

FACTS CONCERNING STATEMENTS ATTRIBUTED TO MAX RAPOPORT

Max Rapoport, an elder in the church in Anaheim, walked out of a meeting on August 13, 1978, and never returned. Although he had been informed six months earlier that Rapoport was attempting to undermine his ministry and foment a "revolution," Witness Lee took no action publicly or privately toward him. Rather, Witness Lee travelled widely, encouraging young believers to spend personal time to read the Bible and pray daily. He also gave messages that were subsequently printed in books such as *The Experience of Christ* and *Life-study of Ephesians*. The contrast between the encouragement to pursue knowing Christ personally and subjectively and the rich opening of the Word of God in Witness Lee's ministry and the shallowness of what Rapoport was promoting became evident, and many younger believers who had been drawn to Rapoport by his dynamic personality turned away from him.

Angry that he had failed to wrest leadership in the work and ministry, Rapoport gave two newspaper interviews—one to the *Los Angeles Times* and one to the *Santa Ana Register*. He also spoke to Neil Duddy, who was developing a book, *The God-Men*, 2nd edition, for the Spiritual Counterfeits Project (SCP). Later, Rapoport backed away from all of those publications, and he repeatedly refused to validate the claims Duddy made in his book. For example, Duddy sent Rapoport a copy of some text he intended to include in the book about statements Rapoport made to him. Duddy concluded, "The SCP has Rapoport's assent that our critique of Lee's voluminous writings is accurate." Rapoport crossed out this sentence, wrote "Please do not say this," dated his comment July 7, 1979, and returned the note to Duddy.

On August 24, 1979, Rapoport's wife wrote to Duddy, saying, "I'm not in any way in agreement with the up & coming book on the Local Churches. I would like it inserted in the Foreword as such." She added, "To allow this book to go out publicly without stating my conclusions & stand would create many problems as I would feel fully misrepresented in my stand for the Truth." She concluded, "I feel my silence would cause the readers to feel I was in agreement with the book." Duddy ignored her request and did not respond to her.

Rapoport was called as a witness in a lawsuit over the book *The Mindbenders*, a book that drew from the same source material as *The God-Men*, including a draft monograph. When questioned by George Kolb, Rapoport admitted that he said things in his newspaper interviews in the heat of anger:

Kolb: And some of the statements that you made were made in the heat of anger, were they not?

Rapoport: That's true.

Kolb: Some of those statements that you made then while you were angry you would not make today, would you?

Rapoport: That's true.

Kolb: If you had it to do all over again, you would not make those statements, would you?

Rapoport: I would not. I would have done probably none of those things. (Deposition of Max Rapoport, May 29, 1981, p. 109)

Rapoport also claimed that the article (and another that appeared in the *Santa Ana Register*) misrepresented what he had said in the interview:

Kolb: Did the reporters who interviewed you while you were in the heat of anger take advantage of you in the sense that they put things in that article and attributed things in that article to you that you did not actually say?

Rapoport: There were some things in both articles that were not accurate. (p. 110)

Furthermore, in his testimony the day before Rapoport had affirmed that he still believed a statement he had written in 1977 in which he called Witness Lee “a person who absolutely keeps the Word of God and lives a life that exemplifies the highest Christian character” (Rapoport, “The Truth Concerning Witness Lee,” insert in *The Santa Ana* [now *Orange County*] *Register*, Oct. 8, 1977):

Kolb: He absolutely keeps the Word of God; correct?

Rapoport: As far as living the life, a Christian life, I still feel he does today.

Kolb: And he exemplifies the highest Christian character?

Rapoport: In his daily life?

Kolb: Yes.

Rapoport: Yes. (Deposition of Max Rapoport, May 28, 1981, p. 60)

Neil Duddy repeatedly asked Rapoport for an affidavit affirming statements in *The God-Men*, but Rapoport did not give him one. Under oath, while being questioned concerning one such request by attorney Charles Morgan, Duddy admitted that Rapoport was unwilling to provide such an affidavit:

Morgan: You sent him an affidavit for him to sign, didn't you, or at least you sent him information that you were suggesting what he's saying in an affidavit; is that correct?

Duddy: That's correct.

Morgan: And he never responded with any affidavit, did he?

Duddy: No.

Morgan: He did not, did he? Well, let me ask you, did he respond with an affidavit?

Duddy: No.

Morgan: And did he tell you why he wouldn't respond with an affidavit?

Duddy: No. (Deposition of Neil T. Duddy, July 5, 1983, pp. 864-865)

Despite a discovery period spanning five years and repeated public appeals by SCP, no evidence was ever produced to support the claims Duddy and the SCP made, many of which were based on uncorroborated statements from Duddy's talks with Rapoport. Those claims included accusations of deceptive recruiting practices, control, coercion, encouragement of immorality, public humiliation resulting in psychiatric hospitalizations, use of fear tactics, and financial mismanagement. In what was then a record award in a libel case, the presiding judge ruled that *The God-men* was “in all major respects false, defamatory, and unprivileged, and, therefore, libelous,” and specifically found that each of the claims listed above also were false and defamatory (Leon Seyranian, “Statement of Decision,” June 27, 1985, p. 2).

In light of such a history, it is unreasonable to base criticisms of Witness Lee or of the local churches on the interviews Rapoport gave in the few months after his departure.