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SPECIAL REPORT

Scientology: A church beset with problems

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Certainly, L. Ron Hubbard exists, says Janet Kenyon, public affairs director for the B.C. Church of Scientology. He has an office in downtown Vancouver.

"Come on in," says Kenyon, unfastening the purple velvet cable that is hooked across the entrance to L. Ron Hubbard's office at 401 West Hastings. His name is on the open door in gold-colored letters. A gleaming gold, or brass, letter opener lies on his desk. There are pictures of his kids. There is an unopened package of Camel cigarettes. A green plastic E meter, his own invention to measure spiritual pressures, lies readily at hand.

"We change the cigarettes every week," says Kenyon. "Otherwise, they'd get pretty stale, eh?"

She laughs. Kenyon is a happy blonde woman, joyfully pregnant. She is from small-town Manitoba, grew up in the United Church of Canada, joined Scientology 10 years ago. She says it cost her \$750 to take the course that now allows her to call herself Rev. Janet Kenyon.

Scientology has never been far from allegations of scandal and cultism since Hubbard founded it 29 years ago, but never has the criticism been as intense as in recent months.

Hubbard, whose 1950 book, *Dianetics, The Modern Science of Mental Health*, set out the theories that were incorporated in Scientology has not appeared in public since March, 1980. There are rumors the 71-year-old author of many science fiction stories as well as Scientology books is dead, men-

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tally incompetent or held captive by renegade Scientologists who have taken control of the wealthy church.

Kenyon says the rumors are nonsense. Hubbard has answered letters written him by local Scientologists as recently as Jan. 31. (There is a box with a pile of special stationery beside it in the Hastings Street headquarters for individuals to correspond with Hubbard. Kenyon says he answers every letter dropped into the box.)

Why doesn't Hubbard settle the matter by simply appearing for five minutes, or even less?

"Why should he?" said Kenyon. She said the author is busy working on a 10-volume sequel to his recently published *Battlefield Earth*, to be called *Mission Earth*.

But Hubbard's disappearance is only one problem plaguing the Church of Scientology:

- Church offices in Toronto were raided last week by 100 police officers in a search of documents.

- A suit filed in a California court by Hubbard's estranged 48-year-old son, Ronald DeWolf, claims that Hubbard used criminal means to acquire his wealth and that a trustee should be appointed to handle the church's assets, estimated to be about \$280 million.

- The U.S. Internal Revenue Service is seeking \$8 million in taxes and penalties from Scientology for the years 1970 through 1974.

Convicted of fraud

- An Australian court has ruled that Scientology is not a religion. A French court has convicted Hubbard of fraud.

- In January, Hubbard's third wife, Mary Sue, was sentenced in Washington to four years in prison for her part in break-ins of numerous federal offices.

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• Dozens of civil suits have been filed against the church by former members who claim to have been harassed and swindled.

And while detractors claim that Scientology is not a church or religion, the church itself claims to be nothing more than a religion that teaches its followers to improve their mental health.

The Church of Scientology was founded in 1954 by Hubbard, four years after he published Dianetics. Worldwide membership in the church was estimated at about two million in the mid-1970s, with the majority living in the U.S.

Scientists say Dianetics means "through the mind." Scientology means "the study of knowledge." Scientists believe the mind records all experiences through many incarnations. Unpleasant experiences are "engrams." There are also "secondaries," which are mental images of earlier engrams. There are also "locks," which are mental images of an experience that "knowingly or unknowingly" reminds a person of a secondary or an engram.

Engrams, secondaries and locks are images that can be linked in chains, say the Scientologists. Ridding the mind of these chains is the goal of Scientology auditors. They say they accomplish this through special courses and the use of Hubbard's invention, the E meter.

(The Hubbard Professional Mark VI model, which is supposed to measure response to memories, happy and unhappy, so that a Scientology "auditor" can determine the state of your mental health, is regularly priced at \$2,375, but was on "sale" in Vancouver last week for \$1,980).

The church offers free stress tests and personality tests in the hope that those who take them will at the very least buy Hubbard's paperback on Dianetics, or perhaps sign up for courses leading to more courses, leading to the various levels within the church.

The costs of the courses vary, said Kenyon, but she acknowledged that some cost several thousand dollars.

"There is a set fee for set services."

She said the Lower Mainland's 1,800 Scientologists attend regular Sunday services and Tuesday lectures at church headquarters at 401 West Hastings.

Counselling sessions with church-trained counsellors are available seven days a week.

Those who speak out against Scientology are not hard to find, although most former members of the church tend to go into hiding, claiming it is the only way to avoid the harassment that usually follows their defection.

About 50 lawsuits have been filed since 1968 by Scientology against Canadian detractors, The Vancouver Sun among them. The case against The Sun never proceeded to court.

Mary (she asked that her real name be withheld) was 29 when she left her husband in 1974 and moved into a Vancouver house with several other women. One of her new roommates belonged to the Church of Scientology.

She said she was attracted to the organization because "everybody was so nice."

"They didn't seem like hooks. There is the friendship thing and the idea of being in on secret knowledge, knowing you are going to save the world."

She read Dianetics and took the personality and E meter tests. She enrolled in several courses. One was called *Do Birds Fly?*

"Two lines of people sat on the floor facing each other, knees touching, hands on thighs. We were to stare into the other one's eyes and say, 'Do birds fly?' The other person would say the same thing back. Over and over. This was to teach us to stare, to hold our gaze."

She wanted out

Several weeks after Mary joined, a woman from the Los Angeles Scientology office visited Vancouver and spoke to members about the Sea Org, an elite group of Scientologists hand-picked to serve on the Apollo, a 100-metre British ferry that Hubbard used as his home and headquarters while sailing around the world.

"I said, 'I'm going to sign up because I'll get my courses free and I can dedicate my life to the cause.' My family, my boyfriend, my estranged husband — everybody — tried to talk me out of it, but I was determined."

Mary went to Los Angeles and signed up for a commission aboard a Scientology training ship anchored nearby. She said she signed several papers — stating she was not mentally ill, that Scientology was not responsible for her welfare and that she agreed to serve the church for six billion years.

After three days of cooking, scrubbing decks, standing on night watch and writing recruitment letters to strangers whose names and addresses were supplied by the crew, Mary knew she wanted out.

"It was a horrendous experience. I was constantly afraid I was going to end up like the other people on the ship ... I was scared of the people. I realized it was a very sticky wicket, though. The only way to get off the ship was to go along with what was required of me."

She asked twice to leave on medical grounds, but the requests were denied. She finally contacted her ex-husband, who helped her get back to Vancouver.

Since her defection, Mary said she has received numerous letters and threatening phone calls. She moves frequently to avoid contact with Scientologists.

Today, at 38, she spends much of her time counselling those involved with cults like Scientology.

"It's hard to say to yourself, 'I was an idiot. I was a fool.' A lot of people have an emotional investment in Scientology. I don't know how many people I encouraged to join. That's the worst thing, that's why I'm talking out now."