



L. Ron Hubbard at his desk in April of 1999.

THE METAPHYSICAL MIND

SCIENTOLOGY SUES ITS WAY TO ACCEPTANCE

Originally envisioned as a self-help styled alternative to psychiatry, Scientology has evolved into a litigious, punitive cult. L. Ron Hubbard's belief system, first introduced to the world through his book *Dianetics* and subsequently codified in *Scientology, a Religious Philosophy*, has been dogged by controversy, lawsuits,

deception, and tragedy from the moment of its introduction to the world.

Scientology has all the components of a cult: a top-down leadership structure, violent coercion of members, secret theology that can only be revealed to those who join, reports of sexual abuse, and an aggressive, combative response to those that question its motives. Several countries have outright banned its practice—including France, Germany, and Australia—and for a brief moment L. Ron Hubbard was associated with a conspiracy to infiltrate the United States government in order to discredit it. Despite this, the IRS officially recognized Scientology as a religion by granting it tax-exempt status in 1993.

If nothing else, Scientology offers a fantastic tale of how a single individual has forced one of the most powerful governments in the world to acquiesce to his demands.

GRAND ILLUSIONS

In his youth, L. Ron Hubbard was a prolific pulp science fiction author looking to make more money than the dime store salary his profession provided him. Hubbard is remembered by several of his writing peers to have said that writing pulp was no way to make money and if a man wanted to become a millionaire he needed to start a religion. Good for his word, he published *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* in 1950. Dianetics was a self-help system broadly inspired by concepts from 1930s pop psychology such as Ludwig Binswanger's treatise on existential therapy. Its main practice was auditing, a counseling technique intended to recall painful past memories and defuse their ability to influence a patient's current mental and emotional state by confronting them head on. *Dianetics* sold extremely well and Hubbard garnered many

loyal followers over the next two years. However, Hubbard's attempts to have his methods recognized by the medical community were unsuccessful as they were entirely based on subjective assumptions and anecdotal outcomes, unable to be re-created for peer review.

Though Hubbard had intended for *Dianetics* to be a psychotherapeutic technique firmly grounded in science, the rejection by the medical world caused him to change tack—and formed his life-long rejection of psychiatry. In 1952 he published *Scientology, a Religious Philosophy* and shortly thereafter incorporated three churches of Scientology in New Jersey, a move critics call convenient timing given that his Dianetics organization had gone broke and lost its trademark to a creditor. Hubbard opened the first brick-and-mortar Church of Scientology in Los Angeles in 1954, and in 1957 the Church was granted tax-exempt status by the IRS; a move immediately reversed after they reviewed Hubbard's organization the following year.

ALIENS AND REPRESSION

Over the next decade, the Church attracted throngs of followers and Hubbard continuously wrote new material, constantly editing Scientology's theology. In 1967 Hubbard created the Sea Organization, a naval extension of the church. Publicly, Sea Org was described as the Church's research and development facility for its senior members. Privately, however, Hubbard found it easier to be a stateless person since the US government was limited in law enforcement once he left its territorial boundaries. He used the time onboard the ship to develop many of the concepts forbidden to all but the highest-level members of Scientology. This included his theory that Xenu, the alien dictator of The Galactic Confederacy,

brought billions of his people to Earth 75 million years ago, then killed them in volcanos by dropping hydrogen bombs on them. The spirits of this mass murder are called Thetans and, according to Scientology, inhabit human bodies. Hubbard developed techniques to rid the body of these Thetans so that humans could become spiritually pure people. Hubbard's fully developed concept of Scientology has never been officially released by the church, but it is described in quasi-religious terms as, essentially, a complex self-help process known as The Bridge to Total Freedom.

Scientology requires a billion-year commitment by its members.

The Bridge largely consists of an ongoing series of auditing sessions for which each member must be approved; each session costs a great deal of money to undertake. In these sessions, members investigate their pasts as well as events in past lives—Scientology requires a billion-year commitment by its members—with the aid of an E-Meter, a device that measures electrodermal activity and that Scientologists believe can help ascertain the meaning of the events described in an auditing session. Scientologists also believe the human psyche is split into two parts: the reactive mind and the analytical mind. Through auditing, Scientologists attempt to realize the latent capabilities of the analytical mind. When this goal is finally realized, Scientologists refer to the resulting mental and emotional state as “clear” and deem the member spiritually realized.



The Scientology E-Meter and cans are shown along with books by L. Ron Hubbard, founder of Church of Scientology, at the church's community center in the neighborhood of South Los Angeles.

A VINDICTIVE SAVIOR

Basing your faith on a science fiction fantasy and charging your followers large amounts of money in order to be saved is a sure way to attract negative attention. Hubbard quickly found himself the target of press articles questioning Scientology's real intentions and a second IRS review of its tax-exempt status. In 1967 the IRS concluded that the Church was engaged in a number of commercial activities and operated for the personal benefit of Hubbard—Scientology's coveted tax-exempt status was subsequently revoked. The Church responded swiftly with a series of lawsuits that would last for the next quarter century, the longest-running legal dispute in IRS history.

Hubbard had anticipated public and government resistance and in the 1950s established the "Fair Game" policy, which states that

any individuals or organizations that pose a threat to Scientology—internally or externally—should be dealt with by any and all means necessary. This policy launched with Operation Snow White, a strategy targeted to undermine and reverse the IRS’s ruling, and later grew into a major branch of the Church focused on PR and image control.

The operation entailed the infiltration of government agencies in over 17 countries, and ultimately became the single largest infiltration of the US government in history, with up to 5,000 Scientologist’s involved. Through wiretapping, burglary and other covert means, Church members stole government documents, tracked personnel with intent to blackmail, and even attempted to plant false information in the IRS archives in order to later discredit the agency. The plot was uncovered and 11 high-ranking Scientologists, including Hubbard’s wife, were found guilty of a number of serious charges against the government. Many served prison sentences as a result.

Methods of control within Scientology are every bit as brutal as attacks against outsiders. As members climb the ranks of the organization they become increasingly estranged from the outside world and the organization discourages the viewing or discussion of any outside materials that contradict its teachings. In 1965 the Church was banned in several Australian states, due to an investigation that found its practice of auditing amounted to a form of hypnotic brainwashing. Members who leave the Church, labeled “suppressive persons,” are effectively cut off from members who remain, a policy that has broken apart the families of many.

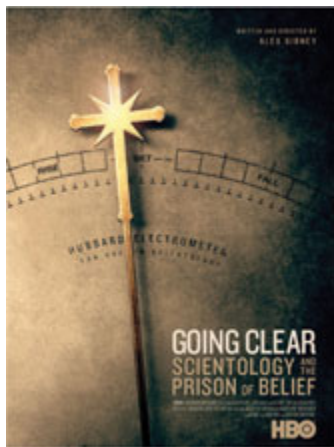
THE LEGACY CONTINUES

There are widespread allegations of intense mental and physical abuse towards members that question the Church's teaching. David Miscavige, who became Scientology's leader after Hubbard's death in 1986, sent dozens of the church's senior members to live in "The Hole," a squalid building housed on the premises of Gold Base, Scientology's California headquarters. Marty Rathburn and Mike Rinder, two of Scientology's most powerful members, were among those Miscavige set his sights on. Each reported disgusting conditions, beatings, verbal humiliation, and were coerced into confessing crimes they never committed. The former members sent to "The Hole" believe that Miscavige used Hubbard's death to consolidate his hold over the church. Since defecting, Rathburn and Rinder have been subjected to 24-hour-a-day harassment by Scientology's security arm.

Despite, or perhaps because of, all this, Scientology has prospered. Its wealthy members, many of them celebrities like Tom Cruise and John Travolta, give generously to the Church. The Church also has a number of different investments and owns real estate holdings valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars. In 1993 the IRS and the Church of Scientology reached an agreement to confer tax-exempt status once again. The terms of the agreement were never released but critics have framed it as a case of capitulation in the face of a sustained legal assault. As part of the agreement, Scientology—which refused to recognize the 1967 decision and did not pay taxes for the entirety of its 25-year legal campaign—agreed to pay \$12.5 million in back taxes, an amount suspected to be just a fraction of the total owed.

Scientology has survived federal investigation, public derision, and countless sealed lawsuits brought against it by former members, the press, and multiple governments from across the globe. Its

endurance is a testament to the power of belief, however absurd, and the efforts of the cult's leadership to persevere in the face of a hostile environment. The controversy of its very existence points to the malleable nature of human spiritual understanding—where some believe it to be as authentic as Christ's resurrection, others see it as nothing more than a sophisticated and disingenuous bottle of snake oil.



ALL CLEAR

Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief is an HBO documentary that details the history of the Church of Scientology and the brutal tactics it uses to keep its members in line. The film features several former members of the Church discussing the abuses they suffered as they began to doubt Scientology.
