

(MAY, 1980)

A
Reader's Digest

REPRINT

The faithful inner core serve
as thieves, shills and spies. The shocking
story behind one of the most dangerous
“religious cults” in America today

Scientology: Anatomy of a Frightening Cult

BY EUGENE H. METHVIN

IN THE LATE 1940s, pulp writer L. Ron Hubbard declared, “Writing for a penny a word is ridiculous. If a man really wants to make a million dollars, the best way would be to start his own religion.”

Hubbard *did* start his own religion, calling it the “Church of Scientology,” and it has grown into an enterprise today grossing an estimated \$100 million a year worldwide. His churches have paid him a percentage of their gross, usually ten percent, and stashed untold riches away in bank accounts in Switzerland and elsewhere under his and his wife’s control. Surrounded by aides who cater to his every whim, he reportedly lives on church-owned property, formerly a resort, in Southern California.

Scientology is one of the oldest, wealthiest—and most dangerous—of

the major “new religions” or cults operating in America today. Some of its fanatic operatives have engaged in burglary, espionage, kidnapping and smear campaigns to further their goals. Says Assistant U.S. Attorney Raymond Banoun, who directed a massive investigation that resulted in conspiracy or theft convictions of nine top Scientology officials in Washington, D.C., last October: “The evidence presented to the court shows brazen criminal campaigns against private and public organizations and individuals. The Scientology officials hid behind claims of religious liberty while inflicting injuries upon every element of society.”

Sci-Fi Fantasy. In 1950 Hubbard, then 39, published *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*. In 1954 he founded the first Church of Scientology in Washington, D.C. By

1978 the organization claimed 38 U.S. churches, with 41 more abroad, and 172 "missions" and 5,437,000 members worldwide. These claims are highly doubtful; critical observers have estimated a hard core of around 3000 full-time staff and no more than 30,000 adherents in the United States.

Even so, Hubbard may live more regally than did the Maharajah of Jaipur, whose 30-room mansion and 57-acre estate in England Hubbard bought in the late 1950s as "world headquarters" for his growing movement. His retinue includes young women, known officially as "messengers," who light his ever-present cigarettes and catch the ashes. They record every word he says, including his frequent obscene outbursts of rage. They help him out of bed in the morning, run his shower, dress him. They scrub his office for a daily "white glove" inspection and rinse his laundry in 13 fresh waters. (Former members say he erupts volcanically if he sniffs soap on his clothes.)

Hubbard attracts and holds his worshipful followers by his amazing capacity to spin out an endless science-fiction fantasy in which he is the supreme leader of a chosen elite. He tells them he is a nuclear physicist who was severely wounded while serving with the U.S. Navy in World War II. "Taken crippled and blinded" to a Naval hospital, he claims to have "worked his way back to fitness and full perception in less than two years." In the process, he developed the "research" that led him to discov-

er "Dianetics" and Scientology, the answers to most of mankind's ills.

The truth is something else. Hubbard did take a college course in molecular and atomic physics, which he flunked. He served in the Navy, but Navy records do not indicate he saw combat or was ever wounded. He was discharged and later given a 40-percent disability pension because of an ulcer, arthritis and other ailments. About this time he was petitioning the Veterans Administration for psychiatric care to treat "long periods of moroseness and suicidal inclinations." He was also arrested for petty theft in connection with checks. When he wrote to the FBI that communist spies were after him, an agent attached a note to one of his letters: "Make 'appears mental' card."

"Robot-like." Since *Dianetics*, Hubbard's bizarre "philosophy" has expanded into a 25-million-word collection of books, articles and tape-recorded lectures. Hubbard claims to have traced human existence back 74 trillion years, suggesting it began on Venus. Today's earthlings are material manifestations of eternal spirits who are reincarnated time and again over the eons. But, Hubbard claims, our earthly troubles often result from ghostly mental images which he calls "engrams"—painful experiences either in this life or in former incarnations.

Hubbard's original book created a sensation; he claimed to have "cleared" 270 cases of engrams, thus greatly increasing the subjects' I.Q.s

and curing them of assorted ills from arthritis to heart troubles. Later Hubbard said that Scientology eradicated cancer and was the only specific cure for atomic-bomb burns.

To detect engrams, Hubbard adopted a battery-powered galvanometer with a needle dial wired to two empty tin cans. Charging \$150 an hour, a Scientology "minister" audits a subject by having him grip the tin cans and answer detailed questions about his present or past lives. The needle's gyrations supposedly detect the engrams. By causing the subject to "confront" the engrams, the minister claims to "clear his memory bin," thus raising both body and mind to a superhuman state of "total freedom."

The Scientology auditor also carefully records any intimate revelations, including sexual or criminal activities or marital or family troubles. According to the church's own documents and defectors' affidavits, such records are filed for blackmail purposes against any member (or member's family) who becomes a "potential trouble source" by threatening to defect, go to the authorities, or generate hostile publicity.

Of course, new prospects are never asked to swallow the whole ridiculous story at first gulp; they get it in timed-release capsules. The process transforms them into what one who went through it calls a "robot-like" state.

Split Personalities. Typical was the experience of 17-year-old Julie Christofferson, a high-school honors

graduate who was invited by an acquaintance—actually a shill—to take a "communications course." (The church advertises that these "field-staff members" get ten-percent commissions on all money their recruits pay.) Unknowingly, Julie hooked herself onto a mind-scrambling conveyor belt of hypnotic "training routines" developed by Hubbard. The recruit, cynically referred to as "raw meat," sits knee to knee with a "coach" for hours, her eyes closed. Next she sits, eyes open, for hours. Then the coach tries to find "emotional buttons." Hours of command drills follow: "Lift that chair." "Move that chair." "Sit in that chair."

As Margaret Thaler Singer, a University of California psychologist who interviewed Julie and over 400 former members of cults, observes, "These routines can split the personality into a severe, dissociated state, and the recruits are hooked before they realize what is happening."

Julie found that the next step, auditing, continued to erase the boundary between reality and fantasy. In this phase, Julie exhausted all \$3000 of her college savings. Then she was told she could take college-level courses while going "on staff" and working full time to recruit and process new raw meat. She ended up working 60 to 80 hours a week, at a maximum salary of \$7.50. She had now reached the "robot-like" state.

Julie felt superior, one of the chosen elite of the universe. She was one of the faithful who are promised they will "go with Ron to the next

planet." Thus, they are conditioned to the "us against them" outlook that characterizes so much religious and political fanaticism.

Julie Christofferson was among the lucky, however. After nine months, her parents removed her from the cult and snapped her out of her zombie-like trance. Last August, a Portland, Ore., jury found the church's conduct so fraudulent and outrageous that it awarded her \$2,067,000.20 in damages.

Doctrine and Dollars. Less fortunate was Anne Rosenblum, who spent nearly six years in Scientology. During her last 15 months she was in the church's punishment unit, the "Rehabilitation Project Force." There, prisoners are guarded constantly, never left alone or allowed to speak to any outsider without permission. They eat leftovers, sleep on the floor, and fill their days with strenuous physical and menial labor, classroom study of Ron's works and grueling auditing to detect "crimes against Ron" in "this or past lives."

As defectors have attested, subjects become hysterical and psychotic in their auditing. Then they are locked in isolation. Not surprisingly, suicides occur. Last January in Clearwater, Fla., for example, a Scientology member hurled herself into the bay and drowned.

Through the years, Hubbard has continually added new grades and "levels" of belief. The "clearing course" costs \$3812, but to get to the highest level, the devotee

shells out \$14,295. Hubbard has punctuated his policy letters to staff with exhortations to MAKE MONEY, MAKE MORE MONEY, MAKE OTHER PEOPLE PRODUCE SO AS TO MAKE MONEY. When numbers of recruits and receipts fall off, Hubbard orders staffers onto a diet of rice and beans.

But revenues appear to have been consistently high. In 1974 the church spent \$1.1 million for an old Jesuit novitiate in Oregon. In 1976 the IRS turned up \$2.86 million in cash aboard Hubbard's 320-foot flagship *Apollo*. Moving secretly, the church paid another \$8 million for a hotel and other properties in Clearwater, Fla. A top Hubbard lieutenant who recently defected has attested that the Clearwater organization alone last year was grossing as high as \$1 million per week.

Dirty Tricks. In 1966 Hubbard created his own "intelligence" organization, called the "Guardian Office" (GO). He had convinced himself that a "central agency" was behind attacks against Scientology, and his suspicion focused on the World Federation for Mental Health. "Psychiatry and the KGB operate in direct collusion," he declared. He seemed to think they worked through the FBI, CIA, various newspapers and other groups. He named his third wife, Mary Sue Hubbard, to direct his own counter-attack from the Los Angeles headquarters. She defined the GO's objective: "To sweep aside opposition sufficiently to create a vacuum

into which Scientology can expand."

The GO training program included instructions in how to make an anonymous death threat to a journalist, smear an antagonistic clergyman, forge phony newspaper clips, plan and execute burglaries. Public-relations spokesmen were drilled on how to lie to the press—"to outflow false data effectively." A favorite dirty trick: making anonymous phone calls to the IRS, accusing enemies of income-tax cheating and thereby inducing the IRS to audit them. Big targets were organizations that investigated Scientology or published unfavorable articles about it—newspapers, *Forbes* magazine, the American Medical Association, Better Business Bureau and American Psychiatric Association.

Individuals were also targeted. In 1971 Paulette Cooper, a New York free-lance writer, published a book called *The Scandal of Scientology*. The church responded with an elaborate campaign of litigation, theft, defamation and malicious prosecution. She got death-threatening phone calls. According to church documents later revealed, this campaign was aimed at "getting P.C. incarcerated in a mental institution or in jail."

It came incredibly close. Miss Cooper and her publisher were sued in several U.S. cities and foreign countries. In order to call off the Scientology legal war, her publisher agreed to withdraw the book. "It just wasn't worth the legal expenses," he explained.

The worst thrust, Miss Cooper says, came after a Scientology agent stole some of her stationery, faked bomb-threat letters and framed her. She was indicted by a federal grand jury on a charge of making bomb threats. She went through two years of torment until she volunteered to take a Sodium Pentothal "truth" test. Only after she passed did the government drop the charges. Defending herself cost her \$28,000.

Counterattack. In 1976 the FBI discovered that two Scientology agents were using forged credentials to rummage through a Justice Department office at night, and thereby uncovered the tip of a widespread espionage operation in Washington. One agent, Michael Meisner, after nearly a year as a fugitive, offered to cooperate with the government. Meisner said that in 1974 Scientology had mounted an all-out attack on U.S. government agencies the church thought were interfering with its operations. He himself supervised Washington operations. With another agent, he broke into the IRS photographic-identification room and forged the credentials that they used to enter various government buildings, steal and copy keys left carelessly on desks, pick locks, and steal and copy government files.

With Meisner's testimony, the FBI obtained search warrants and, on July 8, 1977, raided Scientology headquarters in Washington and Los Angeles. Agents in Los Angeles seized 23,000 documents, many sto-

len from the U.S. government, plus burglar tools and electronic-surveillance equipment. The scope of the espionage operation was staggering. In a Justice Department agency, a Scientology employe-plant actually worked in a vault containing top-secret CIA and defense documents. Other Scientologists entered on nights and weekends and ransacked offices, including the Deputy Attorney General's, stealing highly secret papers and copying them on government copiers.

On October 26, 1979, nine high Scientology officials stood before a federal judge and were found guilty of theft or conspiracy charges arising from their plot against the government. Heading the list was Mary Sue Hubbard, 48, who had supervised the operation. Hubbard himself and 24 other Scientologists were named as unindicted co-conspirators.

Since the convictions, many former Scientologists have come forward to tell stories they had previously kept secret for fear of Hubbard's Guardians. In Boston, attorney Michael Flynn has filed a \$200-million federal class-action suit for fraud, outrageous conduct and breach of contract on behalf of a former Scientologist and others who have been abused by the cult.

But Hubbard and his Scientologists have not been deterred. After last fall's convictions, they issued an appeal for volunteers for the Guardian counterattack, "to ferret out those who want to stop Scientology."

THE LESSONS OF HUBBARD'S CHURCH

of Scientology are many. As history demonstrates, when a fanatical individual employing powerful communication skills gathers an entourage of followers, infects them with his own delusion, persuades them that the outside world is hostile and they alone can save the world, and exacts blind obedience, the collective may break the fabric of civilized restraints and descend into terrifying crimes. Convictions, seized church documents, stipulated evidence and defectors' affidavits demonstrate that Scientologists have already indulged in burglary, espionage, blackmail, kidnapping, false imprisonment, and conspiracies to steal government documents and to obstruct justice; some have committed suicide. The parents of a teen-age girl, after following her into Hubbard's entourage for several weeks, issued an urgent appeal last January to help prevent "what we believe could be another mass murder or suicide."

Above all, the 20th-century record of leader-cults demonstrates that such collectives need watching. Nothing in our legal tradition requires us to shut our eyes to a racket religion simply because it masquerades and claims immunity under our First Amendment. As the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson pointed out, the Constitution is not a suicide pact.

Reprints of this article are available. Prices: 10—\$3.00; 25—\$6.00; 50—\$9.00; 100—\$15.00; 500—\$35.00; 1000—\$48.00. Postage and handling charges included in orders of 1000 or less. Address: Reprint Editor, Reader's Digest, Pleasantville, N.Y. 10570.