

## SPECIAL REPORT

# Hubbard: Prophet or snake-oil salesman?

Was Lafayette Ron Hubbard, founder of Dianetics and the inspiration behind the Church of Scientology, a profoundly gifted man destined for sainthood? Or was he a fraud who routinely lied about his accomplishments in order to bilk millions from his followers?

Even after his death in 1986 at the age of 75, Hubbard's writings on Scientology — often slightly updated versions of earlier "discoveries" — continue to be published and some two million followers remain faithful.

The media, too, continues to be fascinated with Hubbard, if only because of his incredible staying power. He survived numerous controversies, including charges of tax evasion and larceny of government documents, and weathered the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

*Time* magazine's lengthy obituary for Hubbard in February 1986 stated the Church of Scientology was reputed to have assets in excess of \$280 million.

In *Bare-Faced Messiah*, a 1987 biography of Hubbard, author Russell Miller faithfully details Hubbard's humble beginnings on a farm in Montana and his accomplishments as a writer of "pulp"

science fiction, but then departs radically from church accounts of its founder's life, as well as Hubbard's own fantastical version.

Miller considers Hubbard little more than a "liar" who fabricated stories of his childhood and world travels and overestimated his own importance, even before he published *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* nearly 40 years ago.

Hubbard's childhood is described as "prosaic," his "explorations" as half-hearted disasters, his "research" as superficial forays into complex subjects, his advanced education as a few classes, and his many heroic adventures in the Navy and Far East as undocumented.

According to Miller, in 1927, during one of Hubbard's trips to China to visit his father, a naval officer, he wrote in his diary, "The trouble with China is there are too many chinks here."

It may be revealing that Hubbard supposedly made the following now-famous remark at a conference for adventure/action story writers in 1949:

"Writing for a penny a word is ridiculous. If a man really wants to make a million dollars, the best



Controversy surrounds the motives the late L. Ron Hubbard, the father of Dianetics and the Church of Scientology.

way would be to start his own religion."

Always on guard against attacks in the media, the church published a point-by-point refutation of Miller's biography in which Hubbard's remark about religion is called a "falsehood."

In 1950, Hubbard published his landmark *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, a book that would become the cornerstone of his philosophical meanderings and would pave the way for the Scientology, his "applied religious philosophy."

The Church of Scientology was founded in 1954, not by Hubbard, but by those sufficiently inspired by *Dianetics* and Hubbard's initial writings.

Hubbard's arrogance and what Miller calls his "disregard for literal truth" caught up with him before and after the establishment of the church, entangling him in a morass of legal problems up until the time of his death:

The Church of Scientology has won, lost and again won its tax-exempt status over the past 30 years or so (except the Church of Scientology of California, according to the Internal Revenue Service) and won a legal battle to use its E-Meter, a skin galvanometer

that allegedly measures areas of emotional and physical distress.

In 1978, the church lost a much-publicized legal battle with the IRS and the U.S. Justice Department.

Eleven church members, along with Hubbard's third wife, Mary Sue, were indicted on charges of burglary, bugging and obstruction of justice over a 3½-year period. The members were charged with conspiring to infiltrate government offices and stealing files from IRS and Justice Department attorneys in 1976.

In May 1985, a court ruled that the church had "misled" a former member and would have to pay her \$39 million in damages.

According to *Newsweek* magazine, Hubbard lived his last years secluded in an English mansion he bought from the Maharajah of Jaipur.

In his will he left a generous sum to Mary Sue and four of his five children.

The fifth, Ronald DeWolf (who bears his grandmother's maiden name), dissociated himself from his father in 1982, according to Miller, calling Hubbard a "habitual liar, paranoid, schizophrenic and megalomaniac who fabricated most of his qualifications and wrote *Dianetics* off the top of his head."