

## A Contemporary Ordered Religious Community: The Sea Organization

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**ABSTRACT:** Like most religious traditions, the Church of Scientology has at its core an ordered community, the Sea Organization or Sea Org. The article traces the history of the Sea Org from its beginnings in 1967 to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and describes recruitment, role within the Church of Scientology, and life in the community. It also explores the controversial and much misunderstood topic of the relationship of the Sea Org with Scientology's ethics and the program for reforming members who committed serious offenses known as Rehabilitation Project Force (RPF).

**KEYWORDS:** Scientology, Church of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, Sea Org, Rehabilitation Project Force, RPF.

### *Introduction*

This paper, a new version of earlier studies published in 1999 and 2001, has grown out of more than fifty years of observation of the Church of Scientology, which began in 1964 in Chicago. Since 1985, when I moved to California, I had many opportunities to visit Sea Org facilities in Hollywood, California, talk informally with Sea Org members, and gather literature on the church and the Sea Org, all of which has been deposited in the American Religion Collection at the Davidson Library at the University of California – Santa Barbara. Although I later moved to Texas, this collection in California still houses the largest academic collection of material published by and about the Church of Scientology, accumulated during several decades.

This study also included structured interviews with members of the Sea Org and more than a dozen participants in the Rehabilitation Projects Force, in Copenhagen, Los Angeles, and Clearwater, Florida. I was assisted in the initial

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Any study of the Church of Scientology encounters a number of methodological problems, not the least of which are (1) the complex organizational structure, and (2) the massive literature (including an increasing amount of audio-visuals) in which the church's beliefs, practices, policies, and organizational procedures are spelled out in great detail. Added to that is the abundance of controversial material written by former members and critics, some quite intense, and a variety of important documents filed as briefs or depositions in court cases. At the same time, there is a relative lack of more objective scholarly studies (but see an early bibliography in Frenschkowski 1999, as well as Melton 2000; Christensen 2007; Lewis 2009; Urban 2011; Lewis and Hellesøy 2017, although the articles in the edited volumes are of uneven quality). At every step of the way, one must make critical decisions about relevant materials. Unlike many new religions about which there is almost no written material, Scientology has led to the production of a veritable mountain.

Given its size and importance, the literature about the Sea Org published by the church is quite small, the primary items being an old 1999 recruitment piece (Church of Scientology International 1999), and a brief description in *What Is Scientology?* (Church of Scientology International 1998a). Some of the history, however, may be found in a set of lectures Hubbard gave in 1969 concerning the Sea Org.

As with all religions, Scientology has experienced individuals who have joined the church, participated in its activities, and later lost their faith in its teachings. While many former members continue to appreciate their participation in the movement, some former members come to believe that Scientology is a false system, that the practice of auditing is valueless, and that people who continue to be affiliated with Scientology are wrong-headed. Given the cultural context in which Scientology operates, a few have even come to question the genuineness of the religious nature of Scientology and the spiritual component in the life of the average Scientologist. This scope of opinions, both supportive and opposed to Scientology belief and practice and which may be expressed in highly emotive language, constitute theological assessments. As such, they are outside the scope of this paper, which takes no position on the truth or falsity of Scientology. It also

takes no position on the effectiveness or validity of auditing, beyond the fact that many people who have tried it report its helpfulness, and some who have tried it found it ineffective for them.

### *Ordered Communities*

Most major religious traditions have made room for and encouraged the development of organizations and associations that provide a structure in which their most committed members may give their full-time effort to the deepening of their commitment through purely religious activities, and offer their life in service to humanity, the larger religious community of which they are a part, and the divine as they conceive it. These associations are usually structured as intentional and ordered communities, though their actual organization varies widely, from the Eastern Orthodox monastic community on Mount Athos in Greece to the wandering *sannyasin* ascetics in India. Many ordered communities are celibate, others admit married members. Some reside in intimate relationship in tightly structured centers, while others are rather loosely dispersed, with members engaged in various service enterprises.

Members of such committed structures have been generally known for a range of practices, including the assumption of special tasks and disciplines not expected of the rest of their parent community. Entering the special status of the organization usually begins with the taking of an oath of long-term commitment analogous to marriage vows. Many members of religious communities, for example, live a scheduled existence in which obedience to earthly superiors is a high virtue. Within the Roman Catholic tradition, to obedience, monastic vows generally also add poverty and chastity. The Eastern Orthodox Church selects its leadership from among its monks, as do Tibetan Buddhists. Monks and nuns commonly adopt different sexual mores, wear clothing marking their special role in the community, and form an intimate relationship with their fellow sisters and brothers that competes with, if it does not entirely replace, their previous familial attachments. *Sannyasins*, for example, once having assumed their new name and status, often refuse to talk about or consider their prior life and identity. A growing body of literature relates the experience of Westerners who encountered the rigors of monastic life in various Eastern locations (see e.g. Grimshaw 1994).

Even among groups that largely abandoned, or even denigrated, the monastic life, some accommodation to disciplined community emerged. Protestantism immediately comes to mind. Protestants rejected the celibate priesthood, and during their formative period closed the monasteries and nunneries, only to have them reappear several centuries later. Protestant history is replete with accounts of, for example, pietist communal groups such as the Ephrata Community and the Oneida Perfectionists, the Deaconess movement in the Lutheran (Weiser 1962; Nelson 1975, 197–98 and 299–300) and Methodist (Meyer 1889) churches, modern experiments such as the Chicago-based Ecumenical Institute (Cryer 1966) and the hippie communities associated with the Jesus People movement of the 1970s, the largest and most successful being Jesus People, U.S.A. (Eskridge 2013; Young 2015). Among Protestants, intentional communities frequently became for all intents and purposes new denominations, with a few such as the Hutterites growing into large international organizations (Oved 1993; Pitzer 1997).

Western Esotericism, the surviving remnant of the ancient Gnostic tradition that reemerged in the seventeenth century as Rosicrucianism, produced a series of ordered communal expressions, from the German Rosicrucian group that established itself on Wissahickon Creek in Germantown, Pennsylvania in the 1690s (Holloway 1951), to the more recent Holy Order of MANS (Lucas 1995). Among Theosophists, communal life flourished in the early twentieth century (Melton 1997), and Gnostic bishop George Burke built a community of monks in 20<sup>th</sup> century Nebraska (Burke 1994).

Given the ubiquity of ordered religious communities, it is no surprise that various new religions have developed their own variations on monastic life. Among the more interesting of these new ordered communities are The Way Corps, the committed community that existed within The Way International (*The Way Magazine* 1992); the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society (Ross 1989); and the subject of this paper, the Sea Organization, commonly known as Sea Org, founded in 1967 by L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), the person around whose thought the Church of Scientology emerged.

The Sea Org took its name from its origin aboard a fleet of ships, most prominently the *Apollo*, where Hubbard and a number of associates had located in order to continue the development of the teachings and practices of the church, most prominently what are today known as the Operating Thetan or OT

Levels. As Hubbard completed that work, the Sea Org largely transferred its activity to church facilities on land, and Sea Org members were present and active during the reorganization of the church following the trauma it experienced in 1979–80 with the arrest and conviction of a cadre of its leaders associated with the Guardian’s Office (GO). The GO was a special office established in 1966, its stated purpose being to deal with attacks upon the church, so that the main body could continue with its spiritual work apart from the distraction of public controversies.

### *Beginnings*

To understand the Sea Org, it is necessary to understand the particular belief system of the Church of Scientology and its development through its first decade. Scientologists have focused upon the parallels between their thought world and that of various Eastern religions, parallels which exist and are shared by other esoteric groups (Church of Scientology International 1998c). However, many have missed the essential relationship of Scientology to the esoteric tradition, as Western Esotericism has only in the late twentieth century been defined as an academic topic worthy of concentrated study (Faivre 1994, 2000; Hanegraaff 2012).

Scientology is an esoteric Gnostic system based upon the belief that the true self, called the “thetan,” is trapped in MEST (matter, energy, space and time), the visible world. The liberating journey from that entrapped state to total freedom is accomplished in a series of steps, which involve both awareness of one’s state and taking action to detach oneself from the encumbrances that hold the thetan to the material world. In Scientological terms, one crosses “The Bridge to Total Freedom” one step at a time (Church of Scientology International 1998b, 1999b; Church of Scientology Flag Ship Service Organization 1999). The process of moving up along The Bridge is analogous to the degrees or levels of accomplishment familiar to anyone who has studied esotericism. Currently, the highest level in Scientology (OT VIII) is offered only aboard the ship *Freewinds*. The clearest statement of Hubbard’s Gnostic worldview is found in the brief document called *The Factors* and the 1953 lecture on the topic (Hubbard 1995, 2005).

Important to Scientology is a belief that the thetan has, over the millennia, been embodied on many occasions, a belief commonly called reincarnation, though Scientologists generally avoid the term (Hubbard 1968). They also eschew any idea of transmigration, i.e. the belief that the thetan would incarnate into any animal form less than human. In the first stage of Scientology, one concentrates on removing from the thetan some encumbrances acquired both in this life and in past existences. These encumbrances, called “engrams,” are described as aberrations attached to the self that produce dysfunctional behavior patterns. The completion of this initial work is symbolized by the acceptance of the status known as “clear.” Once reached that plateau, one is now ready to begin exercising a free life operating as a thetan. The upper levels of Scientology offer the secret wisdom, the *gnosis*, necessary to continue removing the additional encumbrances from past lives and experiencing total freedom.

Scientology’s essential contribution to esotericism has been the wedding of technological precision to the process of spiritual progress. This technology is expressed most prominently in the use of an instrument called the E-meter as an assist in spiritual counseling, coupled with the demand that the processes and format of counseling, called auditing in Scientology, be followed with a high level of exactness. Technological preciseness is equivalent in Scientology to adherence to orthodox belief in conservative Christianity. Thus, deviation from that precision, i.e., alteration of standard “tech,” is considered a serious matter within the church.

By 1966, Hubbard had largely set in place the process of reaching the state of clear, but was aware that there was more. Through that year, he explored the first of what would become the advanced realizations of the church, and released the material associated with the OT I and II levels in August and September respectively. Then, in September 1966, he resigned his role as administrative leader of the church, and turned over its management to a number of trusted associates. This resignation did not mean abandonment of the movement and organization he had founded, but it did mean that he redirected his activity to the further development of the OT levels and the associated activities. He moved aboard a series of ocean-going vessels, illustrative of his own love of the seafarer’s life. They served as his laboratory for experiments and consideration of the implications of what he observed, and the experiences reported to him by those who first shared the life of an operating thetan. A common element in these

experiences was what was termed exteriorization, more commonly designated as out-of-body experience. According to Scientologists, the operating thetan begins to have short periods in which it experiences itself outside the physical body, with a goal of lengthening the stay.

Aboard the *Apollo*, the flagship of the Scientology ships, Hubbard attracted a cadre of older more committed Scientologists, most of whom had no experience aboard such a ship, and who had to learn from scratch the various tasks, from navigation to engine repair to cooking meals for the crew. Several structures were established to concentrate on the vocational training of the crew, including the Pursers Project Force and the Stewards Project Force. The idea of on-the-job training became integral to the development of the Sea Org, which recruited only a minority of people with prior training in the various areas in which they would be called to operate. Life aboard the *Apollo*, and its sister vessels, the *Diana* and the *Athena*, became the crucible in which the Sea Org was initially tested.

The Sea Org was actually established in 1967 by a small group of Scientologists, all of whom were considered to have reached the state of clear, and some of whom had completed the previously released OT I and II levels (OT III was released in September 1967, OT IV, V, and VI were released in January 1968). The Sea Org membership would soon encompass all who worked on the three ships, though they were by no means all clears.

The impact of what was occurring quietly aboard the *Apollo* began to be felt within the larger community of Scientologists in 1968, when the first Sea Org members left the ships to establish the initial Advanced Organizations, at which the material relative to the OT Levels was released to a then relatively small number of designated clears. At the time, there were approximately 500 such individuals, though the number was rapidly expanding. The Sea Org itself expanded through the first half of the 1970s, and in 1975 experienced its first dramatic change, when life aboard the ships was abandoned and what was termed the Flag Land Base was established in Clearwater, Florida, which would become the spiritual center of the faith.

Meanwhile, the leadership of the movement (the organization of the church above the local church centers) had been placed in the hands of the Executive Council Worldwide. However, in 1971, it was determined that the Council was not doing its job adequately. It was disbanded, and its duties (primarily the

management of the church's continental and national offices and its publishing facilities around the world) assumed by the Sea Org.

Through the end of the 1970s, the Sea Org was in charge of the administration of the church internationally and of three additional Scientology structures. First, the Saint Hill Organizations (named for the center in East Grinstead where Hubbard lectured while in England) specialize in the advanced training of auditors. Thus, the Saint Hill Organizations are the Scientology equivalent of seminaries and graduate schools. Saint Hill graduates are deemed the most efficient and qualified auditors within the church. While the basics of auditing training may be acquired in any local Scientology church, those who wish to pursue a career as an auditor, or audit people during their more advanced sessions at the OT levels, would seek Saint Hill training.

Second, the initial Advanced Organizations (AO) were established in 1968 to deliver the OT Levels. The first AOs were opened in Los Angeles and Edinburgh (the latter soon moved to London and then East Grinstead). Today, there are additional Advanced Organizations in several countries.

Third, the Flag Service Organization offered all of the curriculum of the AOs, but also became the first center to offer OT Levels above OT III. Following the release of the OT IV-VI Levels, OT VII was initially made available in 1970. Prior to the establishment of the Flag Land Base, these higher levels could be accessed only aboard the ships and at the two Advanced Organizations.

In the process of pursuing the OT levels, church members are given access to a set of confidential materials that include the instructions for the spiritual exercises to be followed to gain the particular benefits of that level, as well as the most complete statement of the religious myth underlying all of Scientology. Myth here is, of course, used in its technical meaning currently employed in the field of religious studies as a narrative that expresses the principles that a community of people highly value. The religious myth should be studied for making an overall evaluation of Scientology's place on the large religious landscape. This presents an obstacle for any outsider who wishes to understand the Scientology worldview. As is typical of esoteric organizations, the church has gone to great lengths to prevent the publication of its confidential documents, which it made the subject of a set of court cases since the mid 1990s. These cases were especially directed toward several former members who attempted to post the materials on the Internet. A small cadre of former members, who had access to



the documents prior to their leaving, dedicated a significant amount of time to various attempts to publish the materials in such a way that the church could not prevent access to them. On the legal front, the church has continually moved against such attempts, that include dumping the documents into court records to entering them into various government proceedings. Some scholars have taken at face value the confidential documents posted on the Internet by disgruntled ex-members (see e.g. Raine 2015). Apart from any ethical consideration about the use of documents published illegally, such exercises also run the risk of relying on texts whose authenticity cannot be proved.

Fortunately, with the continued publication (in both audio and literary formats) of Hubbard's many lectures, all of the core elements of the myth have been made available and can be accessed by anyone without reference to the confidential documents, though some diligence is required as the references are scattered in a variety of sources (good starting points are Hubbard 1990, Church of Scientology International n.d.; tape sets such as *The Dawn of Immortality*, *The Time Track of Theta*, *Secrets of the MEST Universe*, and *A Series of Lectures on the Whole Track* are also relevant).

### *The Trauma of 1979*

In 1979, the church began to experience a trauma of immense proportions, analogous on a smaller scale to the sequence Reformation/Counter Reformation that hit the Roman Catholic Church in the sixteenth century. After decades of complaints that the church had become corrupt at the highest levels, and a major schism by those seeking its reform, the Roman Catholic Church finally called a church council and instituted widespread reforms that dominated the church into the twentieth century. Ordered communities, including the Dominicans and the newly founded Jesuits, played a central role in these reforms.

In 1979, nine high Scientology officials connected with the Guardian's Office (GO), including the Office's Controller, Mary Sue Hubbard (1931–2002), and the Church's Guardian Worldwide, Jane Kember, were arrested. The following year, they were convicted in Federal Court of several crimes, arising from their attempt to infiltrate and remove copies of files on the church from the offices of the FBI and IRS. Following their conviction, the Church of Scientology

discovered that the GO had significantly overstepped its bounds, and high church officials and their agents had committed a variety of illegal acts.

The GO, once formed, was headquartered at Saint Hill Manor in England. It also began to reproduce itself and soon most local churches had one or more of its representatives on its staff. The GO operated somewhat autonomously and in addition formed an Intelligence Bureau, which operated in secret from all but the GO's higher officials. The Guardian's Office also competed with the Sea Org for hegemony within Scientology. Once the problems in the Office became known, the internal process of investigating and dealing with them took several years.

To date, the story of all that occurred in the GO has yet to be assembled. Anti-Scientology literature has discussed many of the activities, though often in their attack upon the present Church of Scientology, they are discussed in such a way as to obscure the fact that they are talking about the GO in the 1970s. The church has naturally be less than eager to highlight what is an embarrassing part of its history. Above and beyond the attempt to gather the material from the IRS and FBI files that brought the GO down, many of the more egregious activities are now well-known. They include a spectrum of covert operations such as a plan (never implemented) to have journalist Paulette Cooper (who had written an anti-Scientology book) incarcerated in some manner; break-ins at the offices of people who opposed Scientology; and various "dirty tricks" designed to embarrass or call into question the credibility of Scientology's critics. A full account of the GO activities is beyond the scope of this paper.

As the criminal trial of the church officers in the United States proceeded, Scientology launched its internal review of the GO management. Based upon its own assessment, a complete reorganization of the church at the national, continental, and international level was begun in April 1981 with the first preliminary investigations of the facts. In July, Mary Sue Hubbard, the wife of L. Ron Hubbard, was asked to resign. Action in line with internal church policy was begun against eleven senior GO officials, all of whom resigned their church posts in October. Through 1982, the investigation expanded resulting in a number of those involved in what was considered improper conduct being released from their position in the church and a few being expelled entirely. Still others chose to leave the church at this time. It was eventually decided that the GO was unsalvageable as a church agency. In 1983, it was totally disbanded and its functions assigned to a variety of new agencies (Longley 1983). Also in 1983,

the international headquarters of the church was relocated to Los Angeles, where it remains.

Meanwhile, as the investigation of the GO proceeded, three important new structures were also created. The Church of Scientology International was established as the new “mother” church (using a model not unlike the Mother Church in a different new religion, Christian Science) to have direct oversight of the movement’s otherwise autonomous local churches. A significant part of the GO’s previous functions was assigned to the Office of Special Affairs, a division within the Church of Scientology International. A second organization, Scientology Missions International, was formed to oversee the local Scientology missions (proto-churches not yet large enough to provide all the services that a “church” provides). Both of these structures were then placed into the hands of the members of Scientology’s ordered community, the Sea Organization.

The most important new organization was the Religious Technology Center, a rather unique ecclesiastical structure. RTC was established to ensure that the “technology” of Scientology is properly administered (i.e., orthodoxy and orthopraxis are followed) and remains in its intended hands (i.e., remains in the control of Hubbard’s appointed successors). Hubbard assigned all of his Scientology-related trademarks to the RTC (some of which had formerly been held by the GO), and it is through its control of and ability to license said trademarks that the RTC exercises its authority.

The actual operation of each of these new organizations (and a few other additional organizations, such as the International Hubbard Ecclesiastical League of Pastors) is an interesting subject in itself, but far beyond the scope of this paper. The important point is that all of these new organizations were placed in the hands of the Sea Org. Their creation amounted to the complete reorganization of Scientology, and the assumption by Sea Org members of the leadership role at the national, continental, and international levels. Scientology’s organization is thus quite analogous to the placement of the Roman Catholic Church, and especially the Eastern Orthodox Church, in the care of the clergy and the members of its ordered communities.

For Scientology, the changes of 1980–81 were as significant and as far-reaching as the reforms instituted by Pope Gregory VII (1020–1085) were for Roman Catholicism. During his reign, Gregory moved to end the practice of simony (buying ecclesiastical positions) in the church, and to take the selection of

bishops and priests out of the hands of the king and nobles in whose lands they would work. He asserted the universality of the Pope's jurisdiction and established the principle of papal elections by the College of Cardinals, a change later cemented by the First Lateran Council in 1123 (Cannon 1960, 160–68). Interestingly enough, Gregory relied on his allies in several ordered communities to accomplish his changes.

The reorganization of the Church of Scientology was not well received by all Scientologists, especially those most effected by the disbanding of the GO. Several of those who left the church in the early 1980s went on to write of the change in authority structures in somewhat hostile fashion, and a few who broke with Scientology at this time went on to become some of the church's most hostile and committed critics. They carried with them the knowledge of the actions of the GO and have used that knowledge freely to attack the church. Their revelation of events was supported by the opening of the GO's files by the Federal Court. It remains true today that the overwhelming number of questionable acts mentioned in anti-Scientology literature carried out by church officials and members were instigated by the GO during the 1970s.

Today, almost four decades after the crisis and the reorganization of Scientology internationally, the administration of the movement above the level of the local churches remains the business of the Sea Organization. Sea Org members hold all policy and administrative posts in each of the corporations mentioned above as well as the Celebrity Centres, a set of churches established to respond to the special situation of those in the artistic and entertainment industries. The Celebrity Centres hearken back to previous efforts by different churches to provide space for members of the entertainment industry to develop their spiritual life apart from the glare of the media and the constant reactions by other church members to them as celebrities. Hollywood Presbyterian Church has had a program not unlike the Celebrity Centres for many years. One of its prominent members, Henrietta Mears (1890–1963), founded the Hollywood Christian Group to reach out to the entertainment industry (Orr 1955), which later evolved into the so called "Inter-Mission." Other religious groups have also attempted to interact with celebrities, possibly the most notable examples being the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and the parallel attempts by Evangelical Christians to place "chaplains" with professional sports teams. Evangelical Christians have especially valued the testimonies of celebrities, and world-famous

Evangelical soccer players, many of them from Brazil, have carried the model of the “Athletes for Christ” to Latin America and Europe.

Another relevant organization in the hands of the Sea Org is the Flag Ship Service Organization based on the *Freewinds*, an ocean-going vessel that operates in the Caribbean, where members go to participate in OT VIII and other advanced courses of Scientology.

### *The Sea Org in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

During the more than fifty years of its existence, the Sea Org has grown into a dedicated community of some 5,000 members. This is a relatively small number of church members given the scope of Scientology’s activities internationally, although the issue of how many people belong to the Church of Scientology and the basis of counting church members remains a matter of discussion between church officials, church critics, and other knowledgeable observers of the organization. The resolution of that issue is beyond the scope of this paper.

The Sea Org is the dedicated core of members who have chosen to devote their lives to the spread of Scientology. The largest number of members reside at the church complexes in Los Angeles, Clearwater, Copenhagen, London and Saint Hill (in the UK), and Sydney, as well as aboard the *Freewinds*. Smaller Sea Org centers can be found elsewhere, and individual Sea Org members can at any moment be found elsewhere as their services are needed.

The process of joining the Sea Org has become somewhat institutionalized. In most instances, it begins with a public meeting in a Scientology Church facility, in which a Sea Org representative presents a profile of the work of the organization and invites interested attendees to consider joining. Those who attend such meetings are usually already familiar with the Sea Org from leaflets that are freely distributed in most church facilities, as well as articles in different church periodicals (see e.g. Church of Scientology International 1999a).

At the close of the meeting, those who express an interest in the Sea Org are invited to consider making an initial commitment in the form of signing what has come to be known as the billion-year contract, more recently referred to as the billion-year “commitment” or “pledge.” This brief document is actually a letter of intent of offering oneself for employment and deployment by the Sea Org and to

submit to its rules. To be a part of the Sea Org is not just to join the fraternity, but an agreement to enter into full-time employment by the church and to go where one is needed. However, it closes with the statement, “I contract myself to the Sea Organization for the next billion years.” This symbolic commitment of the individual beyond their present earthly existence is appropriate to a community that believes in reincarnation. It is also somewhat reminiscent of Mormon sealing ceremonies, during which a person is sealed to a spouse beyond this earthly life for “all eternity.”

After the signing of the contract, which is largely of symbolic import, the individuals are given a period of time to consider their decision, but more importantly, to clear up any impediments to their joining the Sea Org. For example, many new Sea Org recruits are already working for the church at one of its local centers. In those cases, they must complete any unfinished tasks with their current job before continuing with the process of joining. Others leave the meeting with a belief that their destiny belongs to the Sea Org. They may have even signed the “billion-year contract,” but are not yet ready to actually join. I have talked to members who waited as long as three or, in one instance, even six years before taking the next step which is to report to the Sea Org’s induction program, called the Estates Project Force (EPF). As part of the training it provides to new Sea Org members, the EPF is one of the organizations that oversee the maintenance and appearance of the buildings inhabited by the Sea Org and the associated grounds. In this capacity, it operates with the guidance of the Base Crew Organization that has general oversight of the building and grounds. Beginning the EPF means a change of residence to one of the large Sea Org centers at Los Angeles, Clearwater, East Grinstead, or Copenhagen.

The completion of the EPF program takes from two weeks to several months (as it includes a self-study program that is completed at different rates by different people). Included in the program is a rigorous daily routine of work and study that introduces people on an experiential level to the nature of the commitment being asked of them. It also introduces them on a cognitive level to the various options for service, the goals of the Sea Org’s activity, and the rules by which they must abide. As the church will invest much in the Sea Org member’s training, and in common with most ordered communities, it wishes to filter out those with a lesser or superficial commitment. The EPF attempts to ensure that each recruit is making an informed and heart-felt assent to the overall vision of what they are

entering. Integral to explaining the Sea Org is a set of lectures given by Hubbard in 1969 to the fledgling group of original members struggling with their new life on a ship. Though most Sea Org members are not working on a ship, the principles articulated are deemed to have universal value.

Following the completion of the EPF program, the recruit makes a final decision to continue, church personnel make a final assessment of the recruit's worth to the organization, and the person is accepted into the Sea Org. If the person has not already done so, s/he now participates in a formal swearing in ceremony that includes the reading of the "Code of a Sea Org Member," sentence-by-sentence, and his/her verbal assent to each clause. The code (posted on the wall of several Scientology buildings) reads as follows:

1. I promise to help get ethics in on this planet and the universe, which is the basic purpose of the Sea Org.
2. I promise to uphold, forward and carry out, Command Intention.
3. I promise to use Dianetics and Scientology for the greatest good for the greatest number of dynamics.
4. I promise to do my part to achieve the Sea Org's humanitarian objective which is to make a safe environment where the Fourth Dynamic Engram can be edited out.
5. I promise to uphold the fact that duty is the Sea Org's true motivation, which is the highest motivation there is.
6. I promise to keep my own personal ethics in and uphold beyond all contemporary honor, integrity and true discipline that is the Sea Org's heritage and tradition.
7. I promise to effectively lead, care for and train those under my charge and to ensure they keep their own ethics in and if that fails to take action with fair and legal justice.
8. I promise to take responsibility for the preservation and the continued full and exact use of the technologies of Dianetics and Scientology.
9. I promise to exemplify in my conduct the belief that to command is to serve and that a being is only as valuable as he can serve others.
10. I promise to improve my worth to the Sea Org and mankind by regularly advancing my knowledge of and ability to apply the truths and technologies of Dianetics and Scientology
11. I promise to accept and fulfill to the utmost of my ability the responsibilities entrusted to me whatever they may be and wherever they may carry me in the line of duty.
12. I promise to be competent and effective at all times and never try to explain away or justify ineffectiveness nor minimize the true power that I am.

13. I promise at all times, to set a desirable example in appearance, conduct and production to fellow Sea Org members and the area in which I operate.

14. I promise to demand that my fellow Sea Org member not fall short of the purpose, ideals and spirit of the Sea Org.

15. I promise to do my part to protect and further the image of the Sea Org.

16. I promise to come to the defense of the Sea Org and fellow Sea Org members whenever needed.

17. I promise through my actions to increase the power of the Sea Org and decrease the power of any enemy.

18. I promise to make things go right and to persist until they do.

It should be clarified that “Command Intention” refers to policies set by an organization at its upper echelons. Those working in a particular organization at the lower echelons may compare what they are doing by reference to the overall policies and goals (broad targets) of the organization. The concept was more fully explained in Flag Order 3793-8 as issued on September 21, 1980 (copy in my collection). The “Fourth Dynamic Engram” refers to an event in the pre-historic past, according to Scientology’s understanding of the evolution of the human race. A disaster befell humans some 75 million years ago and its effect is universal. Removing the negative effects of this disaster is part of the ultimate work of the Sea Org. Each Sea Org member reaffirms the acceptance of the Code in a formal ceremony annually on August 12, the anniversary of the founding of the organization.

Once accepted as a member, the individual is assigned to a job and living quarters. Single members live in a dormitory-like facility and married couples in modest apartments. Most meals are taken communally in a Sea Org managed dining facility. Following a period of training, members work a full day (five days a week) and then have several hours each day for their own spiritual development in personal study, auditing, or course work. Sea Org recruits come from all levels of progress in the overall Scientology program. Sea Org members are to be distinguished from those church workers who are described as being “on staff.” Sea Org is a “superior” order, where members pronounce perpetual vows. Staff is a part of the clergy where members pronounce temporary vows. Sea Org members have additional commitments and policies, as well as a higher level of dedication expected.



Generally, one day a week (Saturday), members will leave their regular job (which may be anything from translating texts, writing legal briefs, or assembling E-meters) and work with the local grounds crew on the buildings or grounds. The Sea Org has shown a pattern of buying rundown property and refurbishing it, and the work of renovation usually involves some form of physical labor from laying brick, installing plumbing or electrical outlets, to planting shrubbery or painting walls. The appearance of the Sea Org facilities in Los Angeles, Copenhagen, and Clearwater are a testimony to the proficiency that members have developed over the years. At various points when the church is preparing for a major event or making a big push to accomplish a particular goal, Sea Org members may work extra long hours (overnight shifts being occasionally reported) for a short period.

It is interesting to compare the daily life of the Sea Org member with that of a Roman Catholic monk or nun. In many respects, they are quite similar, in that both include a preprogrammed routine that includes work and time for spiritual development. They differ somewhat in that in many of the older Roman Catholic cloistered or semi-cloistered orders the life is much more ascetic. A schedule of the daily routine of the different orders is routinely printed in the introductory brochures and informational materials given to people inquiring about the order, particularly those who might consider joining it. I collected several of these schedules. Some routines may have changed in the meantime, but they were in force until a few years ago. For example, the day of a member of the Cloistered Nuns of Perpetual Adoration begins at 5:30 each day. It is punctuated with times of prayer at 11:30 A.M. and at 2, 4 and 7:45 P.M. The sisters retire at 8:45 but rise for the Midnight Office at 12:00 A.M. and then return to their room until a new day begins at 5:30. The Carmelite Nuns of Our Lady of Divine Province rise at 5:40 each day. Their day is marked by Morning Prayer at 6 and mass at 7:30. Their schedule then follows with prayer times at 11:40, 2, 4, 7:30 and 9:30. They retire at 11 P.M. each evening.

Catholic monks/nuns integrate a variety of activities as penances as part of their spiritual growth and effort to deal with human sinfulness. These penances are frequently of a kind that an outsider might consider to be of a humiliating or degrading nature. As one writer in her observation of cloistered nuns noted, “mortification was considered an essential part of most cloistered life, and common penances included frequent fasting, kneeling during meals, and praying for extended periods of time with arms outstretched” (Lieblich 1983, 16; see

also Cita-Malard 1964; Curran 1989). Some practices have changed after the Second Vatican Council, and more recently with the reforms instigated by Pope Francis, but not all and not everywhere.

On Sunday, most Sea Org members attend a weekly worship service, and then work a half-day shift (they may take every other Sunday off). They have the rest of the day to attend to personal needs such as shopping, cleaning their personal space, and washing clothes. Members receive a modest salary that covers their personal needs. The church also arranges for medical care. Most Sea Org members dress in uniforms mildly reminiscent of the group's origin aboard the ships in 1967, though what is considered uniform clothing has become increasingly tailored to the local environment and/or duties of the office.

Married couples in the Sea Org attempt to have a normal married life within the context of their mutual commitment to Scientology. Some choose to have children; many do not. Beginning in 1986, couples who chose to have children were granted a leave of absence from the Sea Org and were reassigned, usually to a staff position at a local church until such time as the child came of age. It has been asserted in some anti-Scientology literature that the church had, at least for a time period, demanded that any female Sea Org members who become pregnant obtain an abortion. I have been unable to find any verification of that allegation, which is also the subject of current litigation in the United States and is vigorously denied by Scientology. Hubbard spoke against abortion in his seminal book *Dianetics* (Hubbard 1950, 112), although officially the church has no position on the practice. Given the nature of the church, were this ever to have become a policy of the Sea Org, there would have undoubtedly been a paper trail of documents, which, if they existed, have never been produced.

It is currently the case that a number of children of Sea Org members have reached adulthood and have themselves joined the Sea Org of their own accord. It is among the basic rules that members, if they want to remain in the Sea Org, may not marry anyone who is not a Sea Org member, nor may they engage in extramarital sexual relationships.

The Sea Org is described as having no formal organization itself. In fact, there is no person designated as head of the Sea Org nor is there a Sea Org hierarchy as such. In fact, this lack of Sea Org organization partially accounts for the relative paucity of material on its life and work. However, concurrent with Sea Org membership, one also develops an employee/employer relationship with one of

the church's organizations that requires most of its staff to be drawn from the Sea Org membership. Thus, each Sea Org member is assigned to a post with a particular structure, be it Church of Scientology International, one of the Advanced Organizations, a Saint Hill facility, a continental organization, one of the church's publishing or multimedia subsidiaries, or one of any of the additional church facilities.

From that point, they develop a relationship to the church through the facility that officially employs them. Each facility is run according to the general organizational structure delineated by Hubbard, and each Sea Org member can locate him/herself on the prominently posted organizational chart. On a practical level, their employer, rather than the entire Sea Org as such, has primary responsibility for the individual member.

After a period of time at any given post, a person may be asked to assume a new job or may decide that they would rather be employed in some other activity or at some different task. In the latter case, they may apply for any openings about which they have become aware, but upon acceptance must finish any incomplete tasks and find a replacement for their post before moving to the new position. In every church facility, an organizational chart is posted showing every job position, and the person assigned to it. The organizational chart will also show any positions that are currently unfilled.

### *The Role of Ethics*

As the first clause of the "Code of the Sea Org Member" implies, ethics is of primary concern to the life of the fraternity, both the upholding of ethics by the individual member and the spread of ethics, as understood within Scientology, through society as a whole. That being the case, the integrating of the ethical system laid out in Hubbard's volume *Introduction to Scientology Ethics* is basic to becoming a Sea Org member (Hubbard 1989: the text has been expanded in each subsequent edition; for a shorter discussion of Scientology ethics see Church of Scientology International 1998a, 285–91).

On an abstract level, Hubbard built his ethical system (as the whole system of Scientology) on the principle of survival. The urge to survive is, Hubbard believed, the dynamic principle of existence, and he observed, "The goal of life in

this universe may be easily and generally defined as an effort to survive as long as possible and attain the most desirable state possible in that survival” (Hubbard 1989, 12). Hubbard also saw the universe in terms of what he described as eight urges or drives in life, the eight dynamics. That is, humans express the urge to survive in eight arenas:

1. Self
2. Creativity (including family and children)
3. Groups (from a circle of friends to the nation)
4. Species (humankind)
5. Life forms
6. Physical Universe of MEST (matter, energy, space, time)
7. Spiritual
8. Infinity.

One may also see in Hubbard’s understanding of the dynamics, at least at a cursory level, a correlation with Abraham Maslow’s (1908–1970) levels of human need, beginning with bare survival and reaching at the higher levels the needs of self-actualization. Like Hubbard, Maslow also proposed understanding the self as basically good.

Ethics in Scientology refers to those actions that an individual undertakes in order to accomplish optimum survival for him/herself and others. Harking back to John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), Hubbard proposed that the highest ethical decisions were those that “brought the greatest benefits to the greatest number of dynamics” (Hubbard 1989, 15). Based upon their contribution to survival in the different arenas, one can judge actions as good or bad. Moral codes express the experience of the race as to what has proven to be at any given moment the actions that produce survival as opposed to those that counter it. Ethical conduct includes the adherence to the codes of the society in which one lives.

One of the difficulties in discussing Scientology among non-Scientists is the massive jargon introduced by Hubbard, both in his coining of new terms and his use of words in a very different manner than that commonly understood in public discourse. The discussion of ethics is additionally complicated by the use in a technical sense in Scientology literature of a set of terms that in common discourse carry immense emotional baggage (enemy, treason, suppressive

person, potential trouble source). As much as possible, such jargon is being avoided in this paper. As an example, the person pursuing a course that is counter survival is said to be operating “out-ethics.” A person who begins to operate out-ethics first becomes self-destructive, but eventually the actions will become visible on several dynamics. When the actions of an individual negatively affect the group, the latter will react. Justice is the name we give to the system any society develops to protect itself from the anti-survival actions of the individual.

Hubbard suggested that, when an individual performs a counter-survival act, s/he initially attempts to correct it. However, these efforts usually fail, due to a lack of knowledge about what is occurring and ignorance of the means of becoming an ethical person (i.e., unfamiliarity with the Scientology tech on ethics). At the moment, the ethics technology operates only within the Church of Scientology, and the most complete attempt to apply it has occurred in the Sea Org.

The effort to establish Hubbard’s ethical system is done, of course, within the context of the overall development of the spiritual life advocated by the church. Each individual Scientologist is seen as being on a spiritual journey. Ideally, that journey involves intensive self-examination, the confrontation with and removal of all of the negative influences that are seen as having attached themselves to the Self, and the learning of a new means of operating without such influences. The new Scientologist encounters what Hubbard called engrams, and learns that dealing with engrams at various levels of reality is considered an essential element in traveling up the Bridge to the highest levels of Scientology.

When one becomes concerned with the ethical question, a second emphasis is added, the concern with present-moment acts of commission or omission that transgress the moral code of the group, in this case the Sea Org. Such acts are called “overts.” An overt is an act (or failure to act) that leads to the injury, degradation, or reduction of the self or others. Overts often lead the person committing them to cover them up. The act of not revealing or talking about an overt is called a “withhold.” The withhold is seen as an act of dishonesty to the self and one’s colleagues. Within the Sea Org, a primary ethical concern is with handling overts and any resulting withholds. It is the duty of Sea Org members to report their own overts and withholds, or any committed by others of which they become aware, to their unit’s ethics officer. Typical overts might involve negligence at one’s assigned task, theft of church funds, or illicit sexual activity.

Overts, seen as having an origin in one's past, are usually dealt with in counseling (auditing) sessions. However, if they become serious, they are seen as harming the group, and the individual has to deal with the peculiar justice system that operates within the Sea Org. That system is based upon other beliefs of Hubbard, possibly the most important one being that handling misdeeds by punishment is ineffective. It simply leads to a worsening of the sequence of overt acts while at the same time degrading the individual. Thus, the Scientology justice system replaces the imposition of punishment with action that seeks to remove the cause of the overt acts and hence prevent them in the future. That action involves the individual's willingness to confront and accept responsibility for their life, and through the technology remove the underlying cause of the overt acts.

This discussion of Hubbard's ethics has been extremely brief, and points out the need for more specialized considerations of it both as a system and in its actual operation within the Sea Org, where it appears to have functioned with some degree of success for more than fifty years. I will, however, add here some further comments on how overt acts are handled in the Sea Org.

When the ethics officers within the church become aware of serious overt acts committed by a person of the particular organization over which they have jurisdiction, they initiate a process of fact-finding to determine the truth of any accusations. This process may, depending on the severity of the actions under discussion, involve a Board of Investigation and a Committee of Evidence. In the more serious cases, the Committee of Evidence will weigh any mitigating circumstances in the situation and make recommendations by which the person may make restitution for any harm done, and take action to prevent the repetition of such acts in the future. There is also a system of appeals by which persons who feel that the initial findings against them have been wrong can seek redress.

In the most extreme cases, when a Sea Org member has lost faith in Scientology, has actively taken actions to harm the church, and has no desire to realign with the church, the committee may recommend expulsion from the Sea Org or even the church. In several instances, individuals expelled from the church have gone on to engage in long-term public opposition to Scientology.

The operation of the Scientology justice relative to a person who has been expelled has been the source of problems for the church, due, again, to Hubbard's use of language that has much different meanings within the church than in common parlance. Basically, Hubbard advocated excommunication as an

act of abandoning the individual to the world. The excluded individual was henceforth cut off from all of the benefits available to a church member, as is common in other religions. However, the language of the ethical texts could, upon a cursory reading, imply that the church would continue to involve themselves in the lives of former members and that Hubbard was by his statements giving Scientologists permission to harass them in various ways. These seeming permissions became the justification for the actions of the GO in the 1970s. Since that debacle, the church has taken pains to state clearly that such permission is neither implied nor intended.

In other cases, also deemed severe, but in which the individual has not intended direct harm and wishes to remain a member of the Sea Org, Hubbard created a program by which the person may deal with their overts and withholds in a comprehensive manner, make restitution to the group, and return to their post in good standing. The program is called the Rehabilitation Project Force (RPF). Though founded in the 1970s, this aspect of the Sea Org was virtually unknown until the 1980s when it began to be discussed in anti-Scientology writings and was introduced into several court cases. It subsequently became one of the more controversial aspects of the Church of Scientology.

### *The Rehabilitation Project Force (RPF)*

The preparation of this part of my paper consumed a considerable portion of my total research time. I reviewed the existing literature concerning the RPF, including the set of 30 documents on the RPF written by Hubbard as Flag Orders between 1974 and 1985. I also visited repeatedly the Sea Org and RPF facilities in Los Angeles, Clearwater, and Copenhagen. During these visits, structured interviews were conducted with more than a dozen present participants of the RPF program and eight former members of the RPF who are still members of the Sea Org. In addition, of course, I reviewed a number of critical accounts of their experience written by former Sea Org members.

As part of a larger crusade against Scientology, Canadian scholar Stephen Kent has spent some twenty years trying to denounce the RPF as an illegal practice, and has appeared as an expert witness in several court cases (see e.g. Kent 1999, 2000, 2003 [a “response” to an earlier version of this article], 2017). His criticism was constructed apart from any first hand inspection of the RPF and

referenced only a limited collection of relevant church documents. He primarily relied on the reports of hostile ex-Scientologists. In my research, I found that he had neglected important aspects of the program, mixed narratives from the RPF's formative years with more recent accounts, and confused incidents not a part of RPF with incidents that occurred within it. He also adopted the "concentration camp" image of the RPF that had been generated with the anti-Scientology literature for use against the church in court. I have found no evidence to substantiate the use of such an extreme image either from the ex-members literature or from my examination of the sites at which the RPF is and was housed. Kent has also found little response from his fellow social scientists for his attempt to use the RPF to revive the discredited theories of "brainwashing" as applied to new religious groups (see Dawson 2001). Together with some of his students, however, he still continues in his quixotic and increasingly controversial efforts (Kent and Raine 2017).

As most religions have created ordered intentional communities, so those intentional communities have created systems whereby those who break the rules may make amendments and be integrated back into the life of the community. The most famous system operating in the West is possibly that created by St. Benedict (480–547) for the Benedictine order. The section on rule breaking begins:

If a brother is found to be obstinate, or disobedient, or proud, or murmuring, or habitually transgressing the Holy Rule in any point and contemptuous of the order of his seniors, the latter shall admonish him secretly a first and second time, as Our Lord commands. If he fails to amend, let him be given a public rebuke in front of the whole community. But if even then he does not reform, let him be placed under excommunication, provided that he understands the seriousness of that penalty; if he is perverse, however, let him undergo corporal punishment (Benedict 1948, 43; for a similar system among the Cistercians, see Louf 1985).

Among the Trappists, anyone seen breaking the rules would be reported to the "Chapter of faults," which would in turn announce these actions at the next meal after which the superior of the order would pronounce a suitable punishment. For example, "a monk might be ordered to lie in the doorway of the refectory while the other monks stepped over him on their way to a meal" (Shapiro 1989, 48). While recently reformed in some branches and convents, these systems of punishments remained in force well after Vatican II.

Within the Roman Catholic Church, there are a set of general laws which all orders follow. Each order then adopts additional rules peculiar to its special



purpose and mission. Canon law operating within the Roman Catholic Church notes that a monk or nun under perpetual vows may be dismissed from their order for what are termed “grave external reasons.” It is the duty of the persons’ immediate superiors to admonish them in hopes of correcting the situation, and may in that endeavor impose various punishments. If the person proves incorrigible, s/he is informed that s/he risks being terminated as a member and is asked for a defense of the questioned behavior. If the situation remains serious, it is presented to the proper authority, the local bishop or superior of the order, who passes it to the Congregation of Religious in Rome. It is ultimately the decision of the Pope formally to order the dismissal (Van Acken 1931; Ellis 1958).

In looking at the Eastern world, one soon runs into the *Patimokkha* section of the *Vinaya-pitaka*, which lays out the rules for Buddhist monks. The *Vinaya-pitaka* is part of the Pali Canon and is used as the monastic rule for Theravada Monks. Mahayana monastic communities have their own sets of monastic rules derived from this earlier one. For example, Pai-Chang Huai-hai (720–814) established a set of monastic rules for Ch’an (Zen) monks in China called the *Ch’ing-Kuei* (Pure Rules). A Korean revision appeared later as *Kyech’osim haginmun* (Admonitions to Beginning Students: see Moon 1996). Among the important admonitions for the monk or nun are to refrain from sexual activity, avoid secular work, and not attempt to create a schism in the *sangha* (monastic community). There is also a prescribed code of etiquette, which anyone who has been present at a Buddhist gathering that included monks and nuns has witnessed.

The *Vinaya-pitaka* also prescribes rules for disciplining rule breakers. There are a set of rules that if transgressed leads to the immediate expulsion of the member from the group. Lesser rules may be handled through the imposition of punishments after a confession or other determination of guilt (Dutt 1924; Bunnag 1973). In the Korean Chogye tradition (the majority tradition in Korean Buddhism), there are four deeds that will lead to immediate dismissal from the monastic community: sexual relations with a woman, stealing, killing, and telling lies, especially making a false claim about one’s state of enlightenment (Moon 1996, 124–25). The Sea Org system differs from that of both the Roman Catholic and Buddhist systems, in that it offers a means for those judged guilty of expulsion offenses to redeem themselves and be reintegrated into the community.

The RPF, the Sea Org's program for those who have committed serious violations of ethical policy, was created in January 1974 while the center of the Sea Org was still aboard the ships. The program grew out of the recognition that some people either could not or did not wish to adapt to life aboard the ships. Originally, such persons were put off the ship, the equivalent of being dismissed from the Sea Org. Then, in 1968, Hubbard created what was termed the "Mud Box Brigade." Those on board the ships who were found slacking off their duties or misbehaving (which in some cases on board the ships could place the lives of the crew and passengers in danger) were assigned to clean the "mud boxes," the places where mud collected from the anchors, and the bilge, the rather foul water that collects in the bottom of any ocean-going vessel. While the average person looking at such a structure might see it as punishment, Hubbard understood it in terms of making retribution to the people who had been harmed by the nonperformance or incorrect performance of one's assigned tasks. This rather stop-gap measure, however, was replaced in 1974 with RPF, a more systematic structure for handling misbehavior that was more fully integrated into Hubbard's understanding of ethics. The RPF also served additional purposes beyond those served by the Mud Box Brigade.

The new Rehabilitation Project Force (RPF) program was designed with multiple goals, though the basic one was providing a situation in which individuals who had been negligent in their posts could be isolated from the group (thus preventing further immediate harm). They were also assigned a period each day to work on themselves using Scientology tech, considered a necessary step to their being reintegrated into the larger group. As Hubbard described it in an early Flag Order (3434RE-1, RPF Series 1, June 10, 1974, in my collection), "the RPF is in actual fact a system of recruiting by taking people off the lines who are blocking things and then not letting them back on lines until they are a valuable operating staff member" The RPF was also designed as a work force in which the members spent five hours a day working upon their own inner condition using the resources available in Scientology technology, and the rest of the day engaged in physical labor of the kind that involved coordinated work with others as a team. While learning to work with others, one can make restitution for the harm done through contributions to the physical facilities in which the Sea Org and the church are housed. As each project is completed, RPF members feel rewarded, usually, with the sense of accomplishment.

Assignment to the RPF can begin in one of several ways. Often, it starts with a realization by an individual that his/her behavior is out of line with expectations. With a number of people I interviewed, their realization came during or shortly after their ending an illicit extramarital affair. In some cases, the affair began to affect their work, but in others the fact that their performance at work was judged superior allowed them to keep the affair unknown to their colleagues. In most cases, however, problems with performance at their assigned work over a period of time were noticed and reported. Following an investigation, the individual was offered the option of pursuing the RPF program or leaving the Sea Org. In one case, the person I interviewed had misappropriated a considerable amount of church money for personal use.

Once a person is informed of the basics of the RPF option, understand what is involved, and chooses it, s/he signs a document noting his/her agreement to join the program. The new RPFer then generally moves quickly to one of the RPF centers that are located in the Sea Org complexes in Los Angeles, Clearwater, London, or Copenhagen. The largest number are in the Los Angeles RPF. Choice of location is determined by several factors, including space available and the presence of another person at approximately the same level on The Bridge with whom one can be paired. A person, for example, who is working on his/her OT levels would not be paired with a pre-clear.

When the person arrives, s/he is assigned to space in a dorm-like room with others and given some orientation. That orientation includes the reading of the thirty Flag Orders pertaining to RPF. Once fully aware of the conditions under which s/he will be operating, s/he again chooses to proceed, and then begins a refresher course in ethics. This part of the process includes, again, a signing of documents to the effect that they understand what RPF is about and want to participate.

One theme that runs through anti-Scientology writings on the Sea Org and the RPF is the lack of informed assent by the participants. This appears to be an unsubstantiated charge. At the time of joining, members of the Sea Org go through an extensive orientation process as well as a screening process by the church to determine their fitness for the organization. That orientation program is conducted by the Estates Project Force, the same structure that oversees the RPF. In like measure, entrance into the RPF program includes an explanation of options open to individuals choosing participation, and at several points during

the entrance process they are called upon to make a conscious decision about continuing. As with the acceptance of any process of recovering one's status in a religious community whose rules one has broken, the participant can at any time choose to leave the community as an alternative to continued participation. Those who participated in the program indicated that they choose to go through the program because they wished to remain a member of the Sea Org.

In the first phase of RPF, some technical training is included, especially if the new person is unfamiliar with the basics of auditing. In fact, individuals may join the Sea Org from any point in their progress up the Bridge. Pre-Clears who join may be assigned jobs that have little to do with auditing, and thus while they may receive personal auditing, they never learn how to be an auditor and counsel another person. Such a person, when assigned to the RPF must learn how to audit before actually beginning the program. The person starting the RPF program is also assigned to a team with whom s/he will be working. In Copenhagen, the number of options is more limited, while in Los Angeles and Clearwater, a variety of work assignments are available.

Dozens of accounts of life in the RPF have been posted on the Internet, a few being posted in multiple sites. A selection of these are mentioned in the anti-Scientology writings of Stephen Kent. In general, these accounts offer valuable research data concerning several individual's negative experience in the RPF, as far as they go. It is the case that some abuse of authority appears to have been experienced by individuals while serving in the Sea Org or participating in the RPF. The RPF includes numerous people who were assigned these for activities that were "off tech," and that activity does not automatically stop when one enters the RPF. The church's own literature and later revisions of rules for the Sea Org and RPF indicate reactions to these problems. I have, however, found no evidence of any pattern of abuse as a common element of life in the RPF.

As with accounts of present and former members who remain in Scientology, these accounts, while very useful, must be received with a critical eye. The accounts of members must be understood in light of their commitments and desires to be part of the Scientology program. Those of ex-members have a few similar problems. First, many were written as depositions for court cases and are thus quite selective in their discussion of RPF. Following a pattern also seen in accounts of former monks and nuns who have left a Roman Catholic order, they have imported later appraisals of their experience into their story. Some have

incorporated the popular anti-Scientology analogy of the RPF as a prison camp, and thus, for example, they speak of their withdrawal from the program as “escaping” the RPF. As members have praise for Scientology and the auditing process, former members often include harsh opinions of Scientology belief and practice. Second, one must struggle with the significant omissions in the ex-member literature. They were not designed as complete stories of their experience in the church, but merely brief accounts of their bad experiences, usually for use in a court case. For example, almost none include any discussion of the role played by the person with whom they were paired during their stay in the RPF. That being said, if critically approached, the accounts of former members remain one valuable source of information among others on the operation of the Sea Org and RPF.

It should also be noted that church authorities and others have questioned the veracity of several of the former members. People who were present and even mentioned in the accounts of Andre Tabayoyon and Dennis Erlich, whose statements on RPF are posted in several anti-Scientology Web sites, have suggested that they had both distorted accounts of incidents upon which they reported and on several occasions created incidents that had never occurred.

In the program, each individual is assigned to a partner with whom s/he will work during the stay in the RPF. This partner is extremely important as one’s progress in the program is tied to the partner’s progress. During what will be a year or more together, the pair audit each other and are responsible for each other’s success. They will finish the program together and one criteria for graduation is the demonstration that the RPFer can help others, specifically their partner. The importance of the partner is underscored in those occasional cases in which a person drops out of the program. The person who remains will be assigned another new partner, whose success will now become his/her responsibility.

The RPF is located within the Sea Org facilities, but members dine and sleep in separate quarters. In Los Angeles, for example, the RPF spaces—dorm, dining hall and kitchen, and woodwork shop—are in the main Advanced Org building. In Copenhagen, they are in the basement (study space) and top floor (dorm rooms) of one of the Sea Org buildings. In Clearwater, they are located in two separate buildings in the Sea Org residence complex. There, the buildings housing the RPF are on the edge of the complex and immediately outside the front door of the

two buildings is a gate that opens from the inside. Any person could simply walk out of the buildings and out of the gate into the city of Clearwater.

The present RPF facility in Clearwater has been used since the mid 1980s. Prior to that time, it was in two different locations in the Fort Harrison Hotel. It was first located in what is now the bakery and later in what is now the primary ethics office. In each case it was inside the hotel in space adjacent to the parking lot. The parking lot is completely open with no doors to lock. Contrary to images of a concentration camp-like atmosphere, there are no locks on the doors of the RPF facilities, and at almost anytime, a participant in the program could, if they decided, simply walk away. Locks on Sea Org facilities through which a departing RPF member might have to pass are such as to prevent someone from coming into the building but not prevent an egress from it. The fences around the present Sea Org residences in Clearwater, for example, were erected after an incident in which an outsider came into the complex and discharged a firearm. They were designed to keep possible trouble makers out, not prevent anyone from leaving. In the case of the Los Angeles, Clearwater, or Copenhagen facilities, persons coming out of the RPF area could loose themselves in the city in a matter of minutes.

This is confirmed in the hostile accounts of former members such as Lynn Froyland, Hana Whitfield, and Ann Rosenblum, all of whom simply walked away from the Clearwater RPF. The only exception to this possibility concerns the RPF at the Gilman Hot Springs, California, center. Gilman Hot Springs is a former resort that the Church of Scientology purchased and now uses as its major recording and video production site. Located there are a professional level recording studio, a large building for shooting movies, and a large auditorium. It is frequently used by people from the nearby community of Hemet, California, for non-Scientology community events. It is located in the countryside, and intermittently in the 1980s and 1990s, there was a RPF unit there. That unit was housed at a location several miles away. While it would not be difficult to walk away from either Gilman or the housing site, it would be a long walk to the next town.

The RPF program is rigorous by any standards. It includes eight hours of physical work six days a week that begins each day immediately after the morning muster and breakfast. Most people on the RPF come with little or no skill in the tasks required to renovate and maintain buildings (painting, plumbing, carpentry,

furniture making, grounds upkeep, etc.). Thus, they will be taught a trade along with being involved in numerous tasks that require little training. In Los Angeles, a number of people have been taught woodwork and the professional appearance of the walls and furniture in the church's Hollywood facilities is ample evidence of the skills they have acquired. In fact, the overall appearance of the various Scientology buildings in Los Angeles along Hollywood Blvd. and L. Ron Hubbard Way (off Sunset Avenue) can be credited to the RPF.

This aspect of the RPF is designed to provide a change in the usual pattern of the participant's life (which has most likely been a desk job) and involve them more immediately with what in Scientology is termed the MEST universe. It is reminiscent of the work ("chop wood, carry water") that is often integrated into the longer Zen Buddhist retreats. The first observation of the Zen Buddhist rule of monastic life, attributed to the already mentioned Buddhist monk Pai-Chang Huai-hai, stated, "A day of no work is a day of no eating." Buddhist scholar Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki (1870–1966) put it thusly, "Manual labor forms one of the most essential features of the Zen life. . . Life meant to the Chinese monks to be engaged in physical labour, to move their hands and feet, to handle tools, in order to accomplish some visible and tangible ends" (Suzuki 1959, 33). Work remains an integral part of the daily life of Zen monks and nuns, and visitors to a Zen monastery for retreats or short stays will be scheduled to participate in the workday that might include cooking, chopping wood, heating water, working in the fields, and cleaning (Sato 1977, 148–49).

In RPF, participants learn one or more skills, and RPF graduates with whom I have talked enjoyed pointing out particular things in buildings on which they had worked. By working intimately with a small cadre of fellow participants, they learned the value of teamwork. A participant spends five hours each day with his/her individual partner engaged in study or auditing. Many with whom I talked had been in the Sea Org many years but, although they had received auditing, they had never learned to audit anyone else. They reported that, as a result of learning to counsel their partner, they had gained a heightened level of sensitivity to the needs of others in general, and how their lives affected everyone around them.

The dominant program used by the RPF (others are mentioned in the Flag Orders) is called the False Purpose Rundown (Hubbard 1991). Over the years of Hubbard's life, he periodically introduced upgraded forms of various auditing procedures, and such new upgrades have continued to be released. As these

upgrades were published, they were, as appropriate, introduced into the RPF. The method of operating the False Purpose Rundown are spelled out in a series of Bulletins known as the False Purpose Rundown Series.

It is Scientology's understanding that overts and withholds are indicative of hidden evil (i.e., counter-survival) purposes, solutions to problems adopted in a moment of confusion. The auditing process includes a lengthy inventory, using the immediate overts that led to the person being assigned to the RPF, of one's life, a confrontation with and clearing-up of counter-survival purposes. The goal is to see life objectively and assume responsibility for one's present condition as the result of autonomous decisions. The False Purpose Rundown is repeated until the person is considered free of evil intentions on each of the eight Dynamics. The Rundown is a lengthy process, hence the year or more required to complete it.

The RPF is designed to isolate the individual and provide a time and space for total concentration on self-change. The hardest hit by the program are married couples, as they have little contact while one of them is in the program. They are encouraged to write regularly, but have only infrequent face-to-face contact. Informants in Los Angeles noted that they occasionally grabbed a few words with spouses in the brief time between the lunch and afternoon activities. The program does make allowances for family needs, and a number of participants noted that they had taken a week or more breaks in the midst of their program to attend to different particular family obligations.

As might be expected, the problems that landed one in the RPF on occasion continue to manifest in the life of a participant during their stay on the program. In that case, there is a program, the "RPF's RPF," to which people may be assigned for short periods of time. In this case, the offense is seen as against the RPF itself, and thus the person assigned to the RPF's RPF is isolated from other participants in the program. During this time, the partner still has the task of helping the person assigned to the RPF. The persons on the RPF's RPF are also assigned specific tasks to benefit the RPF (the group that is considered harmed, in this case), and their manual work assignment might include such tasks as improving the RPF facilities. They may return to the RPF program only by vote of the other participants in the RPF. While in the program, their communication is further restricted and must go through the RPF ethics officer.



The RPF organization is difficult to describe, as it is essentially run by the participants. There is an overseer (the RPF-I/C) who is not a participant, whose job is to see that the program runs smoothly. The RPF-I/C, for example, handles the money that pays for the program. Each organization of the church that assigns a person to the RPF also pays for his/her stay, and each month contributes a stipend to cover food, housing, and personal needs. It is also the RPF-I/C's job to liaison with those in charge of the church's facilities and to decide on the particular deployment of RPF participants, by prioritizing tasks to be completed.

However, the day-to-day running of the program is left in the hands of the participants. One of the participants who is further along on the program is designated as the leader, and s/he will have several deputies to handle various practical and technical matters, including ethics. For example, one or more people with accomplished auditing skills oversee and check the auditing as it proceeds (see Flag Order 3434RE-25, January 7, 1974, revised May 8, 1997, in the collection of the author).

RPF participants are organized into work teams, and such teams proceed to their assigned tasks (and partners proceed to their auditing) without immediate and constant outside supervision. The atmosphere is much more one of an adult education class, in which participants are there to get what they can out of the program, than that of disgruntled individuals just putting in the time. Their success will be manifest in the finished product of their labor and in their self-reported realizations about their life acquired in auditing. Testimonies of new insights and understandings concerning their life may be posted for others in the RPF to read, though they have no circulation in the Sea Org or among general church members.

Because of the relative differences in the speed that individuals work through the False Purposes Rundown, different people's stay in the program varies. One year appears to be the minimum. I interviewed one person who had been in for approximately three years.

Following completion of their program, graduates generally return to the post (or a similar post) that they held when they went into the program. The particular church organization from which they came has at this point invested in their participation and expects a return on that investment. Graduates to whom I talked indicated that they received a cordial welcome back to their post. While most of the people with whom I have talked about their previous RPF experience hold

anonymous staff positions, several people have gone on to hold high positions and a few are now well-known in the church internationally. People whom I have met who lead different church organizations report that staff members who have completed the program become their most productive workers.

Quite obviously, not everyone adapts to the RPF regimen, and some people choose to leave, which they are free to do at any point. Some who left the program, now describe it (as indeed life in the Sea Org in general) in quite hostile terms. From the perspective of an ex-member, who no longer believes in Scientology, they have reinterpreted their life from their new point of view. These accounts bare a noticeable resemblance to similar accounts of others who have left the austerities of Roman Catholic orders. For example, Patricia Curran, who studied the rituals around food in several convents, noted that some of her informants had very different views of the behavior patterns expected of them. In the U.S., those who had become dissatisfied with their orders described the austerities as various outdated holdovers from Europe; daily reminders of belonging to the “club” of religious life; conditioning to “perfect obedience” (the instantaneous execution of the superior’s command). A great number argued that the effects the practices had on them provided the best indicator of purpose. They found them humiliating, particularly when kissing the feet of the sisters, asking prayers, or making the act of reparation. The penances were constant reminders of the self-concept that was held as an ideal: to consider oneself the least, lowest, and last in importance in the community. They regarded the penances also as a negation of all that was natural in favor of all that was spiritual, when these were considered to be in conflict. One named them the tools whereby each person’s spirit was broken so that she could be remolded in the new corporate image (Curran 1989).

Once one no longer sees the purpose in their ordered life, its rule and regulations take on the appearance of a straightjacket. Life in the group no longer is seen as service to the cause and a means to nurture spiritual existence, but as an oppressive existence characterized by the following of a false religion and arbitrary rules.

## *Conclusion*

As an ordered community, the Sea Organization is another doorway offering scholars of new religions some further understanding of the manner in which innovative religious organizations fit into the broader picture of the religious life of a particular culture. The more we know about them, the less distinct they appear relative to larger more-familiar groups. New religions, with a few unique innovations, tend to rediscover successful modes of operation that have been utilized by the older groups through the centuries, and to learn anew some of the same insights as these older groups. In the case of Scientology, they have been rediscovered as a means of channeling the enthusiasm of their more committed members as well as of reintegrating people who had experienced problems in adjusting to the particular pattern of behavior that accompanies their initial commitment. As with marriage, even the most informed person cannot totally predict his/her reactions to the living out of long-term personal commitments.

Understanding new religions from the perspective of ordered communities, also assists us in explaining a spectrum of phenomena, especially the high level of personal commitment shared by the members of some groups. In older ordered communities, both those formed within larger religious groups and those formed as separate religious bodies, we can see processes of formation, means of building and sustaining commitments, ways of problem-solving, and the means of channeling high levels of religious enthusiasm in activity deemed useful in the world. Each of these topics have been issues for discussion in the scholarly study of new religions.

There is a large body of literature on ordered communities both historical and ethnographical as well as sociological and psychological. This study of the Sea Org suggests that such literature would prove a fruitful source of data on new religions. It is hypothesized that the behavior of people in the first generation of, for example, new Catholic or Eastern Orthodox orders would manifest many of the characteristics of the behavior patterns we have seen in the high-demand new religions.

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