SCIENTOLOGY:
THE CULT OF RELIGION

by Hannah Bushon

In 1951, L. Ron Hubbard began assembling groups across the United States to practice what he deemed the "applied religious philosophy" of Scientology, a movement based on his first major book, *Dianetics*. In 1954, the first Church of Scientology opened in Los Angeles, California (Lewis 228). According to the official Church of Scientology website, *Dianetics* addresses the separation between and unity of an individual's body and their soul, and "handles the effects of the spirit on the body." The ultimate aim of the organization is to arm members with tools to improve themselves through individual growth. Rather than being a theistic religion, based on a superior being or God that followers worship, Scientology claims to help its followers become "clear," or "Operating Thetans"[1]— the ability to transcend the "questions that have troubled Mankind for millennia" ("What is Scientology?"). In reality, the Church of Scientology sells the promise of an ultimate Utopia, a mental utopia that frees the individual from past traumas

[1] The Church of Scientology officially explains an "Operating Thetan," or "OT," as someone who "can handle things and exist without physical support and assistance" (Wright 19). Scholar James R. Lewis explains that a "Thetan" is the name for soul or spirit in this instance; someone who is "operating" as a Thetan has undergone Scientology's teachings and trainings, or auditing, and is able to separate their soul or spirit from the body completely, see into past lives and will reincarnate as a Scientologist in lifetimes to come (228-29).

or negative emotions. Despite all of Scientology's grand promises, the organization in fact uses a combination of ritual, rites of passage, indoctrination, and isolation to control members of the organization, with countless former members telling harrowing stories about their experiences. The external projection of the promised utopia juxtaposed with the internal dystopia paints a complex picture when contemplating the utopic value of Scientology as a whole.

Worldwide membership numbers for Scientology are unclear, with the organization claiming larger membership than can be proven, and they offer no support to back up their claims. A CNN News article by Tricia Escobedo lists the church as having "10,000 churches, missions and groups operating in 167 countries, with 4.4 million more people signing up every year." Escobedo speculates that membership numbers likely hover in the hundreds of thousands, though scholars like Mikael Rothstein argue that this could be much lower. Lawrence Wright, author of *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood and the Prison of Belief,* points to a "survey of American religious affiliations compiled in the *Statistical Abstract of the United States"* that projects roughly 25,000 Americans who self-identify as "Scientologist" (IV). The Church of Scientology has never released official membership numbers despite requests from authors and journalists. Wright highlights in the conclusion of his book, "the Church promised to provide an organizational chart, but never did so" (455). But understanding Scientology's global scope is important to understanding the organization's reach in their indoctrination. Some former members highlight that courses, meetings, events, and rituals conducted at "Int," the International Headquarters in Los Angeles, California, and at "Flag," the Flagship base in Clearwater, Florida, include people of diverse nationalities, implying that members do in fact traverse the globe to receive training at major Scientology centers, even if a Scientology center exists in their own country or city.

In essence, Scientologists can be effectively divided into two broad categories: the "Sea Org," or "Sea Organization," Scientology's top-ranking members and potential future members, "Cadets," and the "civvies," or civilians who take courses and go home to their normal lives (Hill 116). All members of both categories are expected to follow the religious path, "The Bridge," L. Ron Hubbard's teachings and auditing practices, to ultimately reach the highest level: OT XV or "Total Freedom" ("The Bridge to Total Freedom"). Each level requires a substantial time commitment, with many former members like Paul Haggis claiming to have spent over 20 years and hundreds of thousands of dollars before reaching the final levels, although still failing to achieve "Total Freedom." Members allege the church is constantly soliciting members for more in donations, and estimated assets of the Church of Scientology are believed to be in the billions of dollars. Combined with Scientology's vast scope of rituals, practices, and celebrity endorsements, and contrasted against the controlling and outright volatile behaviors towards members and critics alike, the line between religious movement and "cult" becomes blurred.

The Sea Org

Jenna Miscavige Hill, the niece of the current Scientology leader, David Miscavige, includes in her memoir recollections of her childhood with parents serving in the Sea Org and how that grandfathered her into signing a billion-year contract at the tender age of seven: "Nothing about the billion-year contract was strange to me" (3). For Hill, signing a billion-year contract required little thought: "I was all too willing and ready to commit myself to the cause that was so dear to my parents" (2). Hill outlines in detail her childhood as a Cadet—the childhood fast track to Sea Org membership, and where most Sea Org members come from. Young Cadets are indoctrinated to pledge allegiance to the Church of Scientology and commit their lives to the organization. For Hill, the

isolation from her family began at a young age as well. With her parents deciding to devote their entire lives to the Sea Org, she and her brother were sent to live on "The Ranch," a heavily fortified compound on the outskirts of Los Angeles designed for the children of Sea Org members. Over the course of several chapters in her book, *Beyond Belief: My Secret Life Inside Scientology and My Harrowing Escape*, Hill outlines how the children performed manual labor all over The Ranch: fixing dilapidated buildings and drywall, painting, cleaning, farming, and paving roadways in blistering heat and desolate winters. In addition to grueling physical labor, traditional education is also neglected in lieu of Scientology-based education. Children and Cadets at The Ranch do not learn math, sciences, or arts as most school children in America do, but instead spend several hours a day studying lectures, books, and mental exercises by L. Ron Hubbard. Cadets also begin introductory auditing courses. Hill writes of The Ranch, "it was around this time that my serious indoctrination into Scientology began" (49-50). For Hill, becoming an inaugural member of the Cadet Org, a precursor to the Sea Org, meant her own dive into the psychological practices of Dianetics and Scientology.

The extreme isolation and indoctrination of Sea Org members and Cadets reveals the organization's desire to foster the interests of the group over the individual. In addition to training, members go through hours of auditing—a form of psychoanalysis of one member to another, using L. Ron Hubbard's electropsycometer,[2] or "e-meter," to track clarity in the individual (Wright 15). According to Wright, Hubbard related the e-meter to a lie detector test, capable of locating and curing phobias, obsessions, bad memories or emotional trauma—the ultimate tool to achieve "Total Freedom" (15). There is also the billion-year contract that many critics take

[2] Lawrence Wright explains this device as a tool for measuring "bodily changes in electrical resistance that occur when a person answers questions posed by an auditor," while L. Ron Hubbard declared it "similar to a lie detector test" (15).

issue with. Sea Org members are required to sign an agreement stating they "contract themselves to the Sea Organization for the next billion years," and outlining the official mission of the Sea Org being "to get ethics in on this planet and the universe" (Wright 116). This directly links members of the Church of Scientology to future lifetimes where life will be better since Scientology is being practiced in this lifetime. The billion-year contract acts as a barrier between Sea Org members and the outside world, a dystopic confinement to the service of the Sea Org.

Sea Org members do, however, have access to special privileges and leadership opportunities. Hill describes absolute luxury for her parents in the organization, including luxurious apartments in Clearwater, Florida, and Los Angeles, private drivers, gourmet food deliveries, and a slew of personal assistants. The parallel between the luxurious lives of the adult, elite Sea Org members and The Ranch mimics the utopian and dystopian undertones of the organization as a whole. While not all Sea Org members live like Hill's parents, the highest-ranking members do. A majority of Sea Org members live in dormitory-style housing, with communal meals, daily uniforms, various jobs and duties around "Int" and "Flag" bases and across the organization, often working 60-70 hours a week and allegedly taking home pay around $50-$100 per week. According to former organization leaders such as Marty Rathburn, Sea Org life is not considered conducive to family life, hence the separation of spouses and children (*Going Clear* movie).

The Sea Org's origins can be traced to the earliest years following the official formation of the International Association of Scientologists (IAS), as rumors swirled amongst members of an official Church of Scientology. Following a 1963 raid on Church of Scientology by U.S. Marshals, a 1967 audit by the IRS, an official condemnation from Australia, and legal inquiries by New Zealand, Britain, and South Africa into local IAS chapters, L. Ron Hubbard began planning a clandestine Naval force to spread the message of

Scientology, comprised of the church's most elite members, and he dubbed it the Sea Org (Wright 112-13). The idea was that in international waters Hubbard would be able to escape any potential obstacles facing his new movement and his own personal issues, like charges of tax evasion or accusations that e-meters did not lead to the medical miracles Hubbard promised: the diagnosis and treatment of "all mental and nervous disorders and illnesses" along with "psychosomatic ailments of mankind such as arthritis, cancer, stomach ulcers, and radiation burns from atomic bombs…" (Wright 111). Legal troubles trailed the Church of Scientology from the start and escaping to open waters with the promise of eventually finding a permanent port was the goal.

Louis Theroux's film *My Scientology Movie* depicts the Sea Org as Scientology's version of clergy, one of several references within Scientology to other religious structures and traditions. The Sea Org holds the organization's highest-ranking leaders, although this power comes with a price. In Alex Gibney's HBO documentary *Going Clear*, former members recount stories of simple mistakes—laughing at an inappropriate moment, spending money on themselves, or wanting to connect with family members outside the church—and how that led to captivity and isolation as a form of re-indoctrination. Hill recounts the discovery that her mother engaged in an extramarital affair while in the Sea Org and had subsequently been "beached," a term originally from L. Ron Hubbard's sailing days, meaning literally that the fleet would leave an individual on a beach. Hill's mother was isolated from her children and husband and sent to serve a 12-month sentence of "hard labor" in an undisclosed location, allegedly in squalor and poverty, being sustained only by basic nutrition and minimal sanitation standards (170-77). In Gibney's *Going Clear*, former member Marty Rathburn tells the story of being held in a similar location at the "Gold Base" location in Los Angeles called "The Hole." Rathburn goes on to assert that "even if law enforcement knocked down the doors tomorrow, no one would want to be saved." Instead, members would insist that they *chose* to

be there, they deserved these dismal conditions, and they want to remain. Rathburn attributes this mindset to Scientology's indoctrination tactics.

The juxtaposition of the luxury lifestyle of Sea Org executives against the work-camp-style lodging of Sea Org Cadets at The Ranch and keeping in mind the inhumane and disturbing images of "The Hole," the Church of Scientology stands firmly at a crossroads between utopia for the elite and simultaneous dystopia for all others. Cadets, Sea Org members, and everyday "civilian Scientologists" are often sold the idea that if they only work a *little* bit harder, they will have the ability to reach "Total Freedom." The Sea Org's position in the hierarchal structure of the Church of Scientology is vast: estimates range from 3,000 to 5,000 members, meaning they comprise roughly 12% to 20% of the total membership of the Church of Scientology.

Indoctrination & Ritual

Without understanding the indoctrination tactics of Scientology, it can be difficult to understand why anyone might subject themselves to the organization. Scholar Mikael Rothstein outlines in his article "The Significance of Rituals in Scientology: A Brief Overview and a Few Examples" four specific examples of rituals employed by the church to cement loyalty among followers.

Rothstein's first ritual, auditing, is focused on the individual and their growth. Through a series of combative and confrontational therapy-type sessions, members are tasked with overcoming hindrances in their past to think more clearly—the ultimate goal being that late-stage mental state of "Clear." Auditing is a crucial part to the breakdown of mental blockages, traumas, or misdeeds in an individual's background through a series of techniques developed by Hubbard in *Dianetics*, and in almost every subsequent Scientology text. Hill outlines one particular auditing technique used around age 13: bullbaiting. In this session, auditors attempt to engage the "Pre-

clear"[3] by screaming insults at them, lunging or jumping towards them. The "Pre-clear" must remain seated, calm, and totally still; they must be able to withstand bullbaiting by an auditor for one hour without flinching or so much as blinking irregularly, in order to pass. Hill recalls a male auditor screaming to her 13-year-old friend about "rosebud breasts," a memory recalled with disgust (181). Immediately following bullbaiting, Hill and her classmates were made "to yell at square glass ashtrays at the top of our lungs," the concept being that this would improve overall communication skills and give "Pre-clears" the ability to effectively convey their thoughts (182). Without studying Dianetics and Scientology from foundational texts up until the course Hill refers to, the utopian value of this ritual is subjective. Based on estimated numbers of "Clear" members since Scientology's conception, several thousand people have felt compelled to move through this level and upward on The Bridge. Hill points repeatedly to moments when she felt she had not gained much from the courses she underwent: "it was often hard to tell what real progress looked like" (183). In order to progress in Scientology where there is no higher being or "God" to praise or pray to, an individual finds the strength within themselves and summons it. In this way, the individual's inner journey will greatly influence the perception of the practice as inherently utopic or dystopic.

Second in the types of rituals outlined by Rothstein are the annual Scientology events to engage members in celebration of their founder, L. Ron Hubbard: May 9 each year is known as *Dianetics* day, the anniversary of the book's publication; March 13 is L. Ron Hubbard's birthday; Auditors' Day is the second Sunday in September, etc. Each of these holidays become large-scale events, often recorded and broadcast live on the Church of Scientology's

[3] A "pre-clear" is a practicing Scientologist who has not yet reached "clear" levels, typically sometime between levels thirty-nine through forty-eight, depending on the individual. The courses from zero to "clear" precede "Operating Thetan" levels of study (Lewis 229).

website. Some of these events, such as the annual meeting of the International Association of Scientologists[4] (IAS), often turn into events worshipping L. Ron Hubbard. Rothstein writes that "Hubbard is adored for his achievements and is whole-heartedly embraced and ritually reinforced as the most unique person in the history of humankind, just like Christ among Christians" (63). Footage of annual IAS events depicts large gilded stages mimicking Hollywood award shows, even featuring stars like actor Tom Cruise. Other regularly occurring events are less grand, such as weekly Accomplishment presentations and graduation ceremonies at large training locations such as "Int," "Flag" and "Gold Base," where members are invited to recount their "successes" from the previous week. Hill describes her most euphoric memories from these ceremonies: "hearing these speakers amplified all the positive things I'd been feeling about the Sea Org," reinforcing Hill's belief that the Church of Scientology was a utopic safe haven for her, even instilling a sense of community.

The third and fourth forms of ritual in Scientology are arguably less important in day-to-day function and serve to legitimize the group in the eyes of critics and U.S. federal standards. Third in the ritual practices fall rites of passage: funerals, weddings, and births become Scientology-based ceremonies, linking the most important instances in a member's life directly to the organization. The fourth and final ritual revolves around "services emulating (to a certain degree) their Christian counterparts" that are held weekly but are not mandatory for members to attend, although many "civilian Scientologists" do (Rothstein 55). Following FBI raids on Los Angeles headquarters of the Church of Scientology in 1977 after

[4] The IAS is a separate entity from the Church of Scientology. Church of Scientology members are expected to pay their local Church or training location a tithing, a percentage of monthly income, and for services rendered such as auditing and courses. Church of Scientology members also pay separate membership dues to the International Association of Scientologists, as a requirement (*Going Clear* movie).

allegations of abuse, "a Scientology cross was created. Scientology ministers now appeared wearing Roman collars" (Wright 281). Adapting the Church of Scientology into the loose guidelines the federal government defines as "religious movement" allowed the group to begin lobbying for 501(c)(3) religious tax-exemption status. The Church of Scientology's movement towards traditional religious symbols aimed to realign it with institutions like the Catholic church, and distance it from other New Religious Movements like Hare Krishnas or The Unification Church (Wright 280-81).

The complex and individualistic approach of Scientology's rituals serves to draw in and indoctrinate members further. As Hill writes in her book, Sea Org members themselves do not pay for the courses they take in order to advance, though "civvies" or civilians, pay thousands per course. Instead, Sea Org members take all classes for free, but will be required to pay back the cost of any courses should they decide to leave the organization. Speaking to Louis Theroux for his documentary, one former member explains that to go from a beginner status to "Operating Thetan" or "OT," the highest level, can cost anywhere from $500,000 to $2,000,000. This financial investment fuels an individual's need to feel a sense of belonging within the organization. For example, a new member becomes enthralled with L. Ron Hubbard's books, begins spending money to attend courses, undergoes auditing that mimics emotional breakthroughs often felt in therapy settings, adding importance to group rituals and gatherings—in this instance, each step in the progression means more income for the Church of Scientology. For the member, this is a utopic, idyllic path with which they will gain the ultimate mental clarity and freedom. For veterans of the Church who spend upwards of 10 or 20 years in the organization, these are the tactics by which Scientology slowly drains the individual's resources, financial and otherwise.

The Charismatic Leader

For Scientologists, L. Ron Hubbard is the patriarch of the entire ideological practice and is revered in a manner resembling some of the most well-known cults of modern history. Hubbard's early life is vaguely sketched out in journals, and Wright outlines his chaotic family life and bouncing from town to town, his father absent at times and present at others. Hubbard long held an exceptional view of himself, enlisting in the military following World War I and later claiming to have various combat injuries, although the U.S. Veterans Affairs medical records show no signs of any combat-related ailments. Aside from alleged military service, Hubbard was making a name for himself as a science fiction writer. After writing hundreds of stories over the course of several years, under more than half a dozen pen names, Hubbard published *Dianetics* in 1950 as a direct rebuke to the growing field of psychiatry. As Wright outlines, "the appearance of a do-it-yourself manual that claimed to demystify the secrets of the human mind and produce guaranteed results—for free—was bound to attract an audience" (79). This is how Hubbard marketed *Dianetics*: why pay someone else to work through your problems when Scientology can give you the tools to solve these problems yourself? But for Hubbard, the major flaw for *Dianetics* was the lack of residual income. Once someone buys the book, they have no reason to spend more money on the system. "I'd like to start a religion. That's where the money is," Hubbard is reported to have said on multiple occasions (Wright 100). This is just one piece of evidence critics use to argue that the Church of Scientology is not a religion at all, but a profit-driven commercial venture.

Two major tactics solidify Hubbard's role as eternal leader and founder: staged praising and his paternal role. In terms of staged praising, each conjunction of study within the Church of Scientology is marked by a resounding celebration of the founder. When a "Pre-clear" moves one level up on The Bridge, for example, they are invited to share this accomplishment after which the group will

shout, "To LRH!" followed by thundering applause. Each auditing session, training session, and school day for Cadets is closed with a collective chant "To LRH!" and applause. In spite of the organization's emphasis on personal growth, L. Ron Hubbard is championed as the pioneer responsible for each member's growth.

Additionally, Hubbard explicitly directed all members of all ranks to reject anyone who questions his system. L. Ron Hubbard's directives against "Suppressive Persons" commands members to cut ties with any person who questions his authority or the legitimacy of the organization. The Suppressive Person Defense League, an organization dedicated to assisting individuals slandered by the Church of Scientology, defines a "Suppressive Person" or "SP" as someone who will "goof up or vilify any effort to help anybody," according to L. Ron Hubbard. Hubbard has also been recorded in lectures telling members to report wavering faith among other members—if a family member begins to doubt Scientology teachings, they are a potential "SP" who may bring harm to other members or the Church of Scientology as a whole. According to L. Ron Hubbard, an "SP" will take as many people down with them as possible ("SP Doctrine"). This further isolates members by turning families and friends against each other. This again brings Scientology to the gray area straddling religion and cult. This utopic aspect of a charismatic leader is strong within Scientology; the concept that a single man from humble beginnings can rise to create an expansive set of self-help books and tactics is inspiring. Alongside the fear-mongering message that no one is safe and no one outside Scientology can be trusted, the dystopic, prison-like system of accountability can serve to trap members within the group.

In early 1986, a young man entered the stage at the annual IAS conference and announced to the world that L. Ron Hubbard had ceased to need his physical body any longer and had graduated to a new plane of research. Hubbard was dead, and the young man addressing the crowd was David Miscavige. Miscavige had been a

lifelong member of the church, a Sea Org Cadet who had worked alongside Hubbard for most of his life, and who was hand-chosen by Hubbard to lead the organization after Hubbard's death. Former Sea Org executives describe David Miscavige as cold and calculating, humiliating and bullying Sea Org members, and accusing him of ousting all other executives in an attempt to consolidate power over the organization (*Going Clear* movie.) David Miscavige's first and last public interview on CBS Evening News in 1992 proved to be indicative about the new leader's character: he was combative, repeatedly speaking over and interrupting news host Ted Koppel. Many scholars and former members agree that not much is known about David Miscavige, his personal life, or background that qualifies him to run the Church of Scientology, other than his years working for L. Ron Hubbard. Jenna Hill writes repeatedly in her book on "Uncle Dave," a warm and kind family man who took special interest in her studies, making sure that she was audited and trained by the best teachers. Each documentary and TV series about Scientology speculates on David Miscavige and his day-to-day life, with some members alleging that his wife, Shelley Miscavige, has not been seen publicly since 2005.

Both L. Ron Hubbard and his successor, David Miscavige, bring to light the absolute rule over Scientology. Whether the totalitarian rule over the organization is utopic or dystopic in nature is dependent on perspective—for someone who believes L. Ron Hubbard's teachings are irrefutable, the idea of an unconditional leader could be comforting. To an outsider examining the religion, David Miscavige and L. Ron Hubbard appear as oppressive and controlling leaders hell-bent on maintaining the Church of Scientology, which contributes to the dystopic reality that some members may feel trapped by the Church of Scientology.

Public Fascination & Scandal

From allegations of sexual abuse, kidnapping and unlawful detainment, to tax fraud and the fight for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, Scientology's history is fraught with legal and public relations issues across the globe. In Russia, Scientology's locations are often raided under laws that protect citizens from "unreasonable scams" (Lewis 230). In the U.S., Leah Remini, an actress and former Scientologist, produces and stars in a documentary-style TV show called *Leah Remini: Scientology and the Aftermath*, where she speaks to other former members about alleged abuses, furthering the negative publicity. A report by Australian authorities in 1967 asserts that "Scientology is evil, its techniques evil, its practice a serious threat to the community, medically, morally, and socially; and its adherents sadly deluded and often mentally ill" (Wright 111). Australian authorities also went so far as comparing Hubbard to a dictator (Wright 111). Countless memoirs and books exist outlining members' experiences within the church. Each year, more movies and documentaries about Scientology debut. Every so often, major news outlets will publish stories with catchy headlines: "Celebrities You Didn't Know Were Scientologists" and "Where Does All of Scientology's Money Go?" The human interest of the organization brings the public back time and time again to examine the group.

The church largely refutes these public allegations, and they have been known to retaliate. Several outspoken former members have found websites created in their name, outlining how each of their accounts of the church is false, often with links and videos on these smear campaign websites leading directly back to the official Church of Scientology website. Paul Haggis, a former Sea Org executive and current outspoken critic of the Church of Scientology, whom Wright interviewed extensively for his *Going Clear* book and who appears frequently in Alex Gibney's *Going Clear* documentary, discovered WhoIsPaulHaggis.com, a website dedicated to discrediting each claim he's made against the church, with links to instructional videos

about how to correctly practice Scientology, and links that lead directly back to the official Church of Scientology website. Harassment by the organization is rampant; in *My Scientology Movie*, Louis Theroux and his cameramen and producers are routinely followed by what they assume to be private investigators and individuals with cameras, filming them as they discuss the organization, presumably on fact-finding missions directly from Church of Scientology leaders. Television stars like Leah Remini routinely show "cease and desist" letters sent by legal counsel representing the group. Lawrence Wright outlines how he was given the runaround by executives when gathering information for his book. Directives by L. Ron Hubbard at the time of the initial IRS investigation in 1967 call on members of the Church of Scientology to harass the IRS right back: "a ten thousand-dollar reward was offered to potential whistle-blowers to expose IRS abuses. Private investigators dug into the private lives of IRS officials, going so far as to attend seminars and pose as IRS workers, to see who had a drinking problem or might be cheating on a spouse" (Wright 280). This is only a small fraction of many retaliatory practices by the organization. Later directives by L. Ron Hubbard, such as the aforementioned "SP Directive" call on members to do anything possible to discredit critics, even threatening family members, filing lawsuits or partaking in 24-hour surveillance on an "SP," regularly reporting back to Sea Org executives. Outspoken critics such as Marty Rathburn and Paul Haggis have posted videos to their own websites featuring members of the Church of Scientology showing up on their doorsteps, cameras in hand, to taunt and threaten the men (*Going Clear* movie).

The extensive accounts of harassment by the church paint a troubling picture. For those entrenched in the belief system, the utopic aspect of defending one's beliefs aids in the sense of community, the idea that Scientologists must band together to protect their community. This also serves to increase the "us versus

them" mentality that L. Ron Hubbard wove into the "SP Doctrine" and other foundational texts. In contrast, the dystopic image of a non-profit, religious organization threatening non-believers with legal action or physical harm echoes religious political regimes guilty of genocidal tactics against adversaries, evoking images of The Crusades, or of Nazis fighting to exterminate Jews. Scholars and average Americans alike cannot seem to understand how a religious group can rely so heavily on fear-mongering and harassment, and the consumption of media related to the topic reflects this: both *Going Clear* by Lawrence Wright and *Beyond Belief* by Jenna Hill hit the *New York Times* Bestseller list, Leah Remini's *Scientology and the Aftermath* television show on A&E Network has been consistently renewed for recurring seasons, documentaries and made-for-TV specials debut each year with new critics sharing disturbing stories of the Church of Scientology—the amount of dissenting opinions available is staggering, and they shroud the Church of Scientology in a perpetual cloud of mystery and cynicism.

In examining Scientology, its structures, rituals, hierarchal organization and leadership, it is easy to understand exactly *why* so much media is produced about the topic, and why so many "tell-all" books exist: The Church of Scientology is complex, secretive and expansive. For several thousand members, Scientology is the pathway to ultimate accountability and safety in an ever-changing world. For others, the Church of Scientology holds the worst memories, abuses and attacks against them, and stands as a constant reminder of an organization that took hold of their life without hesitation.

The utopic aspects are clear in accounts by former members—the promise of total mental clarity, utter control over one's mind, body and spirit—*salvation*. This utopia offers the promise of a better life for a member's children and the future of humankind. It offers the promise that members serve a higher purpose, the emancipation of humanity. The disparity in the idyllic community set forth in

Hubbard's writings and the chilling accounts, videos, photos, and audio recordings of direct harassment against critics is astounding and eerie. Despite decades-long campaigns against the church, critics still question what exactly defines a "religious movement" and where Scientology falls in that realm, articulating a larger issue when defining utopias and their success: where is the boundary between a harmless group of like-minded individuals and a cult? Some argue that a group such as Scientology harms society overall with its divisive and combative attitudes, or on the contrary, that Scientology protects the select few, the elite, from the outside world. The Church of Scientology remains active in its marketing campaigns, public relations crusades, and advertising—as well as its work to discredit critics. The Church of Scientology, in both its utopic and dystopic aspects, can conceivably continue to exist well into the future, with members climbing the "Bridge" for billions of years to come.

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