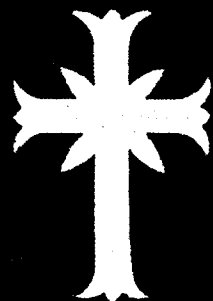


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BEFORE THE BEGINNING...



By BETTY BRENNER

Journal Religion Editor

Whatever else it is, it's a phenomenon, and a controversial and mysterious one at that.

Beyond that, it's difficult to say just what Scientology is — except that it is an organization and a way of thinking gaining attention in the Flint area and across the world as it grows rapidly in adherents and publicity.

Since Scientology opened a branch here a few months ago in a former pool hall at 2102 Joliet a few months ago, handouts have appeared on the college campuses and in business places across Flint.

"You can be totally free thru Scientology," reads a typical one.

Adherents approach other people on the street or call them on the telephone to urge them to attend introductory programs. Films have been shown at the University of Michigan-Flint. A number of persons have become interested here and some have left to study further.

Just how many members Scientology has across the world is not clear, but Scientologists claim about 10 million.

Young people — and sometimes older ones — cast aside plans or college or career to devote their energies to it.

As it has grown, it has created opposition. Australia's state of Victoria has banned it and Great Britain will not allow persons to enter the country to study at the Scientology center there.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has charged that Scientology is using a device, much like a polygraph, for healing and that it has made false claims about what the device called an E-meter, can do. The FDA confiscated some of these devices in a case that has been in the courts since 1963.

In New Zealand a royal commission set up to investigate charges against Scientology of quackery and alienation among family members decided after months of hearings not to recommend that Parliament outlaw the cult on the grounds of free speech and the problems that could arise from driving it underground. It was one of the worst pieces of publicity Scientology has had, but the cult continues to grow there.

A report made for the Victoria parliament called Scientology "the world's largest organization of unqualified persons engaged in the practice of dangerous techniques which masquerade as mental therapy."

But what is Scientology?

Some critics say it is a money-making scheme for a power-hungry former science fiction writer, L. Ron Hubbard.

Worse, some say it is a system of pseudo-psychological techniques that can be psychologically damaging, with neophytes in charge of techniques that could destroy a man's view of himself — and that they have knowledge of someone that could destroy him in others' eyes.

Some critics charge that it empties adherents of everything except what is related to Scientology. They say its most publicized achievement — the state of "clear" — is really a state of emptiness.

Some cite a cruel system of "ethics" which ostracizes, even from their own family, those who disagree with Scientology. There are even reports that dissidents have been put in chains or killed.

On the other hand, believers say Scientology is a church — and, indeed, that is its official name — the Church of Scientology.

It has all the usual adornments of a religion, such as ministers, a creed, regular services, counseling sessions, marriage ceremonies, funerals. Some ministers wear a cross with eight points around their neck. And there are scriptures, written by the founder, L. Ron Hubbard.

Although critics insist it is a church only for tax purposes, Scientologists respond that religion is the search for a higher awareness and that that is what Scientologists are doing.

Believers call it an applied religious philosophy and speak enthusiastically of the values they have received. They have found better marriages, better

communication, less tension, more happiness in life, they say.

They believe, as one brochure puts it, that "an individual is trapped by those things which he does not confront about himself. Through Scientology, he can get out of this trap and move up to Total Freedom" (the capital letters are theirs).

The same brochure assures its readers that Scientology can free persons from loneliness, guilt, feelings of inferiority, depression, nervousness, inhibitions, impulsiveness, alienation, repressions, compulsions, lack of communication.

Those who believe in Scientology emphasize its practical nature. Hubbard says he looked at a variety of teachings — those of Christ, Freud, Hinduism and Buddhism, among many others — and incorporated into his those parts that were useful and practical.

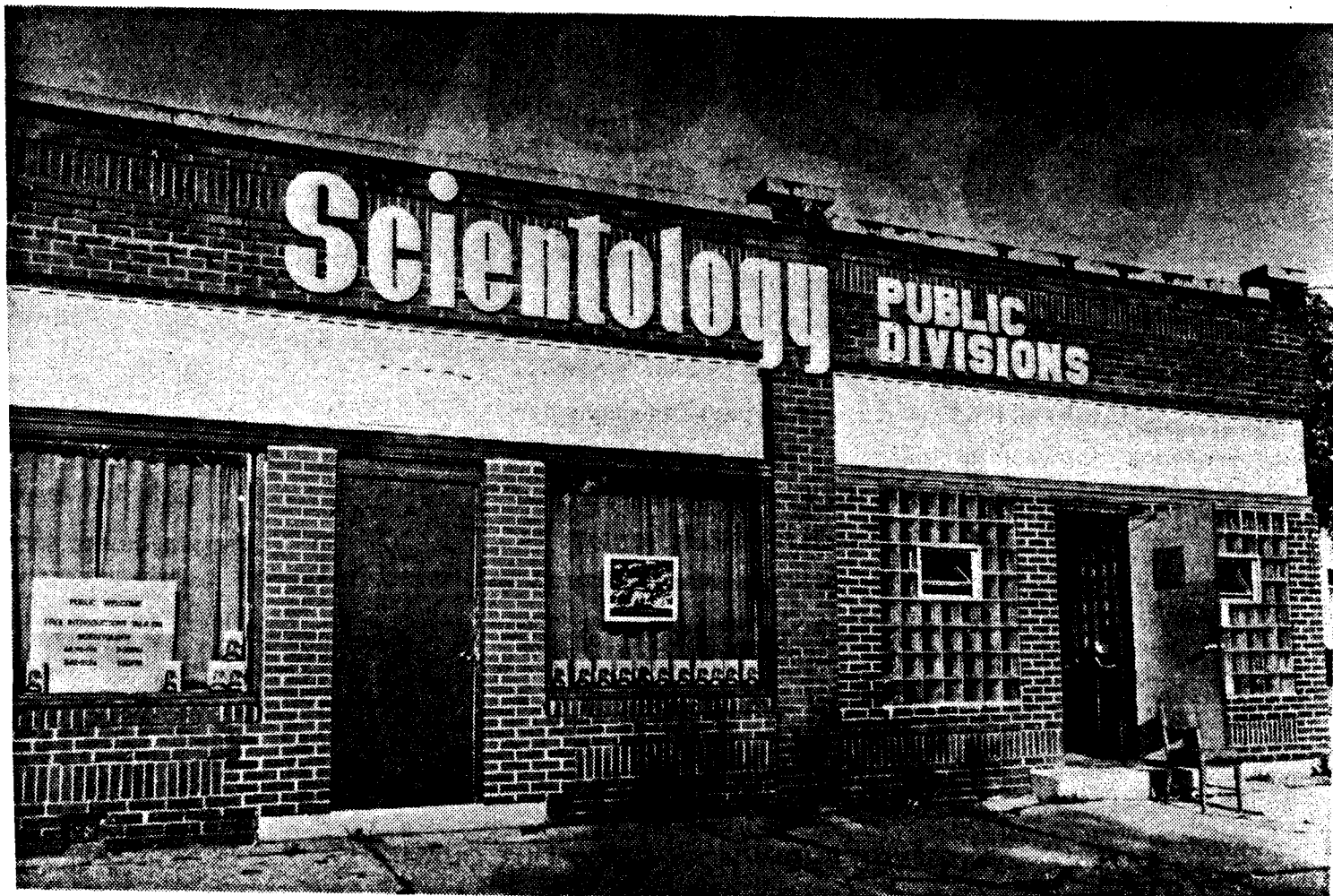
When you ask if any unbiased scientist has checked and approved Hubbard's conclusions, they answer: "We do it every day when we apply them to our lives. Scientology really works for me."

If it doesn't, they say, you can have your money back.

That's right, your money back. The first thing Scientology staff members try to sell you is a \$25 communication course. There's another course after that — for \$50 — and then what is termed processing, several levels of it, going all the way up to the stage called clear, when a person supposedly becomes the optimum individual. Each level costs more than the last.

Those who have reached the stage of clear, they say, are happy, vivacious and purposeful. Their intelligence is above the level of genius. Scientologists say, and they will have no psychosomatic illnesses and 80 per cent of man's illnesses are considered by Scientologists to be psychosomatic.

But, although a clear is supposed to be the optimum person, there are levels above that — and new ones appear as the founder of the group continues his research.



More Goes on in Scientology Head quarters Here Than Meets the Eye

—Journal Photo by LLOYD MOEBIUS

All the steps are laid out in precise terms by Hubbard. In fact, stripped of the often-confusing terminology, the basic tenets are surprisingly simple.

Some say it is this simplicity — a sureness that if certain procedures are followed certain things will happen — that appeals to Scientologists.

Hubbard lays out exactly how counseling is to be done — which questions are to be asked and just how the counselors are to go about it. There are to be no deviations.

How much does it cost to go clear?

Scientologists say, "Oh, about \$3,000."

But those who talk to you are primarily staff members and admit they get a cut in the price because they work at low salary for the organization.

One report says it costs between \$4,000 and \$5,000 for those who don't work for the group. But the costs of traveling to where one can go clear, and for living expenses during that time and for books and other equipment, can go as high as \$15,000, according to another article.

If Scientology is a church, it is unorthodox, to say the least.

At one of the services held regularly here at 3 p.m. on Sundays, adherents spent an hour spotting spots on the front wall, then on the floor, then on the back wall without turning their heads. Then they did the same thing all over again.

In connection with pastoral counseling, or auditing as it is called, the E-meter is used. The counseled grasps two soup cans with electrical wires in them running to a gauge with a needle that is supposed to measure disturbances in the mind. It is this device, roughly equivalent to a polygraph or lie detector, that the FDA confiscated in 1963 in Washington, D.C.

Worldwide headquarters of the church is a ship — somewhere. The Rev. Virginia Eastham, minister of public relations for the Church of Scientology in Michigan, said she doesn't know exactly where Hubbard is, although the ship reportedly has been in the Mediterranean area for years.

Theological beliefs include extrasensory perception and the ability to leave your body behind and travel by spirit through outer space.

Scientology also teaches that man's immortal soul, called a "Thetan," has had numerous past lives, covering trillions of years.

The Thetan, after leaving this body, makes its way to an implant station — one is the planet Venus — where it is implanted with goals, among which is forgetting what it learned in its past life. There it picks up a new body, Scientologists believe.

A wall of fire surrounds our universe, says Hubbard, who claims he has penetrated it.

More important than these beliefs, say members of the cult, are Scientology's beliefs about mankind.

Man, says Scientology, is a spirit. He has a mind and a body, but he is a spirit — an immortal Thetan.

"Before the beginning was a Cause and the entire purpose of the Cause was the creation of effect," Hubbard has said.

Man attains his full potentiality through clearing away negative pictures of himself stored in his unconscious or "reactive" mind. Scientology says. And this is accomplished primarily in the counseling or auditing sessions, believers say.

The auditor asks the same question over and over until the person being audited is forced, they say, to confront whatever in his reactive mind is keeping him from being his best and freest self in that area.

His reactions to the question are registered on the E-meter. When the audited confronts and accepts whatever is disturbing him, Scientologists say, the "mental mass" that disturbances create vanishes. Then the needle on the E-meter floats free, indicating that the mental mass and its accompanying disturbance on that question are gone, they believe.

Auditing costs \$25 an hour, Scientologists here said.

A person is clear when he has, through auditing, cleared up all the problems in his reactive mind and can use his conscious or analytical mind, rather than blindly reacting because of emotional blocks to unconscious memories of things that happened to him earlier.

Some critics call this process brain-washing, saying that the use of free association and repetition can be dangerous. Some call auditing a crude form of psychoanalysis.

Some critics say that the persons conducting the auditing sessions have had too little training because it is counted in hours, not years.

Introductory lectures are held every night through Friday at the center here. In addition to the services at 3 p.m. Sunday, there are meetings at 7:30 p.m. Sunday. Classes are taught throughout the week.

A dozen or so attended the programs I went to. The small number is accounted for at least partially because many have gone on for further study elsewhere.

As you arrive for the introductory lecture, the most dominant thing you see is the collection of Scientology publications.

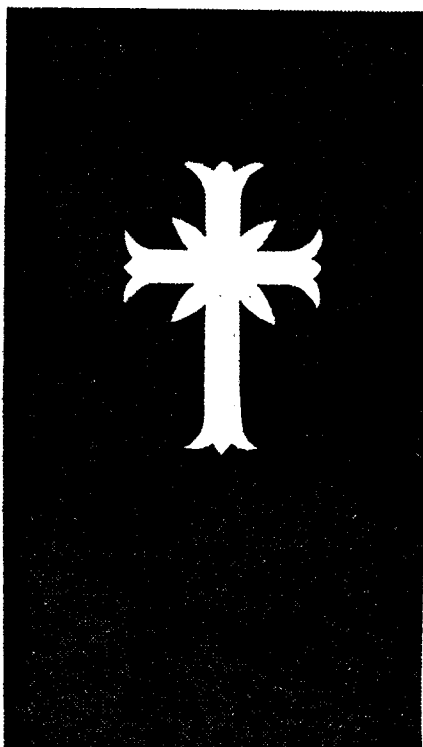
There are publications for children, publications on marriage, ethics and ceremonies and, most of all, publications by Hubbard.

One cover shows a man on a cross and bears the legend: "Man is being crucified by ignorance of himself."

Some picture a mushroom-like cloud.

"Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health," Hubbard's basic book, pictures an erupting volcano. Others show an old man with long white hair and beard.

You are given a warm greeting and a card to fill out with your name, address, telephone number and occupation. However, those introducing themselves to you use only their first names. (When they call you later to encourage your attendance at some specific session, they still use only their first names.)



Those you see appear to be in their 20s, although later at services some are in their 40s and 50s.

All appear to be happy and enthusiastic and often use the words fabulous or terrific. (Later, you see a brochure that speaks of the benefits of being a Scientology staff member. It speaks of good pay and benefits for those with "up statistics"—presumably persuading others to take Scientology courses. Is that one reason for enthusiasm?).

A young girl who said later that she had been active in Scientology only six weeks delivered the introductory lecture I heard. Liberally sprinkled with diagrams, it was primarily devoted to the need for good communication and was a sales pitch for the communications course.

During the course, she remarked, you learn to communicate with someone else by just "being there"—sitting and looking at someone, unmoving, for an hour or more, saying nothing.

After the lecture was over, and after a suitable time for looking at the publications, each visitor was called to one side and encouraged individually to take the first course. (After each program, you get the same encouragement.)

Those who decide to take the first course must sign a release and waiver. The future "parishioner" must agree that he will not hold the organization responsible for "any outside medical costs or errors," and that he is not taking group therapy or psychiatric treatment.

He pledges to pay as an offering the sum required for the specified course. The form goes on to say, however, that "it is my understanding that guidance is made available at no cost to church parishioners."

The parishioner also agrees to accept any "special corrective ministrations" which "may be deemed necessary"—at a "further pledge of offering" of \$5 for half a day.

In Flint three introductory courses are taught. Scientologists must go to Detroit for further training and, after that, to Los Angeles.

A sense of secrecy pervades the whole operation. One example is the use of first names.

Another is that when Miss Elayne Pownall, office administrator of the Greater Flint Council of Churches, called the Scientology office to ask the name of the executive director for the church directory, she was told she would have to go to the center.

The acting executive director here, Miss Ann Weir, would not talk to a Journal reporter, referring her instead to the director of the Detroit church, the Rev. Susan Sullivan, who was trained on Hubbard's flagship.

Mystery also surrounds Hubbard. Not only his location is unknown; so is much of his past. He is 60, he is a member of the Explorers Club, he is an aviator. He says he is an engineer, but there apparently is no evidence of his having received an engineering degree.

He says he was crippled, blind and twice declared dead by doctors and that he rebounded to perfect health through application of Scientology principles. Records on this differ, too.

The allegiance Scientology creates is evident. For instance, the staff here works 14 hours a day, one member told me.

Among the persons I met at sessions here was Walter Gane, former court stenographer for Circuit Judge Philip Elliott. He has gained so much from Scientology, he said, that he decided to quit his job, go to Los Angeles to become clear and make his living as an auditor.

Perhaps Gane explained why Scientology has such an appeal.

"I'd looked for meaning in many other ways," he said, "Now I think I've found it."

"Man is always searching for basic answers," said Miss Eastham. "That's why Scientology is growing."

And, after all, Scientology will tell you, in simple ABCs, just who you are and how the world is made—if you believe it.