

Those affected disagree

Scientology: Self control or mind control?

Opinions about the Church of Scientology run from hot to cold, and from very hot to very cold. In the third segment of a four-part series on the church, the Valley News samples some of those opinions and tells the stories behind them. An accompanying story describes the experience of a young couple who left the church without bitterness despite some disturbing incidents.

By BRIAN ALEXANDER

The price is high, and the pressure to buy is heavy, but the technology is hot.

That's the consensus of those who have been involved in the Church of Scientology. Some say the self-knowledge and happiness gained through Scientology counseling is worth any price, financial or otherwise. Others are more moderate. A few feel it's worthless or worse.

"I do not regret for one moment spending the money," says a man who, along with his wife, paid the church \$20,000 in three years (see accompanying story). "Basically, Scientology is a phenomenal discovery and there are wonderful pieces of technology there for helping mankind."

"It works," says Bettylou Goodrich, a young mother and working woman. "I tried psychiatry, parent effectiveness training — nothing worked except Scientology. It's a mood lifter."

Ms. Goodrich is a newcomer to Scientology, having completed a communications course. But already, she says, she has learned ways of relating to her children more honestly.

She says the organization helped her turn a troublesome, messy daughter into a helpful one. By "confronting" her daughter, and by actively seeking opportunities to praise her, rather than nagging, she received direct communication and consideration in return.

"After one week of this," she says, "she was waiting on me hand and foot."

Ms. Goodrich said her sister is an advanced Scientologist, as is the sister's husband. The couple is "always laughing, a delight to be around," she says. Her sister uses a technique called "touch assist" to alleviate physical pain. If she bumps her head on a door, for instance, she goes through the motions of bumping her head again, thereby "releasing the charge from the experience."

Terry Del Rio, a young working woman with several relatives in Scientology, is also enthusiastic about the "technology" of the church.

"They do make you feel pressured," she says, "and I still don't like that. But the rest of it, the technology of it, all those things Ron Hubbard found out are fantastic."

Hubbard founded Scientology in 1952, and is credited with developing the teachings and counseling techniques of the organization. Ms. Del Rio took a basic communications course and a course to improve her study habits. She repeated the communications course because she "didn't get much out of it" the first time.

Ms. Del Rio is not involved in Scientology now although she would be if she could afford it. Counseling or "auditing" costs \$60 per hour. She recalls her communications course cost \$35 to \$50 and her study course cost \$100 to \$125.

The cost was higher for an Arizona woman who wrote to the Valley News Open Line column, a consumer action team.

"Please help," wrote Marilyn S. Martin of Mesa, Ariz. "Last March I got involved in an organization, Scientology, and after a couple of weeks of their constant harassment they managed to get money out of me for one of their courses."

Ms. Martin never said what course she had signed up for but she said she asked for a refund before starting the instruction, and was refused. The amount she paid, she said, was \$1,675.

She described her prolonged and fruitless efforts to obtain a refund. Only after Open Line contacted the appropriate Scientology office did she begin to receive her refund at the rate of \$100 per week, although a spokesman said the church was not legally required to repay her.

Mrs. Davis (not her real name) says she lost more than just money to the church. She lost her husband.

Preferring to remain anonymous because, she said, "the church sues everyone" who is critical of it, she described the breakup of her 12-year marriage after her husband joined Scientology.

After a severe business setback left Davis in a state of nervous breakdown, his wife says he was "very vulnerable to suggestion." Nevertheless, she knew someone who claimed Scientology could work

wonders, so Mrs. Davis introduced her husband to the friend and thereby to the church.

"I've always believed that any church is as good as any other," she says.

The Scientology personality test "revealed" that Davis was afraid of an early death, because his father had died at age 42. Since the church promotes the concept of an eternal spirit — in essence, a kind of life after death — Davis came home "elated." He wanted to take a course which would cost \$1,250. It was a two-day course called "Life Repair," she says.

Mrs. Davis asked for time to think about the expenditure and he agreed. But the next day, she was notified of a check for \$1,250 drawn on the couple's joint bank account. Since the couple had too little cash to cover the check, she sold some bonds. She recalls what she learned of the course:

"It's like a concentrated auditing process. And auditing really means that they want to find out your weaknesses and then they sort of home in on them. They use them to their own advantage."

Davis grew more involved in the church and soon demanded that his wife join, too. Reluctantly, she went in with him for a talk with a counselor. The counselor was extremely solicitous, she says, and agreed that her husband had handled the money situation poorly.

But Mrs. Davis preferred Christianity to Scientology. Her husband no longer spoke of his new faith, and became a model family man where once he had been a "workaholic." He even remembered his wife's birthday for the first time in 12 years. Mrs. Davis grew suspicious.

Then one day he said, "See how great I am now that I'm in Scientology," and he asked her to enter the church's elite academy, called Sea Org (short for

Sea Organization, and located in Florida). Feeling duty-bound to follow her husband if possible, she asked what changes would be required.

He told her that they would go where they were stationed, take classes as necessary and work for the church. Their two children would live separately and, if the Davises behaved properly they would be allowed to visit the children regularly. They would be paid \$17 per week if they did not earn demerits through poor job performance.

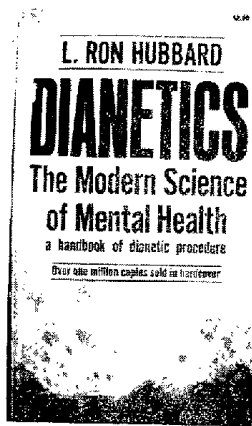
"The rules were incredible," she says.

For four months after she refused his suggestion, he would not speak to her. She grew frantic and sought the advice of a man who once had been highly placed in the Scientology organization. He told her it was standard procedure to use "first warm, then cold" methods of persuading balky relatives to join the church.

Eventually, after Mrs. Davis tried talking to church officials and pleading with her husband, he told her he was going to Sea Org with the woman who was his auditor. The Davises divorced. Davis still sees his children occasionally but Mrs. Davis says her former husband is forbidden to speak with her.

Such stories of religious devotion verging on mind control are not uncommon. The Valley News learned of several specific instances but only Mrs. Davis was willing to tell her story, even anonymously. Fear of reprisals from the church pervades the lives of those who oppose it. For these people, the church takes a toll far beyond its tithes.

(Tomorrow: The concluding segment of this series, containing further revelations about this unusual religion. An accompanying article will explore the controversial Hubbard Electrometer.)



Technology versus the Ethics Department

After three years and \$20,000 invested in the Church of Scientology, Bill and Sarah (not their real names) fled the fold because the church wouldn't let them take a honeymoon.

Bill is a professional in a creative field, fairly successful. He and Sarah have tried various programs of self improvement. In 1966, they began their joint journey into the higher levels of Scientology. They each paid a total of about \$10,000 for church courses and auditing. He says they don't regret spending the time or the money.

"I'm trying to differentiate between the technology of it and the organization," Bill says.

"The reason that my wife and I left was that the organization, from our viewpoint, was very destructive. The people who were running it took over and became influential in our lives — we felt, they were not aiding in our survival."

On the other hand, Bill and Sarah use "hundreds of basic things" they learned in Scientology in their daily lives. For instance, nearly every day they "confront" by sitting face to face and staring at each other. They may remain silent or they may tell each other their dissatisfactions.

"It keeps your life very clear," says Bill. "My wife and I use it a lot and it's phenomenal. It's a phenomenal procedure."

To his friends who intend to join Scientology, he gives his blessing and a warning.

"I make it clear to them not to become a, quote, 'Scientologist.' Because it becomes the only way, and it becomes a method of controlling you. It becomes very difficult to leave."

People who have no strong life goals are especially vulnerable to the church's siren call, Bill feels, because Scientology is "very cause-oriented." The organization has set itself the task of putting the planet's affairs in order, he says.

Bill and Sarah passed through many of the advanced stages on the road to becoming "clear" or free of mental obstructions. Still they felt something was missing.

The death knell of their devotion came when the church's "Ethics Department" balked at allowing them to go on a honeymoon to Switzerland. Why?

"(The attitude was,) you were there to save the planet," Bill explains, "you weren't there to go and have a frivolous adventure, to have a good time. You had a purpose."

The young couple ignored the church and went to Switzerland. There they reviewed their involvement in Scientology and decided the self-determination they had thought they were learning was being taken from them by the teacher.

Bill and Sarah are enthusiastic about another popular movement now — Erhard Seminar Training — which Bill says contains the best elements of Scientology without the organizational drawbacks. But he is still reluctant to talk about some of the high-level "secrets" he learned in Scientology.

"I guess it's like the Masons. You know, they have things that they've found out that they're not supposed to talk about, about the universe and how it's run and what it's all about."

These rather innocuous but still, to the uninitiated, confusing secrets are safe with Bill, for he gave his word not to reveal them. On a more political level, he will say that senior Scientologists often go on "missions" which may be harmless but which are kept mysterious.

"Scientology is a very paranoid organization," Bill says. "And it may be warranted, too, because there are certain people all over the world, they claim, who are very destructive... They are destroying our way of life and they must be taken care of."

He admits he doesn't know how the church tries to "take care of" these "destructive" people. But he does know that, on a very small scale, because of their knowledge of the church, he and Sarah are among the outcasts.

—BRIAN ALEXANDER