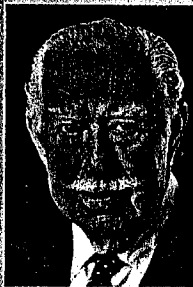


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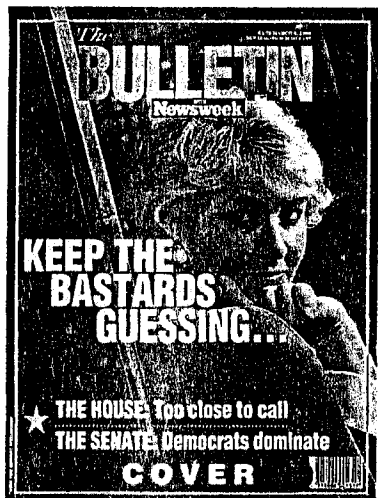


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L. Ron Hubbard

Church of secrets

In the dark: Scientologists enlist the heavy hand of the law to quash attempts to scrutinise their beliefs

By DAVID MILLIKAN

YOU ARE PERHAPS SICK OF HEARING that Kate Ceberano, Nicole Kidman, Tom Cruise, John Travolta and various other luminaries owe their glittering fame and wealth to Scientology. You may also have noticed that Scientology is taking ads on buses. The days of the kids with clipboards eyeballing you on the street to ask if you would like to do a personality test are fading. Scientology is moving to big business and the Internet.

The Church of Scientology tends to live by the sword in dealing with any person or organisation who would challenge its right to be treated on equal terms with Christianity and the other religions in this country. Scientologists have shown a remarkable ability to survive hostile legislation and attacks from governments around the world. In Australia they were the subject of high-level inquiries in Victoria and South Australia in the 1960s, when strenuous efforts were taken in those states to refuse recognition of the church of Scientology. The Scientologists took their case to the Australian High Court

and forced the court in 1983, for the first time, to enshrine a definition of religion in Australian law. On the basis of that judgment it has been a church ever since.

Recently, life in Australia has been fairly quiet for Scientologists. From their headquarters in Castlereagh Street, Sydney, they have been growing slowly but steadily. Their last major public effort was in the royal commission into deep sleep therapy at Sydney's Chelmsford private hospital in the 1980s. But this is not surprising; they have an implacable hatred of contemporary psychology and its techniques.

Determined litigants: But elsewhere things are not so quiet. In the United States and Europe they have been under sustained attack and are again living up to their reputation as the most fierce and determined litigants in the religious world.

Scientology this year celebrates the 40th anniversary of the publication by its founder, L. Ron Hubbard, of *Dianetics*. The faithful look back to this event as the beginning of wisdom and hope in the world. Since then they have established centres in more than 100 countries, with more than 2000 churches and 10,000

people working as volunteers and salaried employees. There is great dispute about their membership. The Scientologists say they have as many as 8 million members throughout the world. Their detractors are less generous, putting the number as low as 200,000. What the real figure is depends on how you count them. The business structure of the church is extremely complex, reaching through many companies holding various stakes in the holy, copyrighted, infallible and priceless scriptures of Hubbard.

Things began hotting up in April 1992, when lawyers for the COS filed a \$US416 million libel action in the US Federal Court against *Time* and writer Richard Behar for Behar's acerbic cover story on the church, "Scientology: The Cult of Greed". Behar said the COS was a "hugely profitable global racket" that had "shielded itself exquisitely behind the First Amendment as well as a battery of high-priced criminal lawyers and shady private detectives".

The case against *Time* continues, but the enor-

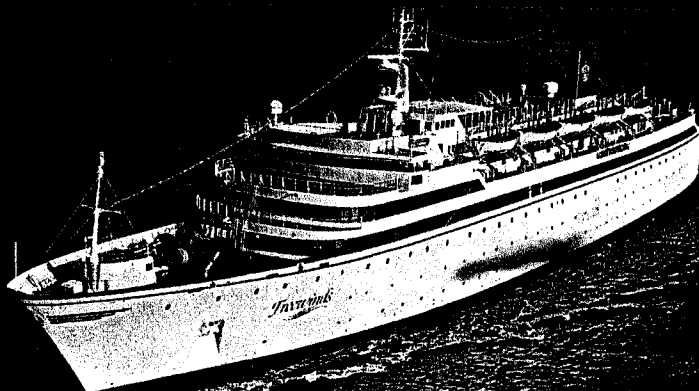
BELOW: The COS Celebrity Centre International won a 1993 award for "the revitalisation of Hollywood"



LEFT: "Auditing", not of the COS accounts, but of parishoners' needs

RIGHT: The main COS facility in Los Angeles

BELOW: More advanced spiritual salvage is done at sea on the *Freewinds*



mous cost and pain of such actions has sent shivers through media outlets throughout the world. In Australia, there is no newspaper or television station which does not tread with great care around any story which involves the COS.

In the past 18 months the legal action has reached new heights. It stems from the action of former high-ranking Scientologists who took some of the secret documents of the church with them when they left. Steven Fishman, a former Scientologist, was quoted in the *Time* article and was also sued. During his defence Fishman submitted to the court a series of high-level course materials written by Hubbard. These highly secret documents have been the focus of the church's recent barrage of lawsuits. The COS has claimed that Fishman stole these documents, which were held in only seven secure locations around the world and are seen only under the most secure circumstances by members of the church who have attained an elevated level through the completion of a series of courses.

Exposure: During the case against Fishman, copies of the documents were placed on the public record. The church repeatedly requested that the documents be removed from public access. People associated with the church spent months on a roster arriving early each

morning at the Los Angeles courtroom to book out the documents and hold them for the day. But someone managed to get a copy, and within days the papers' contents began appearing on dozens of sites on the Internet around the world. And thus we have the problem today.

On February 13, 1995, Church of Scientology representatives and local police raided the home of former Scientologist Dennis Erlich in Glendale, California, seizing his computers, disks and many other items. The church subsequently bought an action against Erlich as well as against the Internet access provider, Netcom On-Line Services, and the Bulletin Board Service operator, Tom Klemesrud. On November 21 the judge in this case, Ronald Whyte, issued an interim ruling which involved a decisive victory for the Church of Scientology. He has argued that the case must go to trial and the liability of Netcom and Klemesrud is a matter to be decided by his court. They now face months of legal battles worth millions of dollars.

Last August, former Scientologist

Arnie Lerma's home was raided in circumstances similar to that of the Erlich raid. At the same time the church sued Lerma's Internet service provider, Digital Gateway Systems. When the *Washington Post* (now owned by the Moonies - the Unification Church founded by Sun Myung Moon in 1954, which has a number of international businesses) wrote

about this matter and included 46 words from the "sacred scripture" it was also sued.

On August 12 last year the homes of former Scientologists Lawrence Wollersheim and Bob Penny were raided by Scientology representatives accompanied by US federal

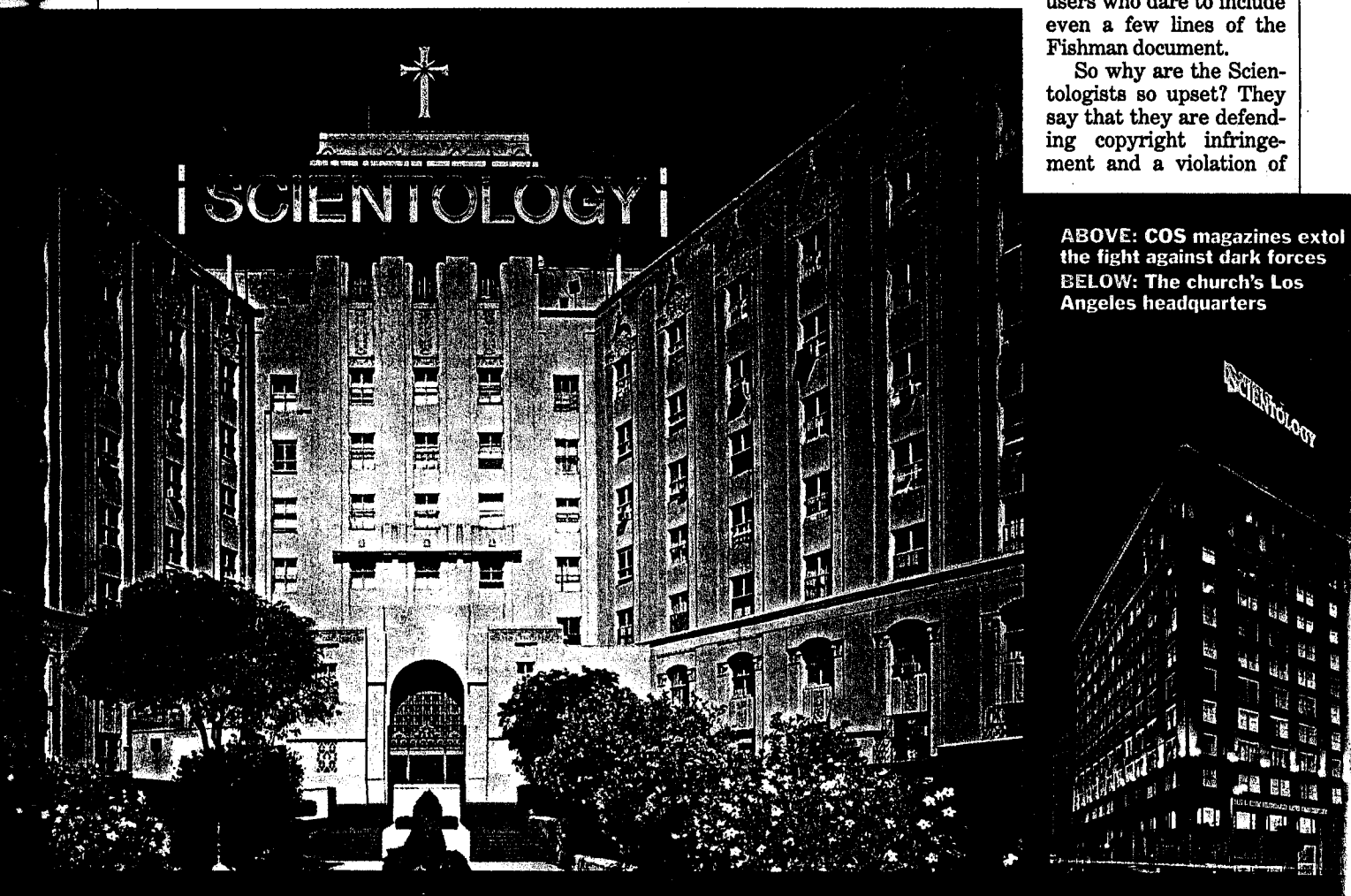
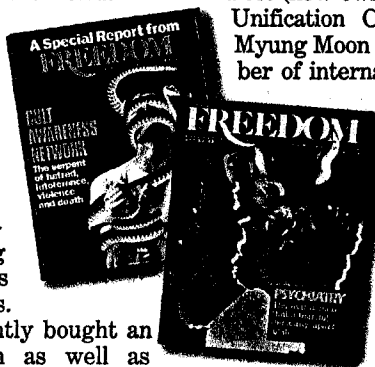
marshals. Wollersheim recently won a multi-million-dollar lawsuit against the church. He is still waiting to collect.

On September 5, agents of the church, with a locksmith, local police and two "computer experts", entered the premises of an Internet service provider in Amsterdam.

And so it goes on.

This is by no means the whole list - COS lawyers have sent E-mails and faxes threatening legal action against Internet users who dare to include even a few lines of the Fishman document.

So why are the Scientologists so upset? They say that they are defending copyright infringement and a violation of



ABOVE: COS magazines extol the fight against dark forces
BELOW: The church's Los Angeles headquarters

trade secrets. The information in the Fishman documents are course descriptions written by Hubbard for a program to transform an individual into an "operating thetan" with extraordinary powers. In the past five years the church has been through an exhaustive process producing an authorised, complete and scrupulously accurate version of the entire output of Hubbard's writings and recorded tapes. It is an astonishing amount of writing and, in total, constitutes the infallible and inviolate scripture of the Church of Scientology.

According to COS president Reverend Herber C. Jentzsch in a speech celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Church of Scientology, delivered on January 1 this year: "The church has gone to great lengths to clear away mysteries and misconceptions. Dianetics and Scientology books can be found in all public libraries and in local bookstores. The entirety of its scripture are [sic] available to anyone who desires spiritual betterment and who reaches for it."

Mystery: Despite Jentzsch's concern about removing the mystery, few people actually know the full picture of what Scientology teaches. The Fishman documents opened a door into the elevated levels available to only the very few. As the Australian High Court ruled, Scientology is a religious belief system and like all religions it has its prophet or messiah. L. Ron Hubbard is their man. Without question Scientologists say he is the greatest being to have lived on Earth. They accept his writings as the key to understanding life and as the only hope for salvation in this world. The passion

they bring to the protection of Hubbard's writings is similar to that which we have come to expect of Muslims who will protect the honour of their prophet, Mohammed.

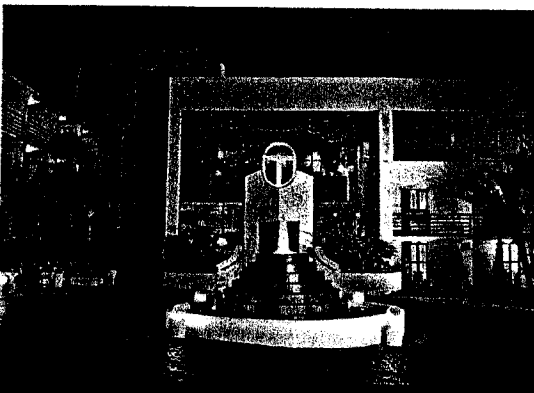
They ascribe to Hubbard superhuman mental powers. They say that by the time he was a teenager, he was fluent in many languages. For example, on his application for officer training during World War II, Hubbard said he had a working knowledge of Spanish, Japanese, "Pekin" and "Shanghai pidgin", Chamorro and Tagalog. By his late teens he was said to have travelled to various Asian countries and sat at the feet of some of the great seers and mystics of the time. He read all the major texts of Asian and Western philosophy. He came to understand Buddhism, shamanism, and Indian mysticism. In short, Hubbard was a man of such magnitude that he was able to encompass the entire body of human wisdom and distil its essence into a series of writings. These are the scriptures of Scientology and, believers say, they provide the answers to questions about the future of this world and all who live in it.

There is an intense urgency about Scientology, for they believe we are surrounded and influenced by dark and

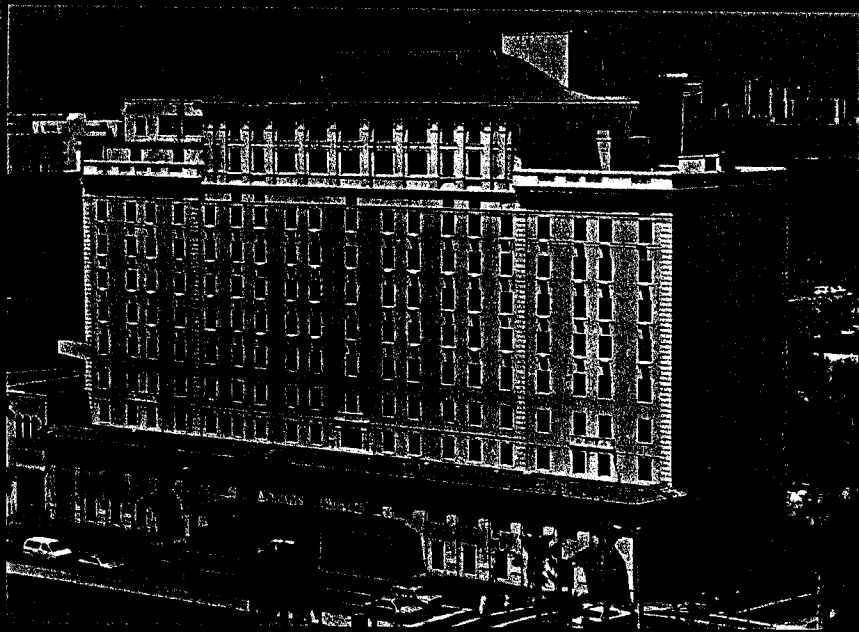
powerful spiritual forces. When we die, for example, they believe the true self, the thetan, goes to one of many "implant stations" where, without the protection of a life of Scientology, we become prey to capricious forces which can play vicious games with our minds and send us back to earth in a damaged state.

Reincarnation: Scientologists have a low opinion of the body. They see the "flesh" as the receptacle of thetans who come and go through an infinite number of reincarnations. Hubbard's vision stretches back "trillions of years" to galactic incidents where millions of thetans were traumatised - some were frozen, some exploded by hydrogen bombs. These now seek, through reincarnation as humans on Earth, a means of recovery from the pains of the past, through the insights of Hubbard.

In the past month in the United States, Judge Leonie Brinkema found in favour of the COS, saying the documents which Fishman and others released on the Internet were copyrighted and the church was entitled to damages and legal fees. It was a major win for the Scientologists. But this is not the end of it. Decisions in Germany, Holland and elsewhere could well go against the church. But for the moment, the Fishman documents have disappeared and the days of the Internet's role as an anonymous forum where anything goes are over. It also means that the public will have to wait a little longer to get the full picture of what Scientologists believe. ■



BIG STUFF: The Sandcastle (right) and Fort Harrison (below) are just two of 20 COS buildings in Clearwater, Florida ... its largest centre in the world



BELOW: A typical Church of Scientology study centre
BOTTOM: Saint Hill College in East Grinstead, England

