

letters

Scientology: defenders and detractors.

10

L.A. WEEKLY

Letters

There and Back Again

Dear Editor:

Re: "Scientology: The Other Side of the Looking Glass" [*L.A. Weekly*, April 4-10]. I guess it's too much to expect a difficult thing like total truth to be approached in your newspaper. You do pretty well with the movie schedules, not bad with the nightclub billings either. But why do you have to mess up with something that counts, something that has saved lives, salvaged marriages, made people happier and more able — something that could even benefit *you*? You spent all that effort and time, so why didn't you go all the way and learn what you were talking about and present not just partial truths mixed with distortions and outright falsehoods?

Yes, I was glad to see a good amount of factual, positive data about Scientology's results and successes, but why taint it with your obvious negative bias? I'd say you need to do some extensive rereading of your journalism courses or take a look into your own ideas of integrity. You quote a few dissatisfied people, but fail to indicate whether they asked for and got the refunds that are due them per standard policy. You stress the donation rates for professional services, but fail to stress the huge variety of free and very inexpensive services that are available. You indicate (accurately) how the number of satisfied Scientologists far exceeds the small minority of dissatisfieds (many of whom still acknowledge the workability of the subject), yet devote a disproportionate amount of space to quoting the latter. You omit anything about Hubbard's technology of study, which has greatly increased thousands of people's abilities. You also leave out any mention of Hubbard's great new music album with Chick Corea, Karen Black, John Travolta and others.

Mainly, however, you fail to capture the feel and atmosphere of what really is going on there. There is an excitement, a hope, a feeling of great morale and improvement, of life and future growth. How could you miss that? Even if you are not up to experiencing it yourself, surely you must have seen more than the strange little picture you painted.

—Eric Krackow
N. Hollywood

Dear Editor:

I want to commend you on your article about Scientology. You did your homework and presented a far more objective and truthful view than Scientology church officials or rabid former members ever could.

I was a Scientologist from 1977 to early 1983, and there are a lot of people like me, ex-Scientologists who aren't rabidly angry, pressing lawsuits or anything else — we simply outgrew the whole thing. I think the majority of Scientology as presented in the earlier books by Hubbard in the '50s and '60s truly does tend to encourage a high degree of self-determination, freedom of thought, belief in one's own ability, belief in the natural goodness and rightness of man, et cetera. A lot of us got interested in Scientology through reading those books and using the ideas to help us shrug off old beliefs or inhibitions that we no longer needed.

On the other hand, we eventually ran up against the "all-for-the-group" types who had a totally distorted view of the church and were into weird sorts of power trips and what-not. The majority of people ac-

continued on page 12

• Letters continued from page 10

tually running the Church of Scientology — engaging in the incredible politicking and so forth necessary to reach their present position — are not necessarily well-versed in the philosophies espoused by Scientology, believe it or not. Oh, they can quote you a few Hubbard hack phrases, but many of them are just young kids or young adults who grew up in the Sea Org, or people who were misfits in regular society and find within the church political structure a chance to be big shots, to be admired, to have control.

The majority of Scientologists, on the other hand, are not senior staff members or are among the majority of lowlier staff members who just quietly do their jobs. They are pretty decent people on the average — a fair degree of intelligence, a fair degree of philanthropic feeling, et cetera — who feel that Scientology has helped them and want other people to be helped as well. But for many of them, it becomes obvious that the more free, the more self-determined, the more capable you become within the church, the less desire you have to have anyone else tell you what to do and think — which would tend to put you into conflict with the church authorities. Most of the people I know who are still in the church are there because they lack self-confidence, feel that the "bridge" is essential to attaining their spiritual goals, and have bought the church line that the "bridge" is not available outside the church — which, of course, is not true. There are "independent Scientologists" delivering the exact same product all over the world — minus, of course, the degree of threat and coercion that tends to hang over church interactions.

I enjoyed my period of time as a Scientologist. I learned a lot about myself, opened a lot of spiritual vistas, dared to believe certain things were possible, and met a lot of people who are still my friends. I think those ex-Scientologists who are most bitter are probably pretty angry at themselves for having given up their own power.

What Hoden said about church members, and particularly staff members, not being insulated from the outside environment is absolutely incorrect. When you are working literally from morning to night, six or seven days a week (with one day off to do your laundry if you're lucky), you are automatically insulated. When all your friends are Scientologists — the people you talk to, the people you look up to — you are automatically insulated to a certain degree. That is true with any group or ideology. And you only realize this is true when you step out of the group and begin to build a life apart from it. At that point, you can begin to appreciate what a narrow view of the world you were participating in.

—Joy Flynn-Watson
Burbank

Dear Editor:

I am a regular reader of the *L.A. Weekly* and appreciate the information it gives me about what's happening in L.A. It was all the more disappointing, therefore, to see your article about Scientology. I was reminded of the American Tourist who takes the Grand European Vacation (10 capitals in 14 days), comes back with plastic souvenirs and badly taken photos, complains that all the natives didn't speak English — and then wonders why they seemed resentful.

Having studied and used Scientology for 11 years, I could write you a book about the increased joy, abilities and creativity I

have experienced myself and seen in others on a daily basis. I feel your readers have the right to know that there is no greater happiness than knowing there is a road out — out of the synthetic, plastic nightmare most people know as "life." You can jump in the driver's seat and fly on the highway, or you can stand on the sidewalk as the cars whiz by and pretend you're moving. The choice is yours.

—David Kline
Los Angeles

Dear Editor:

Thank you for the informative and open article on Scientology. It is important for Scientologists to know that they can get virtually all services and materials accurately and easily without having to deal with church coercions. Scientology makes its members feel that only their "guilt" makes them disagree with the church. Many people would like to "come out," but are afraid of losing friends, family or business associations through the "disconnection" policy.

I am glad to offer, at no charge to any sincere seeker, the viewing and right to copy any of the extensive documentation supporting church critics. These include the church documents you quote, videotaped confessions of former church officials and numerous affidavits and court transcripts. Also we have all the data on joining FAIR's class-action suit, which includes claims for recovery of funds as well as confessional folders.

That Scientology does some things very well is the source of its strength. That it claims to do all one would ever need is the source of its danger. It must allow people to study and practice wherever and however they wish. The Church of Scientology management promotes itself as an advocate of religious liberty for all. In practice, they do not even allow their members to read whatever they please.

Your description of the egg-throwing at the Stansfields is accurate. I was there. The reason for it, judging by the epithets garnishing the eggs, is that we have helped dozens of people who leave the church to put their lives back together.

—Valerie Stansfield
The Revitalization Center
Burbank

Dear Editor:

Your article on Scientology surprised me. From the title — and after reading how, having been shafted in the past, Reverend Hoden at first expressed fears of newsmen and then opened the doors to you — I felt that at last we might be getting a break from the press.

I became a Scientologist at 18, in 1963. I was looking for the truth. (I knew it existed somewhere, and no one would tell me where.) Well, I found it and have stuck with it gladly for these many years. I have worked inside the church and outside the church, even worked with L. Ron Hubbard for a while. All in all, I find that nowhere is perfection to be found on Earth, but that Scientologists are at least trying to be better and to treat others better, to help and to free mankind.

And they get results . . . we get results. If it looks a bit odd to you, so what? Does it work? I say yes! A great many others say yes, and for that reason it deserves a better shake than it got at your hands.

Costly? Have you looked at the price of psychiatry lately? Or college? I am reminded of the story of the fellow who had a watch that didn't tell time. When his friend remarked on it, he said, "But it sure was cheap." Would you rather buy something that was cheap but didn't work, or

would you spend your money on something that worked? I am neither brainwashed nor duped. I just know what getting better is worth to me and know what life would be worth if I had no way to improve myself.

The cost of health care is skyrocketing, yet no one balks at coming up with the bucks. It's that or die. There is something worse than dying. It's living forever knowing there is no way off the merry-go-round.

—Jon Batson
Toluca Lake

Dear Editor:

Your article on Scientology was one of the best efforts to be objective about the subject I have seen, and I hope that the fact it wasn't a tract for the faith does not discourage responsible leaders like Ken Hoden from dealing with the press in the future. Given the generally sensationalistic and inaccurate reports that result from an antagonistic relationship with the media, retreating to a fortress mentality would be very counterproductive.

Unfortunately, the article was not faultless. Dwelling on past sins and on the deeds of overzealous individuals and neglecting a serious look at and experience with the "technology" gave an unbalanced view. It would also have been fair to allow the Scientology leadership to look at the article before going to press and respond in a sidebar. At the least, you should expand your letters section to accommodate the response, lest you be accused of censorship. [Editor's note: So resolved.]

What makes Scientologists so aggressively defensive and overbearing in relationships with outsiders is their certainty that their techniques work. Having taken a course and read some of Hubbard's work, as well as having associated with Scientologists while remaining an outsider, I can say with informed objectivity that the ideas are pretty effective. (I did not pursue the program, both because I found it difficult to follow and because I was uncomfortable with the institution.) As a PR professional who has handled various controversial groups, I have always found those immersed in a subculture lose the ability to communicate effectively with the outside world, forgetting how people out there think and becoming their own worst enemies in public relations.

Whatever the weaknesses of the article, it did have constructive advice if Scientology is to overcome the negative publicity and get people to look at it seriously: Lower the cost of services to a reasonable level, provide a more humane milieu for members and especially staffers, grant that geniuses like Hubbard also have their peculiarities, and replace the adversarial/conspiratorial mindset with a more cooperative attitude toward the rest of the world. That the institution can change for the better has been shown by recent history, and I have no doubt that these suggestions will be adopted if the leadership has the objectivity and courage that is needed for change.

—Scott Smith
Calabasas

Dear Editor:

My congratulations for your attempt at a thorough report on Scientology. I have been a Scientologist for nearly 20 years and have rarely seen anything but hatchet jobs on Scientology in the press. You obviously held in the reins of the writers, or the writers are in themselves unusual. Although their preconceived conclusions do show through — they're no Woodward and Bernstein — they *did* work at it. I

didn't burn the paper, after all.

Your writers got one thing 100 percent right: The attack of the powerful agencies seeking to squelch Scientology has the potential of making *this* spirit feel like David in the grasp of Goliath. As the person who personally devised and instituted the "Minutemen" you so grossly misrepresented, I can assure you that Cointelpro is not a fig-newton of Scientologists' imaginations. Your comment about the church's ". . . facade of good will" (substantiated by locks on doors and security measures) is a slur. The fact is, many agents provocateurs have been uncovered and documented. The security measures you mention were initiated in defense of the "squirrels" who went on a spree of stealing copies of the religious technology so they could set themselves up in business. They also have a propensity for altering the technology, cheating their marks out of the potential gains of the church's Standardized Technology. You must have put out a cattle call to find as many squirrels as you did. Then again, Planet Earth isn't Gilligan's Island. Evil is quite real.

Incidentally, no one can responsibly study Scientology and make a statement like "The Church criticizes psychiatry while selling pseudo-Freudian counseling." The two are antipodal in concept and arch-enemies, both in technique and goal. Ask a psych-o-anything for a useful definition of the mind if you want to observe obvious confusion. Then let him know that "psyche" means "spirit," so he can get the idea of how far out in left field he is without noticing it. The shrinks hate any concept that is spiritual, because spirits who know who they are cannot be behavior-modified. Shrinks have been brainwashed, by the best of them.

—R.P.
Eagle Rock

Dear Editor:

The price we pay for religious freedom in this country is that thugs like Reverend Moon, Jim Jones and L. Ron Hubbard can use fraud and deception to prey on troubled people, subject them to all-or-nothing emotional alignment, and steal their lives, liberty and property. In your expose of Hubbard's con game, you bent over backward to be fair, an obvious effort to preclude legal harassment. But in doing so, you cut them enough slack to hang themselves with their own lies and double-speak. Hats off to you!

One of the myths perpetrated by Hubbard is that Scientology is both a religion and a science. It is neither. Anyone not too lazy or brainwashed can discover that Dianetics and Scientology are an eclectic mish-mash of ideas stolen from psychotherapy, Religious Science, Rosicrucians, Freemasons, Templars, the Cabala, Yoga Sutras, Aleister Crowley, et cetera. Hubbard re-packaged these ideas, copyrighted them and sold them back to the public for a profit. What a guy!

At best, Scientology is "in the business of selling religion" — a big "sting operation" to separate the gullible from their life's savings with promises of immortality, increased IQ and supernatural powers. The only thing that is "clear" in Scientology is the fact that L. Ron Hubbard was a pathological liar, and in the obscure stratosphere of Xemu-land, this appears to have been a communicable disease.

—A Former Scientologist
Los Angeles

Write to Editor, L.A. Weekly, P.O. Box 29905, L.A., CA 90029. Include name and address (withheld on request) and daytime phone. Letters may be edited.