

"They can't quote anything from my work that would suggest I propagate hate against

new religious groups because I never have. I am not a religious bigot. These are libellous allegations that have no substance in reality," Kent said.

Kent said he's being attacked for two reasons. The first is because he acted as a consultant to the German government, which is about to publish its findings on sectarian and psychological groups that are "probably going to be very critical of Scientology and its probable human-rights abuses."

"The second reason is that I am the most vocal academic in the world when it comes to discussing issues of Scientology's probable human-rights abuses."

Kent has been the target of Scientology attacks in the past. In September, Scientologists picketed at the University of Alberta and formally accused Kent of harassment.

The university rejected the accusation and defended Kent's right to academic freedom.

Doug Owram, the University of Alberta's academic vice-president, said the university fully stands behind Kent and his research. Kent's work on Scientology is peer reviewed and meets all internal scholarly guidelines.

The university will probably not respond to the article.

"We've seen these sorts of attacks before and to get into a mud-slinging match with them goes nowhere," Owram said. "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."

# THE GLOBE AND MAIL

CANADA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER • FOUNDED 1844 • FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1998

## CORRECTION

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In June 1998, The Globe and Mail distributed copies of Freedom Journal, Volume 2, Issue 1, as an insert. Freedom Journal is published by the Church of Scientology. Articles appearing in that edition of Freedom Journal made certain allegations concerning University of Alberta Professor of Sociology, Stephen A. Kent (PhD). The Globe and Mail is not aware of any factual foundation for the printed allegations made against Dr. Kent in those articles. The Globe and Mail apologizes to Dr. Kent for any embarrassment caused to him.

## OPINION

THE GLOBE AND MAIL A22 FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1998

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Defamatory attack

In early June, The Globe and Mail distributed an insert published by The Church of Scientology entitled *Freedom*. This insert contained an article that amounted to a lengthy and defamatory attack on me and my research on new and alternative religions, particularly Scientology itself.

As an insert in The Globe and Mail, this Scientology publication and the article about me may have enjoyed a greater degree of credibility than would otherwise have been the case, which prompts my response in these pages.

Presumably, the attack on me was occasioned by my published work and presentations about Scientology, including those in which I have stated my concerns about what I perceived as probable human-rights abuses within the Scientology organization. The article was especially critical of, but vague about, presentations that I made in Germany last year concerning Scientology. From reading the article, no one could know that my presentations were about what in my view are Scientology's probable human-rights abuses, and that I made these presentations at the invitation of German government officials and others who were investigating Scientology.

Rather than engage me in a dialogue or debate about these human-rights issues and concerns, Scientology — through its publication — chose to launch a personal attack upon my character and research skills.

My statements and conclusions about Scientology are thoroughly researched, carefully documented, and based on interviews and extensive citations from the organization's own materials. Moreover, I take full responsibility for what I have written and said. In contrast, no individual takes responsibility for being the author of the statements made against me in the Scientology publication, or even for the publication itself. Why not?

I am not the only researcher who ques-

tions Scientology's practices or who reports on them. Many Web sites devote themselves to the debates surrounding the controversial organization. One of the most thorough sites may be found at <http://www.xenu.net/>

In my view, the heightened media attention that Scientology is receiving indicates that increasing numbers of people are realizing that Scientology deserves close scrutiny. Earlier this year, Canadians may have seen a television segment about Scientology on CBS's *Public Eye* with Bryant Gumbel. Likewise articles on the same topic ran in the July 21, 1997, edition of Newsweek and the Dec. 1, 1997, edition of The New York Times. The Globe and Mail ran a two-part series on Scientology on Jan. 19-20, 1998. Later this year, both ABC's *20/20* and *Arts and Entertainment* will present shows concerning the organization. I am pleased that Scientology is receiving so much public attention.

Stephen A. Kent, PhD, Professor of Sociology, University of Alberta, Edmonton