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### **A Diagnostic that America Does Not Need**

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Let us open here by a recollection and reflection on deprogramming, its perpetrators, apologists, and "useful idiots," i.e., the mainstream media. "Deprogramming" constitutes a jolting, unsolicited, and demeaning assault on the faith of a believer, an experience that many of the early American followers of Reverend Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon endured. Unfortunately, to this day a handful of so-called deprogrammers with their strident and benighted anti-religious views make their living through portraying themselves as "experts" of what, with intention, they demean by referring to as "cults." Indeed, in some cases, these individuals' unchallenged "expertise" and the vigilante behavior that they tolerate and, in many cases, endorse, serve as a rationale for the imprisonment, torture, and death of followers of some of targeted religions, including Falun Gong. Deprogrammers flag these religions because they fall outside the parameters of what these usually unschooled "experts" define as "acceptability."

Deprogramming's greying devotees have not abandoned a delusional drive to impede believers of unpopular religions from worshipping in accordance with their conscience, under the protection of the United States Bill of Rights and in accord with the Four Freedoms outlined by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his 1941 State of the Union Address. Like the Klan, the American Nazi Party, and other extremist organizations that no longer have a sounding board, the day is coming when deprogrammers will no longer be protected by an uninformed media who, in ignorance, allow them to continue to spew non sequitur arguments designed to rationalize criminal activity.

The *New World Encyclopedia* defines deprogramming as follows:

Deprogramming is the process of removing a person thought to be under "mind control" from a religious or other community and influencing him or her to abandon allegiance to the group. It is normally commissioned by concerned relatives of the follower, often parents of adult children and involves forcible abduction. Historically, it usually involved confining the person against his or her will without prior psychological evaluation. This led to controversies over freedom of religion and civil rights in the United States, Europe, and Japan in the late twentieth century.<sup>[1]</sup>

In November 1975 I was first kidnapped and deprogrammed. That first incident took place in Kingston, New York just a few miles from Barrytown, NY where the Unification Theological Seminary was located at the time. My deprogramming was short-lived when, after an initial session, everyone present fell fast asleep including me. Suddenly I awoke and understood that there was an opportunity to escape and that I needed to act. I carefully navigated my way across the slumbering bodies in the room, managed to open the door and quickly fled to freedom.

My second kidnapping took place on Thanksgiving weekend in 1978, precisely the same time as the Jonestown massacre, which became the connect-the-dots theme of each of the deprogramming sessions that I endured. My confinement that second time lasted for a little over a month, nothing compared to the more than twelve years that Japanese Unificationist Toru Goto was held or the extended period that other Japanese Unificationists suffered under duress and in isolation during their endless deprogrammings and detentions.<sup>[2]</sup>

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At the time of my second kidnapping, I served, together with Dr. Antonio Betancourt, as Director of the Spanish-speaking churches of the New York City–northern New Jersey area. The New York Church leader was Reverend Ken Sudo, who was my leader at that time.

A few weeks prior to Thanksgiving 1978, my father had called me at the 43rd Street Headquarters Church in New York where I lived at the time. He informed that he was not well (he indeed was not well and would live for less than two more years). My father asked if I would join him and my siblings because this might be his

last Thanksgiving. Touched by his appeal, I decided to respect his wish. I was already thirty years old by that time and, though some of my fellow leaders and friends suggested that there might be some risk in visiting him, I, nevertheless, opted to travel and celebrate Thanksgiving with my family.

Our family spent a few days together in Norfolk, Virginia where one of my sisters lived and, ironically, where my daughter now lives with her husband and our granddaughter. On the Saturday following the celebrations, I was driven back towards the airport by family. Abruptly, we deviated from the itinerary and drove into an open garage of a house in Norfolk. The car stopped and I was asked to wait a minute.

The electric garage door came down and I immediately understood what was to follow. For the next month, I was held against my will because of my religious beliefs. Things were further complicated because my parents had managed to get a judge from my home state of Pennsylvania, where I had not had legal residence for eight years, to issue a conservatorship that placed me under the "protection" of my parents and identified me as "mentally incompetent." The Judge who issued the conservatorship never met or spoke with me. He made a de facto ruling restricting my freedom simply because of my choice to join the Unification Church.

## The Deprogramming and Escape

I had been a follower of Rev. Moon for more than seven years by the time of my second deprogramming. My captors and deprogrammers had little or no understanding of our Church. For them, the names Sun Myung Moon, Bo Hi Pak, and Ken Sudo that dripped from their mouths were strange-sounding foreign names of people whom they demonized. For me, these were real people with whom I had spent days, weeks, months, even years of my life; I had spoken with them, learned from them, at times openly disagreed with them, but always found them to be individuals of character, integrity, and empathy.

Within a few days, my parents recognized that the first group of deprogrammers whom they had contracted were incompetent and dismissed them. Next, they hired Alan Tate Wood, whom I had worked with in the early 1970s when he served as one of the young leaders of our Church in Maryland. Wood, who left the Church shortly after that time, has bashed the Unification Church across five decades. A committed devotee of the so-called Anti-Cult Movement (ACM), he conducted a *GoFundme* campaign in December 2016 to raise \$3500 to participate and present a paper at the 2017 International Cultic Studies Association Conference in Bordeaux France. On his *GoFundme* page, the 70-year-old Wood sounded like a Little Leaguer raising money for Disneyland, explaining that if he were able to get the support needed (which he did) and participate in the program, it would represent the "fulfillment of a lifelong dream."[\[3\]](#)

In the three days that he spent with me, Wood did not share about his life-long dream of one day presenting a paper at the International Cultic Studies Association. He did, however, "counsel" me, fully aware that I was being held against my will. His stay abruptly ended soon after he invited me to participate in a role-play game where I was the deprogrammer and he was the Unificationist. He understood through that exercise, I am sure, that I was already quite aware of all of the retrofitted, sophomoric arguments of the Anti-Cult Movement. The next morning, he left without bidding me good-bye. He expressed regret to my mother that, in my case, he could do nothing.

It was soon after that my parents brought in a former Unification member, by the name of Dee Anderson. Anderson had been deprogrammed and had later become a Christian. When she arrived at my home in the suburbs of Pittsburgh, she informed me that, before arriving, she had received a Bible quote for me:

I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness;  
I will take hold of your hand.  
I will keep you and will make you  
to be a covenant for the people  
and a light for the Gentiles,  
to open eyes that are blind,  
to free captives from prison  
and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

(Isaiah 42:6-7)

I know what she thought that this quote meant but, from my perspective, I had the inspiration that this person had brought the blessing and support of Christianity with her and that, if I cooperated with her, God would release me from the dungeon where I sat "in the darkness."

Throughout my deprogramming, I was never forced to recant my beliefs. If things had become unbearable, I suppose that I would have feigned doing so. Fortunately, I had had a discussion with Bento Leal, a UTS alumnus and Unificationist leader who had gone through a deprogramming himself. Rev. Leal had shared with me about how, during his sessions, he refused to enter into dialogue with the deprogrammers and, when they brought up faith-related issues, he changed the subject, explaining that he was tired of engaging with them on religion. In my case, I adapted Rev. Leal's approach to my own situation which I will next contextualize.

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One of the assumptions of most deprogrammers is that, if you are a Unificationist, then you were converted through a workshop where you spent several days in isolation from your normal surroundings and were indoctrinated. However, in my case, I did not join through a workshop.

I had met the Unification Church in Paris, France in March 1971 through Dr. Claude Perrottet when we were both students at the University of Paris. Over a few months I sporadically studied the Principle, more out of respect for Dr. Perrottet than out of a burning search for religious truth. Frankly, most of the Unification Church teachings had no appeal to me; I had already developed a generally negative attitude toward religion. The Unification Church's approach to the mission of Jesus and the failure of John the Baptist, nevertheless, did catch my attention. And as I understood the Unification view of the Fall more completely, I recognized that Father Moon potentially offered an insight into Theodicy, the reason for the overpowering presence of evil in a world allegedly created by a good and loving God.

By that time, I had intuited that there must be an invisible problem in the world that no one had grasped. Witnessing the endemic corruption within business and government, I had concluded as an undergraduate that to escape institutional evil, I should follow the example of Dr. Charles Parnell, my mentor and favorite professor at the University of Notre Dame, and become a professor myself, and thus avoid dirtying my hands in the graft of the military-industrial complex. Nevertheless, as I reflected further, I realized that wealthy American universities relied on the endowment funding provided by mega-corporations such as Dow Chemical and Boeing, corporations that produced napalm and the delivery systems needed to unleash hell from the sky on enemy forces in Vietnam while also causing collateral civilian damage. This led me to understand that the ivory tower could not provide an escape; it too was complicit in the vicious circle of evil. Academia's hands were thus not clean.

As I fully engaged Reverend Moon's teachings on the Fall, I concluded that he had indeed uncovered the invisible problem that I had intuited and sensed. Next came the daunting recognition that in Sun Myung Moon, whom I first suspected to be a KCIA agent, I had found God's Messenger. After six months of occasional visits to the church and my own reflection and independent study, I chose to become a follower of Reverend and Mrs. Moon. I did so without ever attending a workshop.

During my deprogramming, I explained to my deprogrammers that it was a mistake to assume that I was the product of a 2-Day Workshop experience. I added that, because I had not joined the Unification Church in a day or on a weekend, it would serve no purpose to treat me as if I had. If they expected me to reconsider anything, it should be done based on allowing me to study and research on my own and not based on one-way "conversations." I was grateful when they agreed to respect those conditions. The "shoe" that they had tried to force me to wear simply did not fit, in my case.

As if I had a choice (which I did not, given the conservatorship that my captors had acquired to legally sanction my confinement), I offered to stay around and study independently and, based on my readings, engage in conversations. I read among other things Robert Jay Lifton's entire *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* and not just Chapter 22 that deprogrammers back in those days liked to ask Church members to read. That chapter unto itself may resonate somewhat with a Unification workshop, but the entire book, Chapter 22 included, bore a much closer resemblance to the deprogramming rant and the disrespectful treatment that I had been subjected to by my first deprogrammers and then by Alan Tate Wood. As I gained more of my captors' trust, I was allowed more free movement but was still far from on my own.

Finally, the big day came. Accompanied by my brother Marty, I was permitted to travel into downtown Pittsburgh, where it was agreed, that I would complete some job applications. The first place that we visited was the Pittsburgh Hilton Hotel, one of the landmarks of the downtown. I entered the employment office with my brother, completed an application, and then waited my turn for an interview. At some point a receptionist signaled to me and she escorted me to a nearby door. My brother agreed to stay there in the waiting room during my interview.

I walked through the door but not into another office or office suite as I had anticipated. Instead, I stood before a stairwell. I descended the stairwell and found myself in the middle of the entire underground parking area of the Hilton Hotel. I saw countless doors leading from the underground parking lot into downtown Pittsburgh.

I chose one of the exits, took off running as fast as I could, and desperately searched for a safe haven to conceal myself. Fortunately, I had been given some pocket money that day (the first time that I had any money for over a month). I found a movie theater not far away, purchased a ticket, entered the theater, found a phone booth, and placed a collect phone call to the Unification Church of New York. After enduring the classic "Night of the Living Dead" two or three times, Jonathan Slevin from the Unification Church of New York City

finally arrived at the theater. We shook hands, embraced, and then with an attorney, drove west across the Pennsylvania border into West Virginia and then to Ohio, and from there we flew back to New York City.

That began my search for justice, and my case *Ward vs. Connor* eventually reached the United States Supreme Court where an April 18, 1980 decision by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia was upheld when the Supreme Court denied a Writ of *Certiorari* to the defendants. In its landmark decision not to review the lower court decision, the United States Supreme Court *de facto* recognized that 42 United States Code Section 1985 (c) applied not only to the violation of the constitutional rights of person based on race but also based on religious beliefs.[\[4\]](#)

## **The Criteria for Expertise in Religion**

A variety of people spoke with my mother about how to handle my deprogramming during my confinement. One of them was Steve Hassan. A little more than two years after his departure from the Unification Church, Hassan was already being recognized by the media as a "leading cult expert." My mother explained to me that in her phone conversation with Hassan, he had warned her not to give me too much freedom and to monitor me closely.

Why were Steve Hassan, Rick Ross and other deprogrammers portrayed by the media as "cult experts" at that time and since then? Let's draw a comparison here.

I was born into a Roman Catholic family, presumably with an Irish Catholic heritage dating back some 1,500 years, thanks to Saint Patrick. Before the age of ten, I, like any Catholic who attended a parochial school, was instructed in the sacraments and had received Baptism, Penance, Holy Communion, and Confirmation.

I served as an altar boy for five years. I studied Latin and, like all altar boys of the time, had to memorize much of the Catholic Mass in Latin. I was both an Eagle Scout and a recipient of the *Ad Altare Dei* Medal[\[5\]](#), the Catholic medal of honor awarded to Catholic Boy Scouts who completed the Church's strict requirements for eligibility.

I had attended eight years of Catholic grade school and then one year of Catholic preparatory school and then three years of public high school where, once a week, I attended catechism classes in association with the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO). I next spent four years at the University of Notre Dame, where all undergraduates of Catholic back-ground were obliged to take courses in religion and theology. I later went on to doctoral study at the Pontifical University of Paris (Institut Catholique de Paris) and at De La Salle University, a respected Catholic institution of higher education in the Philippines that was founded by the American Christian Brothers more than one hundred years ago.

My maternal uncle, Martin Conroy, served as a priest of the Spiritan Order, which founded and oversaw Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. A priest for more than fifty years, my Uncle served as a missionary to Africa, as Treasurer for the Order worldwide but, most of his life, he pastored different church parishes in the United States. Every summer he came to our home and I still recall him doing his daily reading of the Catholic Office and his meditation on the patio in our back yard. My paternal great-aunt, Kate Ward, devoted her entire life to the Catholic Church as a nun and parochial school teacher (Sister Presentation). My younger brother Marty spent nine years as a Capuchin seminarian and then chose to leave and marry following his novitiate year. I had cousins who served in the clergy as well. In my youth, I never missed a Sunday mass or a Holy Day of Obligation; I was steeped in the Roman Catholic faith.

To be clear, in spite of my Catholic heritage, experience, and education, I would fully expect the media to calumnize me if I were to portray myself as an "expert" on Roman Catholicism. The Catholic Church would not see me as an expert in the faith, and justifiably so. They might point out that although I attended Catholic institutions of education, I did not major in Theology or Church History. They could also point out that neither my Latin nor my New Testament Greek were up to par.

## **Mainstream Media's Low Bar for "Expertise" in New Religions**

Compared to Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, or Judaism, the media has a much lower bar in when it comes to so-called cults. Decades ago, CBS numbered among the national news outlets that respectfully portrayed "father of deprogramming" and high school dropout Ted Patrick as an "expert"[\[6\]](#) on cults; they continue to present Rick Ross who has only a high school degree as an expert as well and say nothing of how his writings have been used in the People's Republic of China to justify the brutal repression of the Falun Gong movement[\[7\]](#) that we will elaborate on later in this article.

Neither Patrick nor Ross had any experience of being converted to a new religion although Patrick claims to have been shaken by his interface with the Children of God, a religious movement quite popular in the 1970s, which his son had joined. The only real expertise of deprogrammers such as Ross, Hassan and Patrick lies in a contrived deconstruction of conversion practices in new religions that was first introduced by Patrick and since enhanced by deprogramming apologists, who argue that new religions, such as Falun Gong, the Unification Church and Transcendental Meditation engage in a common "mind control" practice. They challenge,

deconstruct, undermine, and demean such religions in a way that would not be tolerated if the same analytical tools and criteria were applied to mainstream faiths such as Catholicism, Judaism, Protestantism, or Islam.

## **The Self-Anointed Unification Church Leader**

In his recent publication *Cult of Trump* (2019), Hassan looks at Donald Trump through Ted Patrick's lens and deems him a "cult leader." As already indicated, Hassan portrays himself as a cult expert, making frequent reference in *Cult of Trump* to having once served as a high-ranking leader of the Unification Church. Mr. Hassan has been described as "onetime assistant to national (US) director, Unification Church." He sometimes also refers to himself as the Assistant Director of the Unification Church in New York.<sup>[8]</sup>

A *Rutland Herald* article of years ago cites Mr. Hassan as a veteran of the Unification Church but it also references Mr. Michael Warder who undisputedly served for ten years in top leadership roles within the Unification Community<sup>[9]</sup> and had many experiences working directly with Reverend Moon. Warder, like Hassan, has been critical of the Unification Church; he even testified against Rev. Moon during the 1982 court case *United States vs. Sun Myung Moon*.

In contrast to Hassan, Mr. Warder was definitely a high-ranking leader of the Unification Church, something that Hassan never was. Hassan is not an expert on the Unification Church. He was not among the leaders chosen for graduate study at the opening of Unification Theological Seminary in 1975. He never held an official city, state, or national leadership position in the Unification Church. He never received the marriage blessing from Father and Mother Moon. He has no expertise in spoken or written Korean, the original language of all of the Founder's writings and speeches.

Hassan boasts of having attended some 25 top leader meetings. Yet, in all of the many speeches that Reverend Moon gave in the 27 months that he was a member of the Unification Church, his name appears in none of the transcripts of his talks, unlike Michael Warder. There is no evidence that Hassan was ever singled out by Father Moon. There is no evidence in Hassan's writings or speeches that he ever even engaged in a single conversation with Rev. Moon and yet he is celebrated as an "expert."

At the time of his "exit" from the Unification Church, Hassan had barely begun to navigate the process that leads to assuming a major leadership responsibility inside the Unification Church. Two years ago, Rev. Demian Dunkley became the new President of the Family Federation for World Peace USA. How long had Rev. Dunkley been a Church member when he assumed that role? Twenty years. About eighteen years longer than Steve Hassan. In a sworn testimony, Hassan described himself as having "headed the Unification Church's fund-raising operations in Baltimore"<sup>[10]</sup> In fact, he had led a fundraising team which he said raised \$35,000 in eight weeks on the streets of Baltimore.<sup>[11]</sup> It was while in that role, following an accident which he blames on Reverend Moon, that he was deprogrammed.

Even if Hassan did have some of the experiences that he claims to have had, one would hope that the press would have sufficient discernment to recognize that the alleged unfortunate experiences of a person who spent 2 years and 3 months with some leaders and members who followed Reverend Moon may not be "the rule" of Unification life but "an exception." Other mainstream faiths have allegations of aberrant behavior and the press covers them as unfortunate exceptions rather than the rule.

## **A Leader in Search of Apologists**

Hassan likes to give the impression that his hands are clean of the dark side of deprogramming. Yet, he not only became a deprogrammer himself but he expressed high regard for Ted Patrick, the originator of forcible kidnapping and deprogramming. Hassan, who says that he contemplated killing his father at the time of his own deprogramming<sup>[12]</sup> and no doubt blames the Unification Church for those thoughts, seems to feel that there is a place for the violent, vigilante measures that landed Patrick in prison three times.<sup>[13]</sup> In 1981, Hassan told the *Miami Herald*, "I don't believe that the only way for a person to leave a group is by forcible deprogramming." In the same interview, he clarified his view on Patrick saying, "I don't agree with him in a lot of ways but I do respect him."<sup>[14]</sup>

One of Hassan's mentors, whom he continues to praise in *Cult of Trump*, is the late Margaret Singer, an untenured adjunct professor at Cal-Berkeley. She was roundly criticized and discredited by her peers for relying exclusively on former disillusioned members of new religions and for failing to interview or take into account the experiences of those who chose to stay with the Unification Church and other new religions that she "researched." John Bierman in his book *The Odyssey of New Religions* cites Berkley psychiatrist Dr. Lee Coleman who criticized Singer's biased approach to the study of new religions:

In light of Singer's methodology, one might speculate as to how the American public might react if a report on the Roman Catholic Church were done solely on the basis of interviews with a small number of apostate priests and nuns. It is unlikely that

this would be accepted as objective. Nevertheless, as Franklin Littell of Temple University points out, Margaret Singer and a small coterie of these people travel the world, like "ambulance chasers," testifying at trials and investigative hearings about new religious movements they do not like, all while receiving very substantial fees.<sup>[15]</sup>

Singer was barred from giving expert testimony by the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia in 1988 because her biased approach to researching new religions had been condemned by both the Board of Social and Ethical Responsibility of the American Psychological Association and by the American Sociological Association. Dr. Singer's two lawsuits to reverse the Court of Appeals decision challenging her expertise both ended in failure and the District of Columbia's decision remained upheld.<sup>[16]</sup>

Hassan, the late Margaret Singer, the late John Clark of Harvard Medical School and other deprogramming supporters have failed to document when, where, and how Ron Hubbard, Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the Jehovah Witness Leadership, the leaders of Opus Dei, or the late Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson, or Donald Trump, all accused of being cult leaders by Hassan, acquired the competencies needed to "brainwash" their followers. When did that happen for Rev. Moon, for example? Margaret Singer and John Clark have never provided any evidence of how religious leaders developed their techniques of coercive persuasion.

### **The Conversion Mysterion Explained "in a Snap"**

The mystery of the conversion practices of the new religions was allegedly solved more than three decades ago by Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman, neither of whom were credentialed in psychology or psychiatry. Reliant on the crude "brainwashing" narrative of "father of deprogramming" Ted Patrick and on the use of the demeaning umbrella term "cult" instead of religion, journalists Conway and Siegelman wrote *Snapping* to explain how new religions, by depriving inductees of food, of sleep, and by exposing them to an "information overload" through prayer, singing, and long repetitive lectures, cause them to "snap" through an "infinitely complex convergence of physical, mental and emotional stresses" that "crest in a holographic crisis in the brain, then resolve into a whole new organization of mind and personality."<sup>[17]</sup>

Ted Patrick, Rick Ross, Steve Hassan and others deprogrammers alleged to provide an antidote to "cult mind control" through a treatment that allegedly mirrored the conversion process outlined by Conway and Siegelman. Victims of deprogrammings were subjected to deprivation of food, sleep, and exposed to profane, timeless rants against the leaders and the doctrines of the faiths that they had embraced. The aim of deprogramming was clearly a "build up, crest in a holographic crisis in the brain," which, as per Conway and Siegelman, would result in "a whole new organization of mind and personality."<sup>[18]</sup>

The term "deprogramming" would appear to imply that one abandoned a belief system that had beleaguered him or her. One would assume that, once liberated from whatever oppressive mind control or belief system, one would return to "normal." However, after deprogramming, people such as Steve Hassan do not simply abandon the belief system that had "distorted" their personality. The victims of deprogramming do not go back to the days prior to their religious conversion. They are converted to a new faith, preceded on accepting that the religion they had embraced had, in fact, "programmed" them. In the convert's post-deprogramming worldview, they accept the belief that, through a combination of techniques including food and sleep deprivation, singing, chanting, endless repetitive lectures, they were subjected to coercive persuasion, and that the points that defined their original hologram of beliefs, values, and identity had undergone a sudden shift resulting in radical and dangerous transformation of viewpoint and values.

The new deprogramming converts also buy into the argument that the leaders of the religion that they had previously subscribed to were experts in the techniques of mind control, and that such techniques have multiplied since the Korean War when Mao's China subjected US prisoners of war to mind control.

The late John Clark of Harvard University, a militant opponent of new religions and of the Unification Church, warned, "The new youth cults, though usually self-styled as religious for purposes of First Amendment privileges, are increasingly dangerous to the health of their converts and menacing to their critics." The *New York Times* reporter assigned to write Clark's obituary explained, "At first, Dr. Clark himself had to be convinced of what was then not a generally accepted principle: that an ordinary person, not suffering from any significant psychiatric problem, could within a matter of days be persuaded through simple group pressures to walk away from a previous life and devote everything to a particular group." Clark was converted to the view that he outlined in a 1982 testimony that "individuals are succumbing to pressures within the cult milieu, pressures that can induce radical personality changes as easily in normally developing people as among disturbed ones."<sup>[19]</sup>

Two of the key texts that supporters of this view read are Chapter 22 (and Chapter 22 only) of Robert Jay Lifton's *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* and *Snapping* by Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman. Often following a deprogramming, the victim is encouraged to participate in the deprogramming of another person. In the past through a deprogramming clearing house formerly known as the Cult Awareness Network (CAN), names of friends and associates involved a given new religion were garnered from those who had been

deprogrammed. The parents of those friends were then contacted by CAN, and new prospects for deprogramming were mined by professional deprogrammers.

## **The Anti-Cult Perspective and the Murder of Lisa Steinberg**

The media readily reported about the "authoritative" insights that anti-cult organizations and so-called "cult experts" provided. They paid little attention to cases where deprogramming organizations and the deprogramming were implicated in having a deleterious effect. Consider the case of Joel Steinberg, the deviant who repeatedly beat his 6-year old stepdaughter Lisa and, finally on November 1, 1987, left her comatose on the floor of the bathroom of the home that he shared with his lover, the former Random House editor Hedda Nussbaum. Steinberg alleged that Lisa, who died from that beating three days later, was trying to hypnotize him and put him under the influence of a cult. When he finally admitted beating Lisa to death, Steinberg rationalized this to Hedda saying, "This staring business has gotten too much for me."[\[20\]](#)

Nussbaum testified that Steinberg "had put the (cult) idea" into her mind as well. He alleged that not only Lisa but Hedda could put people into hypnotic trances by staring at them. Steinberg also told Nussbaum that the members of her family were part of a cult and forbade her to talk to her parents on the telephone because, as Nussbaum put it, "they were dangerous to me."[\[21\]](#)

The media only attributed Steinberg's killing of Lisa to his increased use of cocaine in the month leading up to the fatal beating.[\[22\]](#) Lisa died on November 4, 1987. The media offered no explanation of why Joel's recurrent brutal beating of his lover began at least as far back as February 1981 when Ms. Nussbaum had to be hospitalized for a ruptured spleen, due to a beating by Steinberg. That was almost seven years prior to when Steinberg stepped up his use of drugs. Steinberg pummeled Hedda repeatedly because she was allegedly "brainwashed" by a cult and he believed that she, like Lisa, was trying to influence him. Steinberg claimed to have taken Hedda to "nine deprogrammers."[\[23\]](#)

Steinberg's lawyer affirmed that "if anybody believed in cults, it was Steinberg." Once in prison, following his sentencing for first degree manslaughter, Steinberg was confronted by *Chicago Tribune* reporter Cheryl Lavin about Hedda's many scars and disfigured face. Steinberg told Lavin that "he never hit her" and blamed what had happened on "cult activity." When Lavin challenged this explanation, Steinberg told her to read Conway's and Siegelman's *Snapping*[\[24\]](#) to better understand about cults and how they operate.[\[25\]](#) Steinberg made clear through his conversations that he had spent time with and learned from leaders of the anti-cult movement in New York.

## **The Anti-Cult Perspective and the Waco Debacle and Consequent Tragedy**

Steinberg's is not the only case where looking at religious people through the prism of Ted Patrick and *Snapping* had tragic consequences. There is also the shameful mishandling of the Branch Davidian sect standoff with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms and the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Waco, Texas in 1993. Deprogrammer Rick Ross, with no formal education beyond a high school degree and a record of criminal activity connected to Grand Theft in his early twenties, has been a consultant on "cults" to CBS and to other major networks. In spite of the absence of a formal education, Ross validates his expertise, by pointing to how he has served as an expert witness on "cults" in several court cases.

Ross also served as an advisor to the FBI during the Waco debacle. In that case it is clear that a decision was made to look at David Koresh and the Branch Davidians through the prism of the anti-cult movement rather than through the perspective of trained biblical scholars Dr. James Tabor of the University of North Carolina -- Charlotte and J. Phillip Arnold of the Reunion Institute in Texas who had also been summoned to consult with the FBI and to reach out to Koresh. Tabor and Arnold both were permitted to enter the compound and meet with Koresh during the standoff. They were convinced that Koresh could be reasoned with and led to surrender his weapons if his rather modest faith-related requests were met by the FBI.

Instead of relying on the recommendations of the trained religious scholars, the FBI attempted a deprogramming *en masse* of the Branch Davidians. They deprived Koresh and his followers of food, supplies and sleep. Jeffrey Jamar, the FBI agent responsible in Waco exposed the Branch Davidians to "flashing lights, and blaring Tibetan chants and music and squealing rabbits." He explained that he did so because he wanted the Branch Davidians "to think for themselves," a common phrase employed by "deprogrammers." Byron Sage, the FBI's Chief negotiator described it as his mission to "persuade David Koresh's followers that their leader was a thief, a liar, a child molester and a profanity spouting con man."[\[26\]](#)

Hassan and Ross had different recommendations that further disrespected Koresh. Hassan said the FBI should call the leader by his given name, Vernon Howell, and not respect his wish to be known as David Koresh -- a name that refers to the Persian King Cyrus, liberator of the Hebrews following the Babylonian captivity. Ross, for his part, proposed confrontational tactics such as letting former members give testimony on Howell's failed prophecies or allow relatives to communicate to those in the compound about how their daughters were sexually molested by Koresh. Ross also suggested blasting the compound with audio recordings of these allegations.[\[27\]](#) In the end, the FBI's confrontational approach and their decision to end the mediating efforts

of Tabor and Arnold led to the assault on the compound that claimed the lives of 76 Branch Davidians including 25 young children.

## **The Anti-Cult Perspective and the Enabling of a Religious Crackdown in China**

One final, tragic example of the danger of the deprogramming worldview is the case of the Falun Gong. This has led to a divide within the anti-cult movement between the "street deprogrammers" and the alleged scholarly wing of the deprogramming Mafia. Falun Gong has been criticized by Hassan for being a destructive cult.<sup>[28]</sup> His counterpart Rick Ross, who in the past criticized Hassan for charging \$5,000 for his "exit counseling" interventions with members of the Unification Church and other new religions, takes an even harder hitting position against Falun Gong. In 2014 Ross dedicated his book *Cults: Inside and Out*, to Ms. Hao Hui Jung and her daughter Chen Guo, two of seven Falun Gong members who set themselves aflame in Tiananmen Square to protest China's violent repression of the group following an unsuccessful 2009 non-violent demonstration against the Chinese government. Ross fails to mention that the Falun Gong movement denounced this horrid act of self-immolation by Ms. Hao, Ms. Chen and five others.

Chapter 12 and 13 of *Cults: Inside and Out* denounces Falun Gong as a "destructive cult."<sup>[29]</sup> Ross has traveled to China and has made his organization available to expose new religions in China, including the Unification Church. Hassan also made himself available for at least one interview with a Chinese government anti-cult-related organization, and likewise denounced Falun Gong.<sup>[30]</sup>

Ross is silent on the many reports on the Chinese Communist Party's repression of Falun Gong. He has not responded to the charges by *Human Rights Watch* and *Amnesty International* that the Chinese government has been involved in killing Falun Gong members and then harvesting their organs.<sup>[31]</sup> On his website, Ross features a special page dedicated to Chinese government-supported publications engaged in a full-blown attack on new religious movements inside China.<sup>[32]</sup>

## **Deprogramming's Next Steps?**

In his recent book *The Cult of Trump* (2019), Hassan outlines his intention to again challenge the validity of the new and minority religions that he opposes. Hassan explains that he plans to undo the decision leading to the removal of "cult" participation as a mental disorder from the third edition of the *American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. He points to some progress that has already been made in the fifth edition, DSM-5:

Buried deep inside the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5) is a special designation for victims of cult brainwashing and undue influence. It is labeled Other Specified Dissociative Disorder 300.15 (F44.9).<sup>[33]</sup>

Hassan quotes from it directly:

Due to prolonged and intense coercive persuasion (e.g., brainwashing, thought reform, indoctrination while captive, torture, long-term political imprisonment, recruitment by sects/cults or by terror organizations) may present with prolonged changes in or conscious questioning of, their identity.<sup>[34][35]</sup>

However, this diagnostic is less definitive than Mr. Hassan would like it to be. Furthermore, the *Diagnostic* does not supply any definition for cult. One senses that this may have been inserted into the *Diagnostic* without a complete awareness of its implications for deprogramming.

In *Cult of Trump*, Hassan expresses special gratitude to his mentor Dr. Michael Commons, who Hassan explains "runs the research arm" of the Program in Psychiatry and Law at Harvard. Hassan adds that Commons "told me that if I was serious about wishing to help to update the legal definition of undue influence -- and become a respected expert witness -- I needed to get a doctorate, do quantitative research, and publish articles in peer review." Two years away from 70, Hassan continues making progress towards earning a doctorate at Fielding Graduate University in California.<sup>[36]</sup>

In John Biermans' *The Odyssey of New Religions*, Berkeley psychiatrist Lee Coleman explained that allowing new religions to be singled out, as Hassan has done since his deprogramming in 1976, could have an adverse effect upon how not only new religions but all religions are viewed:

Because the religions under attack are generally unpopular, it has been easy for many to overlook the fact that such tactics once unleashed on some may eventually be unleashed on us all. Under the cover of psychiatric expertise and benevolence, indeed there is no one who would escape the possibility of mental evaluation -- evaluation to determine if the choice were made with a free mind or manipulated one.<sup>[37]</sup>

Dr. Massimo Introvigne, the Founder of CESNUR, originally became interested in new religions because he saw that the mistreatment that they endured opened the way, as Coleman notes, for all religions to face a similar fate. To paraphrase Dr. Introvigne, "When you assess one religion based on purely psychological criteria, you open the way for all religions to be assessed based on purely psychological criteria."<sup>[38]</sup>

On his website, Ross explains, with regret, his decision to no longer participate in involuntary deprogrammings except in the case of minors:

It is no longer possible for me, because as one cult intervention professional observed, "the truth is that [involuntary] deprogramming is extremely risky in legal terms." Specifically, destructive cults, groups and leaders today often maintain teams of lawyers to harass professionals involved in such work. I cannot afford the expense and time to fight these efforts.<sup>[39]</sup>

Religion is treated with respect and deference in the United States, as provided for in the Bill of Rights. Deprogrammers and the media outlets who legitimize them have chosen to corral and deprive a certain class of religions of said rights. They view and portray those religions based on purely psychological criteria.

When a media outlet reliant on deprogrammers to access expertise on new religions imposes a demeaning name on the members of a new religion or refers to their faith as "a cult," they set a precedent for the media to impose names on any religion or minority that they do not choose to tolerate. They dehumanize people of faith and open the way for the kinds of things that have happened to the Falun Gang in China to happen to the Falun Gong and other minority religions in America and anywhere else in the future.

As Rick Ross has expressed it: "Hopefully, someday the need for involuntary interventions will be recognized through new legislation and families who feel this is their last hope will receive help."<sup>[40]</sup> One wonders whether Hassan, who admittedly wants to enhance his credibility with a newly minted doctorate and thus augment his anti-Unification Church agenda,<sup>[41]</sup> supports the new legislation pinned for by Ross.

Today's members of the Unification community include members of the clergy, best-selling authors, artists, performers, practicing attorneys, judges, medical doctors, nurses, physical therapists, research scientists, nuclear engineers, commissioned and non-commissioned officers in all of the US Armed Forces, elected officials, university professors, newspaper reporters, plumbers, electricians, air pilots, real estate brokers, CPAs, investors and so much more. They seem to be doing fine without the "help" of Ted Patrick, Rick Ross, Steve Hassan, and other senior citizens who still masquerade as "cult experts" and "deprogrammers."

## Notes

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<sup>[2]</sup> "Forced Conversion still a Problem in Japan," Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, March 31, 2015. [familyfed.org/news-story/kidnapping-and-forced-conversion-still-a-problem-in-japan-12503/](http://familyfed.org/news-story/kidnapping-and-forced-conversion-still-a-problem-in-japan-12503/) Accessed on September 12, 2020.

<sup>[3]</sup> Allen Tate Wood, "Fundraiser by Allen Tate Wood: Send Allen to ICSA 2017," [gofundme](https://gofundme.com/f/Send-Allen-to-ICSA-2017), December 25, 2016, [gofundme.com/f/Send-Allen-to-ICSA-2017](https://gofundme.com/f/Send-Allen-to-ICSA-2017). Accessed on September 6, 2020.

<sup>[4]</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 1985(c) provides as follows:

- Preventing officer from performing duties

If two or more persons in any State or Territory conspire to prevent, by force, intimidation, or threat, any person from accepting or holding any office, trust, or place of confidence under the United States, or from discharging any duties thereof; or to induce by like means any officer of the United States to leave any State, district, or place, where his duties as an officer are required to be performed, or to injure him in his person or property on account of his lawful discharge of the duties of his office, or while engaged in the lawful discharge thereof, or to injure his property so as to molest, interrupt, hinder, or impede him in the discharge of his official duties;

- Obstructing justice; intimidating party, witness, or juror

If two or more persons in any State or Territory conspire to deter, by force, intimidation, or threat, any party or witness in any court of the United States from attending such court, or from testifying to any matter pending therein, freely, fully, and truthfully, or to injure such party or witness in his person or property on account of his having so attended or testified, or to influence the verdict, presentment, or indictment of any grand or petit juror in any such court, or to injure such juror in his person or property on account of any verdict, presentment, or indictment lawfully assented to by him, or of his being or having been such juror; or if two or more persons conspire for the purpose of impeding, hindering, obstructing, or defeating, in any manner, the due course of justice in any State or Territory, with intent to deny to any citizen the equal protection of the laws, or to injure him or his property for lawfully enforcing, or attempting to enforce, the right of any person, or class of persons, to the equal protection of the laws;

- Depriving persons of rights or privileges

If two or more persons in any State or Territory conspire or go in disguise on the highway or on the premises of another, for the purpose of depriving, either directly or indirectly, any person or class of persons of the equal protection of the laws, or of equal privileges and immunities under the laws; or for the purpose of preventing or hindering the constituted authorities of any State or Territory from giving or securing to all persons within such State or Territory the equal protection of the laws; or if two or more persons conspire to prevent by force, intimidation, or threat, any citizen who is lawfully entitled to vote, from giving his support or advocacy in a legal manner, toward or in favor of the election of any lawfully qualified person as an elector for President or Vice President, or as a Member of Congress of the United States; or to injure any citizen in person or property on account of such support or advocacy; in any case of conspiracy set forth in this section, if one or more persons engaged therein do, or cause to be done, any act in furtherance of the object of such conspiracy, whereby another is injured in his person or property, or deprived of having and exercising any right or privilege of a citizen of the United States, the party so injured or deprived may have an action for the recovery of damages occasioned by such injury or deprivation, against any one or more of the conspirators.

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[12] Ibid.

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[21] Ibid.

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