

# Scientology's "Bullbaiting": You Flunk If You Laugh

by Dennis Wheeler  
Fourth in a series

I sat in a stiff-backed chair. I had no thoughts, no fears, no hopes — or at least I tried to feel that way. I didn't look at the room around me, or hear the other people talking, or notice the roar of traffic floating through the window. I simply stared deep into the eyes of the young man who sat facing me. I stared at him, motionless, and was *there*, and confronted him, and didn't react — just as I'd been told to do.

"So you drive a Honda, huh?" he sneered, twisting in his seat. "Hey, I bet you keep lots of porno in the back of that car, huh? Really good stuff, lots of centerfolds, hey?" He leered and tapped me on the leg. I continued to stare at him passively, then burst into laughter.

"Flunk for laughing!" said my supervisor, Christy.

I was in the midst of "TRO Bullbaiting," one of the drills in the Church of Scientology's Communications Course, or "Comm Course." The class was described as a self-improvement course that would help me communicate better with others — a talent which the local Scientologists had told me I was lacking. They knew, however, only that I'd been led to Scientology through an ad in a local newspaper which had advertised "free I.Q. tests" at something called the "Santa Rosa Testing Center."

The I.Q. test had led to a "personality test" which led to an introductory lecture which led ultimately to the Comm Course. The course had no semesters or scheduled starting dates, apparently no lectures, and no reading material except the "course pack" and a book called *Scientology: A New Slant on Life*, written by the group's founder, L. Ron Hubbard.

I read *New Slant* cover-to-cover, and was surprised to find that not only did it make scant reference to Scientology itself, but shed no light on some of the unusual "drills" I'd already witnessed in the Comm Course. One of the drills, for instance, involved one student asking another, over and over, "Do fish swim? Do birds fly?" A different drill, called TR8, involves a student giving orders to an ashtray; a third, one of the students commands another simply to touch the walls of the room.

The local Comm Course takes place weeknights, 7 to 10 p.m., at Scientology's mission at 721 Mendocino Avenue in Santa Rosa. My supervisor was Christy, an intense young woman who'd been involved with the Church for several years. A certificate hanging in the course room proclaimed that she'd attained the state of Clear," which in Scientology's own terms means she had lost her "reactive" mind.

It was hard to get to know Christy. She freely admitted, in fact, that her own personality was irrelevant for the duration of the course, that if she proffered her own thoughts and feelings and character the whole process would become diluted and ineffective.

"What do your materials say?" was one of her standard ways of dealing with a student's confusion. Her usual way of expressing approval was merely to say, "Good!"

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The drills were dubbed OTTRO, TR1, TR2, and so on, "TR" standing for "Training Regimen." Each was prefaced by the "checkout," which mainly consisted of looking up "misunderstood" words in dictionaries and then being able to define them according to Hubbard's meanings.

And me? I'd gotten only up to TR1. I sat in a chair facing Christy, and was supposed to pluck lines of dialogue, one at a time, from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll. I was supposed to make the lines "my own," not simply by reading them aloud but by saying them naturally and unaffectedly.

Already, though, I was balking.

"How doth the little crocodile improve his shining tail," I read from the dog-eared book. I repeated the phrase aloud to Christy and tried as hard as I could to "make it my own."

"Good!" she said.

I continued with, "I didnt know that Cheshire cats always grinned...How puzzling all these changes are!...I haven't the least idea what you're talking about...Oh my dear paws! Oh my fur and whiskers!...Three inches is such a wretched height to be...Off with his head!...I wonder what they will do next!"

flunk. Flunk. Flunk. "I'm afraid I can't put it more clear-

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Scientology students involved in one of the Comm Course drills, or "Training Regimens."  
(Photo by Kirk Odabashian)

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ly," I read, "for I can't understand it myself, to begin with." This time I received a "Good!" And no wonder — that one almost was my own.

"Are you getting bored?" Christy suddenly asked, narrowing her eyes.

I admitted that boredom was indeed seeping into my mind, but that I was frustrated, too, by not understanding what this was all about.

"What do your materials say?" Christy asked.

I glanced back at the course pack. And word-for-word I read the mind-boggling "theory" behind the Alice drill: "On TR1, the student is using Observation, Consideration, and Confront as previously drilled. He is also drilling being Cause or Source-point, awareness of Effect or Receipt-point, and as Cause getting a Message (or Impulse or Particle) across a Distance to Receipt-point with Estimation, Interest, Control, correct Direction, correct estimation of Distance, Time, and correct Timing, correct Velocity, correct Volume, Clarity and Impingement, and with the Intention that it is received and duplicated at receipt-point."

Clear as mud, I thought. "Look," I said, before Christy could start telling me to look up any words I didn't understand. "It's like I'm being taught to lie convincingly. I bet a professional actor would pass this drill really quickly — it's like I'm being taught to take someone else's ideas, someone else's thoughts, and try as hard as I can to make everyone think they're my own ideas...I don't know, it just sounds kind of immoral to me."

Maybe Christy herself was getting frustrated by this time. Her instructions in the course pack warn her, "there is a possibility that during a drill a student may become angry or experience some misemotion. Should this occur, the coach must not 'back off.'"

On this particular night there was only one other student besides me in the course room, so perhaps Christy had more time to deal with me on a one-to-one basis. She tried

a new tack. "Are you bothered, Dennis, because I'm flunking you so much?" she demanded.

"Yeah, a little," I scornfully admitted. "But that's sure not the main problem. It just seems that if the ideas and thoughts I have are my own, then I can't help communicating them in my own natural way. And if they're not mine, then it seems really immoral to try to make people think they are."

Next Christy tried to apply the problem to "everyday" life: "It's like when you were learning how to drive a car," she said. "You didn't get to drive your own car, you had to drive someone else's car first, like your parents', right?"

"Yeah," I said, "but then after you do learn to drive, it doesn't mean you should steal someone else's car and drive it all over town and try your hardest to make everyone think it belongs to you."

"Break time!" Christy snapped.

It was 8:30. Time for the 15-minute break.

And time for me to get out of here, I thought angrily.

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During the break I sipped a glass of water, and fumed. Several Scientologists lolled around on the front porch, enjoying the cool evening air. Christy stood in the hall and tried to convince another student to pay up for yet another course.

I wondered how she was reacting to my obstinacy. In the course pack Hubbard warns the supervisors, "Once in a while the student will start to rationalize and justify what he is doing if he is doing something wrong. He will give you reasons why and because. Talking about such things at great length does not accomplish very much. The only thing that does accomplish the goals of the TR and resolves any differences is doing the training drill. You will get further by doing it than by talking about it."

Suddenly I knew I'd had enough of the Comm Course —

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not only enough for my *News-Herald* story, but enough for me, the person himself, a rational human being.

Just before the break was over, I abruptly told Christy I was leaving. She whirled around to place herself between me and the door, took my arm firmly, and cooed, "Come on. Stay just a few more minutes."

"No," I said, "I think I'd better leave."

"Did you have a bad weekend?" she asked — implying, I think, that the only reason I couldn't comprehend the drills was because I was a cranky, tired little boy.

"No, I had a pretty good weekend. Bye."

Next week: Scientology versus "the Merchants of Chaos" — how the organization deals with what it calls "Suppressive Persons."

## Conclusions?

# "Thanks, Ron, But No Thanks"

by Dennis Wheeler

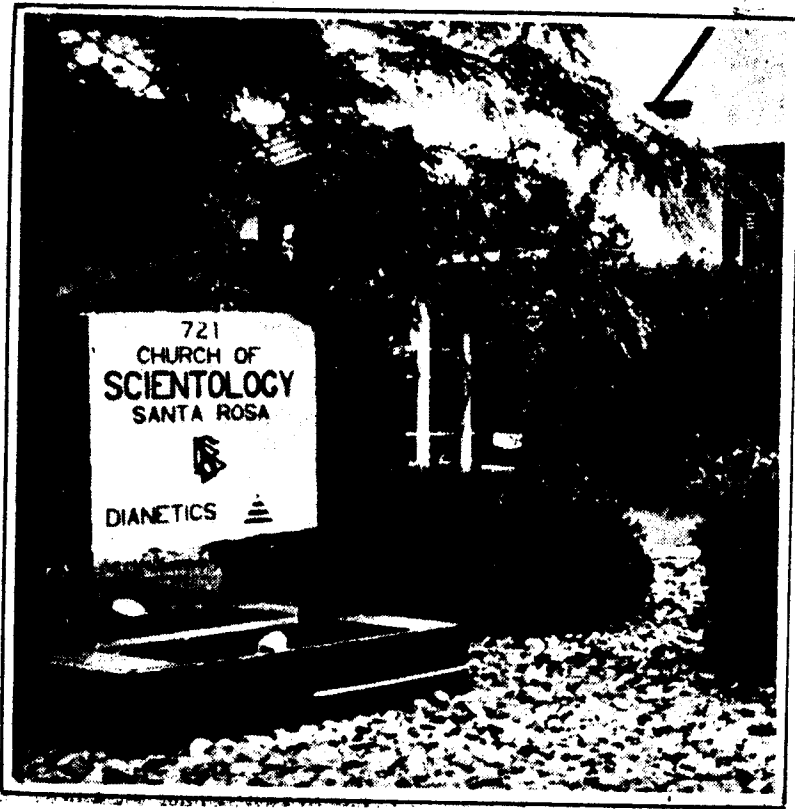
What was good about Scientology's Comm Course? Well, the "Confronting" — staring at someone and not moving — wasn't too bad. Done in moderation, and after my eyes stopped hurting, I treated it as just a form of relaxing meditation. But too many of the TRs in the Comm Course seem to me to be geared toward learning how to not communicate — to wear a robotic, emotionless mask.

According to Hubbard, "The only reason a person gives up a study or becomes confused or unable to learn is because he or she has gone past a word that was not understood." But the Comm Course "materials," with their tangled-up language and bits of psychobabble, communicated little to me except confusion — and let's face it, being able to recite dictionary definitions of every single word in a sentence doesn't necessarily make that sentence any more easily understood.

Conclusions?

I remembered a quote from Gotthold Lessing in a book by a former cultist:

"If God had locked up all truth in his right hand, and in his left the unique, ever-alive striving for truth, albeit with the addition that I should always and eternally err, and he said to me, 'Choose! — I should humbly clasp his left



hand, saying, 'Father, give! Pure truth is after all for thee alone.'"

Okay, so it's pompous.

But in Scientology I saw no hands, neither left nor right. I saw neither truth nor the striving for truth. Instead I saw a pressure to "join" and "fit in"; an outright withholding of information deemed necessary to prepare newcomers for future revelations; a lack of the joy and humor and spontaneity I've felt in other churches; the false affection which one of the cults calls "love-bombing."

And I saw that age-old root of all evil — the love of money. During the breaks in the course, several times I heard students being chided by their superiors for not forking over more money for more and more and more training. And at one point one of the students — who works for a local janitorial service — proudly showed me the receipt he'd just gotten for finally paying for the "Purification Rundown," a Scientology program designed to "get rid of the restimulative effects of past drugs and chemicals." It came to approximately \$630 and he admitted he wasn't even sure what the Purification process would entail.

"You are very fortunate people," Hubbard tells his followers. "You are very very lucky people. You came all the way down the track, lived all those years, did all these stupid things, and you wind up here with a chance out."

Thanks, Ron. But no thanks.

## Is It Mind Control?

Experts say Yes "Ridiculous Charges"

# Yes...

The Church of Scientology (which was founded by L. Ron Hubbard and operates a mission in Santa Rosa) is often charged with using mind control techniques to obtain and maintain the loyalty and resources of its members.

Scientology officials, as well as many Scientology church members, scoff at these charges, insisting their practices and teachings are designed to liberate the mind, not enslave it.

But Ford Schwartz, a longtime Scientologist and later a "deprogrammer" for the Freedom Counseling Center in Burlingame, claims the Church's "Communications Course" (or Comm Course) is usually the first step in a process of mind control. During his own years in the organization, he says, he conversed with approximately 3,000 students either enrolled in the course or recently graduated from it. The drills, or "TRs," in the course are repeated throughout one's career as a Scientologist, he says.

According to Schwartz, recruits are urged or "crushed" — a Scientology slang term — to sign up, pay, and start the course immediately. "The registrar is trained to hurdle any objections to the above," he says in a report on the subject. "At times, checks with insufficient funds or counter checks drawn on non-existent accounts are accepted knowingly by the registrars in order to have the person start right away." The cost, he says, ranges from \$10 to \$50, and the course varies in length from several days to two months.

A supervisor maintains "an almost military atmosphere" during the course, Schwartz says, and students are told to read from a "course pack."

"When the student completes a page, the supervisor begins a 'checkout' by questioning to see if the material has been fully understood. If the reply is affirmative, the supervisor snaps a question at the student which is *always* a demand for the definition of a word contained in the text." An example of this, Schwartz says, could be, "What's the definition of the word *if*?" The "misunderstood" word must then be looked up in a dic-

tionary, and the student has to read the entire page over again.

If the student disagrees with any of the material and asks the supervisor to explain or defend it, says Schwartz, "the supervisor *invariably* says, 'What do your materials state?' or 'What word just before that did you misunderstand?' " Students in other Scientology courses reportedly look up over 10,000 words individually so they'll "learn to study."

His own experiences in the Comm Course? "As a new Scientologist in 1972, I was extremely confused and disoriented during my initial contacts with this course. I was driven by the desire to please my supervisor and other Church staff. And I experienced a feeling of superiority over newer students once I'd learned the ropes," an experience which he says is often felt by other students.

Schwartz believes that students who are convinced they have serious problems communicating with other people (a conviction often suggested by the Church's "personality test") may feel helpless in solving the problems of life. And, he adds, confusion that arises out of being shunted from one person to another in order to start the course results in a feeling of being totally controlled by one's superiors.

"Being flunked in a checkout is demeaning," Schwartz points out. "Instant and exact definitions of common words such as *if, but, or, of, the, to,* or others aren't demanded in other educational forums...An awful realization occurs which goes something like this: 'I've been reading and studying all of my life and went by words like *if* thousands of time. I must not really understand *anything!*' No wonder I have problems!" The result, says Schwartz, leaves the student feeling stupid and vulnerable, unable to trust the validity of decisions made prior to Scientology.

Schwartz compares the student's mind at this point to a blank sheet of paper. "Hubbard says that the world begins with TRO. He implies that without the ability to 'just be there' and thus achieve a 'major stable win,' one hasn't really started the process of living...Where was the person before? How valuable can any experience be if the person

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wasn't there to experience it? Whether designed for this purpose or not, the drills convince most students that existence and interaction have been problems for them since they weren't 'there' to participate."

The "re-education" of POWs during the Korean War, says Schwartz, dealt with political loyalties. "That was a light task compared to the revisions the Comm Course makes. TR1 involves a re-learning of how to talk; with TR2, re-learning of how to listen; with TR3, a re-learning of how to properly ask a question; and with TR4, there's a re-learning of how to interact with another. The student's regression to a childlike and impressionable state is the result."

Schwartz also says a "hidden agenda" is involved in the Comm Course. Students may have only signed up for a course to help them communicate better with others, but actually, says Schwartz, they're being trained to become "auditors" and "Operating Thetans." "The certificates issued upon completion of the Comm Course doesn't mention communication," he claims. "One becomes certified as a Hubbard Apprentice Scientologist."

Often, Schwartz says, students in the drills called OT-TRO and TRO experience sharp alterations of consciousness, which Scientologists call "being there," "being exterior to one's body," or having a "major stable win." It's during or after this experience that the student often adopts the definition of "Thetan," which is the Scientology concept of the soul, a reincarnated descendant of a vast galactic empire.

The problem with this, says Schwartz, is that one is then isolated from any group, philosophy, and religion which fails to address a person as a Thetan. "Where else can a Thetan go for understanding or help? What other group has paved the way for a Thetan's ultimate freedom and ability? To whom should a Thetan give gratitude, loyalty, and support?"

Schwartz's wife, Andrea, was also a Scientologist for many years. She's convinced that one of the purposes of TR1 (the "Alice in Wonderland" drill) "is to get you to say things that don't make any sense...so that you can communicate with conviction something you don't believe or that doesn't make sense to you."

TR1 through TR4, she says, "are teaching Scientologists how to control other people *verbally*, TRs 6 through 9 are how to control somebody *physically*...The whole progression is toward how to control a person totally. And guess what? — as you learn to control a person, you're going to get the idea that *you*, too, have to be controlled. That's why you always reverse roles in the drills. If they just wanted to teach you how to control people, there'd be no reason for you to have to do the other thing as well...It's almost inconceivable," she continues, "that this man Hubbard didn't know something about thought reform when he was doing it because it's so perfect. I can't think of how Scientology could be more of a thought reform process than it is."

Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman, authors of *Snapping: America's Epidemic of Sudden Personality Change*, are outspoken critics of Scientology. The group, they say in *Snapping*, "does not lead people beyond faith to absolute certainty — it leads them to levels of increasingly realistic hallucination. The crude technology of auditing is a direct assault on human feeling and on the individual's ability to distinguish between what he is actually experiencing and

what he is only imagining."

The authors quote a young man who was involved in Scientology for five years: "They have a drill to make your eyes look natural...You have someone sit three feet away from you, and you sit there and look at each other. Then one person acts as a coach and the other as the student, and he'll say, 'Start!' and if you blink your eyes in an unnatural way, he'll say, 'Flunk! You blinked in an unnatural way. Start!' He coaches you for hours like that."

"If people just took the Communications Course and then left Scientology for life, it would not be such a bad thing, because the beginning course does help you out. But then the technique itself sucks you into further and further courses. The counseling never ends."

— Dennis Wheeler

## No...

Scientology officials and members say that charges their church engages in "brainwashing" or "mind control" are ridiculous.

The Comm Course, they insist, has no other purpose than the improvement of communication skills in the individual. The end result, according to Scientology literature, is "improved ability in the origination and handling of communication and in handling oneself in life situations and predicting and handling others."

The drills involved in the course, according to *What is Scientology?* (a Scientology text), "are based on the idea that if Man wished to get physically strong or stronger, no matter how strong he was, he would exercise. The same view is held as regards a person's ability to deal with life and to get even stronger, no matter how strong he is, in the game of life. The drills are simply exercises to bring about greater awareness and the ability to confront (the ability to be there comfortably and perceive) and to communicate freely with anyone."

If it doesn't upset the schedule, the public is invited to sit in on the course, although people are encouraged to try it themselves. The local Scientology mission is located at 721 Mendocino Avenue, Santa Rosa. Hours are Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and 6:30 to 10 p.m. The number listed in the phone book has been disconnected.

Scientology files contain numerous letters and affidavits testifying to the success of the Comm Course.

And last month, a slightly adapted version of the Comm Course, called the Success Through Communication Course, was delivered to 16 women inmates at the San Francisco County Jail in San Bruno over a period of two weeks. According to Scientology's report on the project, it was "delivered as a response to the need of the inmates, when released, for some basic skills to cope successfully with life outside the prison, i.e. in job interviews, employee/employer relations, family relations, etc., communication skills being key to human interaction. The course given, Success Through Communication Course, is, of course, not an end-all in basic life skills, but, rather, a first step in a series of courses which can increase an individual's ability to cope with the problems of life without resorting to crime, drugs, etc."

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All the participants in the course reportedly considered it a success. They presented to "L. Ron Hubbard, author and humanitarian," an "honorary certificate for his valuable contributions to the betterment of the inmates with his Communication Technology in courses given by Scientology Community Services."

Some human potential groups reportedly have sprung directly from their founder's involvement with Scientology, or have borrowed heavily from Scientology's teachings. These include est, Silva Mind Control, Lifespring, and Mind Dynamics. These movements are so prevalent, in fact, that in Scientology slang they're called "squirrel groups."

Psychiatrists have often been consulted or asked to testify in recent court cases regarding alleged mind control as practiced in "destructive cults." But Berkeley psychiatrist Dr. Lee Coleman says "mind control" is a myth.

In *Psychiatry the Faithbreaker*, Coleman says, "The claim of 'brainwashing' today accomplishes what the claim of 'possession by the devil' accomplished hundreds of years ago. Both offer an explanation for behavior that someone wants to invalidate. Today indeed critics can't accept the fact that many young people are finding fulfillment in some of these new churches, so they attribute their contentment to the effects of 'mind control.'"

Coleman agrees that many churches do exert a powerful influence on their members' opinions and lifestyles. "That they do is indeed one of the few points church critics and friends agree upon. Yet whatever influence they do wield is legally no different from the influence that takes place every day in established churches, high-pressure selling sessions, social clubs, and all forms of counseling."

— Dennis Wheeler