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Volume 2, Issue 2, March–April 2018

Contents

Articles

- 3 Introduction: Scientology and the New Cult Wars
The Journal of CESNUR
- 11 Is Scientology a Religion?
Luigi Berzano
- 21 A Contemporary Ordered Religious Community: The Sea Organization
J. Gordon Melton
- 60 “The Most Misunderstood Human Endeavor”: L. Ron Hubbard,
Scientology, and Fine Arts
Massimo Introvigne

Research Notes / Scientology, Anti-Cultists, and the State in Russia and Hungary

- 93 The Social Construction of “Extremism” in Russia: From the Jehovah’s
Witnesses to Scientology and Beyond
Massimo Introvigne
- 101 The Provisions Against Religious Extremism and Illegal Business Activity
as Instruments for Outlawing Religious Minorities in Russia: The Case of
the Church of Scientology
Boris Falikov

- 111 What Is Really Happening in Russia? A Response to Prof. Introvigne and Prof. Falikov

PierLuigi Zoccatelli

- 118 Religious Discrimination and State Neutrality: The Case of Scientology in Hungary

Patricia Duval

Book Reviews

- 124 Kent, Stephen A., and Susan Raine, eds. *Scientology and Popular Culture: Influences and Struggles for Legitimacy*

Reviewed by Massimo Introvigne

- 129 Aldo Natale Terrin, *Scientology. Libertà e immortalità*

Reviewed by Luigi Berzano

Introduction: Scientology and the New Cult Wars

The Journal of CESNUR

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ABSTRACT: Russian efforts aimed at “liquidating” the Church of Scientology confirm that the “cult wars,” often described as long dead in the West, continue in countries such as Russia, China, or Hungary. Media remain largely hostile to Scientology even in the West. This issue of *The Journal of CESNUR* explores developments in the Church of Scientology in the 21st century and the reasons of this persistent hostility, which appears somewhat paradoxical as both scholars and courts of law throughout the world increasingly recognize Scientology as a religion.

KEYWORDS: Scientology, Church of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, Anti-Extremism Laws in Russia, Anti-Cult Movement.

On March 28, 2018 the Russian federal security agency FSB raided Church of Scientology’s premises in Moscow and St. Petersburg, a further step towards the “liquidation” of Scientology in Russia (RAPSI 2018). The raids happened almost at the same time when Russia closed the American consulate in St. Petersburg and expelled several Western diplomats. International tensions may explain the timing of the raids but, as Boris Falikov illustrates in this issue of *The Journal of CESNUR*, Russian authorities had started cracking down on Scientology several years ago. In our *Research Notes* session, we offer transcripts of discussions about anti-Scientology propaganda and legal actions in Russia, and how they are being exported in other countries such as Hungary, from a recent conference in Kaunas, Lithuania, and a seminar in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

We normally refer to the “cult wars” as a thing of the past, an attempt at eliciting state intervention against “cults” that was thwarted by the vigorous reaction of academic scholars of new religious movements (Gallagher 2016)—but this statement needs to be qualified. First, anti-cultism in the West was

defeated in the courts in the 1990s, and marginalized in the academia, but is still alive and kicking in the media and in popular culture. And a handful of scholars, although not supported by the majority of their colleagues, still believe in the anti-cult narrative based on brainwashing and mind control. Their views do not have a large echo, except when it comes to Scientology, whose opponents are normally taken more seriously by the media than the enemies of other religious minorities.

Second, the cult wars as a legal and political phenomenon may be out of fashion in Western Europe and the United States, but are very much alive in countries such as Russia and China. We devoted the previous issue of *The Journal of CESNUR* to China while, in this issue, we focus on Scientology East and West.

Some journal issues (and books) are better read from the end, and a good starting point here is Massimo Introvigne's review of the book edited by Stephen Kent and Susan Raine, *Scientology and Popular Culture*. It shows how anti-cultism is kept alive in the West by television, Internet, the media, and a handful of scholars who, in the case of Scientology, may occasionally involve in their projects more than the usual suspects, because of the hostility towards Scientology fueled by massive media campaigns.

The book edited by Kent, a veteran anti-Scientology crusader, and Raine, reiterates that Scientology is not a religion and that its use of celebrities and the arts is purely manipulative or for public relations purposes only. That this is not the case is proved by the articles by Luigi Berzano and Massimo Introvigne in this issue. In both his lead article and in his review of the book by the Italian scholar Aldo Natale Terrin, Berzano sums up the reasons why most scholars and courts of law have concluded that Scientology is indeed a religion. Introvigne explores the aesthetic theories of L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), which make him a significant thinker in the field, and discusses how they have inspired a rich generation of Scientology artists.

Accusations of wrongdoings on which claims that Scientology is not a “genuine” religion are often based are discussed in the article by J. Gordon Melton, which shows how the much maligned Sea Org is an ordained community not so much dissimilar from those found in mainline religions. Systems of rehabilitating members who committed serious offenses against the community

and the Church of Scientology, Melton insists, are also not so dissimilar from those used in monastic orders within mainline religions.

We continue the publication of additional material as *Supplements* to the *Journal*, and they include for this issue a long article in French by Frédéric Pansier about the status of Scientology as a religion under French law. In fact, Pansier goes well beyond French law to quote the most relevant international decisions on the religious nature of Scientology.

On March 19–20, CESNUR co-organized the seminar *Religion and Civil Society in the Post-Soviet Era: Central Asia and Beyond* at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. One of the sessions was devoted to Scientology. As an obvious reaction to the seminar, the Kyrgyz edition of Russian international propaganda agency *Sputnik* carried on March 29 a lengthy article on Scientology, claiming that it is “banned” in Kyrgyzstan (which is not true) and “prohibited in Australia, England, New Zealand and Greece”—the article also mentioned pending cases in “Germany, United Kingdom and Belgium” (Sputnik.kg 2018).

This is an egregious, but unfortunately typical, example of fake news propagated to justify Russian breaches of religious liberty. In none of the mentioned countries is Scientology banned. Pansier’s article details how Scientology won its cases in Australia, United Kingdom, and Germany. Internet anti-Scientology sources keep quoting old cases, some of them dating back to the 1960s and 1970s, ignoring the more recent case law. Sputnik also conveniently omits to mention that in Belgium on March 11, 2016, after one of the longest cases in Belgian legal history, Scientology obtained a resounding victory and a decision whose language was embarrassing for both anti-cultists and Belgian prosecutors, who wasted taxpayers’ money for twenty years investigating and prosecuting a criminal case that went nowhere (Tribunal de première instance francophone de Bruxelles 2016).

Unlike Pansier, Sputnik also omits to mention the landmark decision of the Italian Supreme Court (more precisely the Court of Cassation, which is the Supreme Court for jurisdictional purposes in Italy and should not be confused with the Constitutional Court) dated October 9, 1997, which led to the full recognition of Scientology as a religion in Italy (Introvigne 2014). This decision

remains extremely important in assessing the legal boundaries of the notion of religion.

The Italian Supreme Court (Corte Suprema di Cassazione 1997) regarded the theistic definition of religion adopted by the Court of Appeal of Milan in a previous decision unfavorable to Scientology as “unacceptable” and “a mistake,” because it was “based only on the paradigm of Biblical religions.” As such, the definition would exclude Buddhism, whose main Italian organization, the Italian Buddhist Union, had been recognized in Italy as a “religious denomination” since 1991. Buddhism, according to the Supreme Court, “certainly does not affirm the existence of a Supreme Being and, as a consequence, does not propose a direct relation of the human being with Him.”

It is true, the Supreme Court observes, that “the self-definition of a group as religious is not enough in order to recognize it as a genuine religion.” The Milan decision quoted the case law of the Italian Constitutional Court and its reference to the “common opinion” in order to decide whether a group is a religion. The relevant “common opinion,” however, according to the Supreme Court is rather “the opinion of the scholars” than the “public opinion.” The latter is normally hostile to religious minorities and, additionally, difficult to ascertain: one wonders, the Supreme Court notes, “from what source the Milan judges knew the public opinion of the whole national community.”

On the other hand, most scholars—according to the Supreme Court—seem to prefer a definition of religion broad enough to include Scientology and, when asked, conclude that Scientology is in fact a religion, having as its aim “the liberation of the human spirit through the knowledge of the divine spirit residing within each human being.” The 48-page decision of the Italian Supreme Court also examined some of the arguments used by critics (and by the Milan judges) in order to deny to Scientology the status of religion. Five main arguments were discussed.

1. First, critics objected that Scientology is “syncretistic” and does not propose any really “original belief.” This is, the Supreme Court argued, irrelevant, since syncretism “is not rare” among genuine religions, and many recently established Christian denominations exhibit very few “original features” when compared to older churches.

2. Second, it is argued that Scientology is presented to perspective converts as science, not as religion. The Supreme Court replies that, at least since Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Christian theology claims to be a science. On the other hand, Scientology’s “science” claims to lead to non-empirical results, such as “a knowledge of God,” or “of human beings as gods.” Some scientists may perhaps call it “bad science,” but it is also true that this “science” is “inherently religious.”

3. Third, critics make reference to ex-members (mostly militant apostates such as “[Jon] Atack and [Gerry] Armstrong,” quoted in the Milan decision), who claim that Scientology is not a religion but only a facade to hide criminal activities. The Supreme Court asked how we may know that the opinion of disgruntled ex-members is representative of the larger population of ex-members. Other ex-members in fact appeared as witnesses for the defense, and at any rate, the number of ex-members of Scientology appears to be quite large. The opinion of two and even twenty of them, thus, would be hardly representative of what the average ex-member believes.

4. Fourth, texts by L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, and by early Italian leaders seem to imply that Scientology’s basic aim is to make money. Such texts’ interest in money may appear, according to the Supreme Court, as “excessive,” but “perhaps appears much less excessive if we consider how money was raised in the past by the Roman Catholic Church.” The Supreme Court quoted Ananias and Sapphira in the *Acts of the Apostles*, who died because they kept for personal use a part of what they obtained from the sale of their property and lied to the apostles, rather than giving everything to them (*Acts* 5: 1–11), as well as late Medieval controversies about the sale of indulgences. It also mentioned the fact that, until very recently, Italian Catholic churches used to affix at the church’s door “a list of services offered [Masses and similar] with the corresponding costs.” The latter comments, according to the Supreme Court, confirmed that *quid pro quo* services are more widespread among religions than the Milan judges who found against Scientology seemed to believe. Concerning Scientology, the Supreme Court went on to observe that the more “disturbing” texts on money are but a minimal part of Hubbard’s enormous literary production (including “about 8,000 works.”) They are mostly found in circular letters or bulletins intended “for the officers in charge of finances and the economic structure, not for the average member.” Finally, even if one should take at face

value the “crude” comment included in a technical bulletin of Scientology (not written by Hubbard) that “the only reason why LRH [L. Ron Hubbard] established the Church was in order to sell and deliver Dianetics and Scientology,” this would not mean, according to the Supreme Court, that Scientology is not a religion. What is, in fact, the ultimate aim of “selling Dianetics and Scientology”? There is no evidence, the Supreme Court suggests, that such “sale” is only organized to assure the personal welfare of the leaders. If “sales” are intended as a proselytization tool, then making money is only an intermediate aim. The ultimate aim is “proselytization,” and this aim “could hardly be more typical of a religion,” even if “according to the strategy of the founder [Hubbard], new converts are sought and organized through the sale and delivery of Dianetics and Scientology.”

5. A fifth objection discussed by the Supreme Court was that Scientology is not a religion, since, according to the Milan judges, some Italian Scientologists were guilty of “fraudulent sales techniques,” or abused of particularly weak customers when “selling” Dianetics or Scientology. These illegal activities, the Supreme Court commented, should be investigated and prosecuted on a case by case basis, but there is no evidence that they may have been more than “occasional deviant activities” of individual members within the Milan branch, “with no general significance” concerning the nature of Scientology in general.

The Italian Supreme Court 1997 decision on Scientology includes one of the most important discussions, so far and at an international scale, of how courts may apply existing laws requiring them to decide whether a specific group is, or is not, a religion. It argues that the non-existence of a legal definition of religion in the Italian and other Constitutions “was not coincidental.” Any definition would rapidly become obsolete and, in fact, limit religious liberty. It is much better, according to the Italian Supreme Court, “not to limit with a definition, always by its very nature restrictive, the broader field of religious liberty.” “Religion” is an ever-evolving concept, and courts may only interpret it within the frame of a specific historical and geographical context, taking into account the opinions of the scholars.

Twenty years after the decision of the Italian Supreme Court, Scientology remains a test case for defining the legal and cultural meaning of “religion” in the 21st century. It is for this reason that the articles in this issue of *The Journal of CESNUR* and the Supplement should be of interest for scholars of law and

religion, both because of the relevance of Scientology as one of the most significant new religions and of the broader significance of the legal and theoretical issues they discuss.

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Is Scientology a Religion?

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ABSTRACT: Is Scientology a religion? In order to answer the question, I use the substantial definitions that today many scholars (among them Aldo Natale Terrin, in his recent volume on Scientology) call “polythetic,” in that they put together several specific, common characteristics in a *set* of dimensions. We find in Scientology, *firstly* (especially in the *Dianetics* volume), a complex set of doctrines, beliefs and behaviors, which the faithful must observe in order to reach the state of *clear*. *Secondly*, we find a community organized around certain beliefs and practices, common to all Scientology members. The *third* characteristic defining religion is the presence of a recognized authority, in this case L. Ron Hubbard, the sole master of the truth, understood as a doctrine with a practical, effective side that can be verified. The *fourth* characteristic is the community dimension around the “Sunday service,” comparable with the liturgical services of Protestant churches. The *fifth* characteristic is an ethical-moral view of life, based on promoting rationality at the service of the greatest good for the greatest number of “dynamics.” The *sixth* feature is the presence of God, identified in Scientology as the “Eight Dynamic,” whose essence is not yet well known.

KEYWORDS: Scientology, Defining Religion, L. Ron Hubbard, Gnosticism, Scientology and Theology, Scientology as Religion.

Introduction

“When I mention religion, I mean the Christian religion; and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England” (Fielding 2001, 76). So says Thwackum in Henry Fielding’s (1707–1754) 1749 novel *Tom Jones*. Many still think like Thwackum—when they talk about religion, they mean only their own. Today this form of ethnocentrism is increasingly challenged, on the one hand, by the globalisation of religions that fuels religious pluralism and, on the other, by

secularisation, which makes societies and individuals more and more autonomous from religions in their lifestyles.

Religions today exhibit a great variety: to name but some, religions without founders or magisterium (Hinduism); religions without a supreme divinity or clergy (Buddhism); religions without specific beliefs but mainly focused on rituals and practices (Confucianism); religions with belief in one God only and with highly organized communities (Christianity); and religions without a clear distinction between the religious and political spheres (Islam). Even the etymology of the term “religion” is controversial, between Cicero’s (106–43 BCE) *relegare* (to gather, collect carefully) and Lactantius’s (ca. 250–325) *religare* (to connect).

Many scholars agree with a distinction, which divides religions into two main classes on the basis of two kinds of definitions. *Functional definitions* indicate what a religion *does* for its devotees and the social roles it plays. *Substantial definitions* show what a religion *is* and consider its substance.

Functional Definitions of Religion

Sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) offered the best-known functional definition of religion. After him, scholars identified six principal functions common to all religions. Religion offers support, consolation and a sense of reconciliation. It builds a transcendental relationship through worship and ceremonies. It attributes a sacred character to the values and norms of the society where the individual lives. Sometimes, it even plays a role seemingly contrary to the one just mentioned, the prophetic function, by means of which the present state of affairs is challenged and a different future society is foreshadowed. A fifth function concerns identity: religion gives the individual a sense of identity, not only for the present but also for the past and the future.

The latter feature is connected with individual development, maturity and progress, through the various phases of existence and in the society in which one lives. Based on these functions, Clifford Geertz (1926–2006) defined religion as: “A system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in [people] by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of

factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” (Geertz 1973, 90).

A large amount of criticism has been levelled at functional definitions, accused of reducing religions to the social roles they play in society. Such criticism is based on the idea that the religious goes well beyond any purely functional dimension.

Substantial Definitions of Religion

Substantial definitions, on the other hand, define religion as a set of beliefs and symbols, and values derived directly from them, linked to a distinction between an empirical and a supra-empirical reality. Thus, religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to a transcendent reality, joining its adherents together with the aim of forming a moral community.

Substantial definitions refer mostly to a supernatural reality, and to certain historical religions. It can be argued that these definitions are much more exclusive, because they indicate more specifically the elements that contribute to the making of a religion: a notion of divinity, forms of worship, ethical duties, types of authority, and beliefs in the present and future worlds. Functional definitions, on the contrary, are much more inclusive, because they comprise all the institutions, including the cultural and social ones, which fulfill the same functions of the individuals’ social and cultural integration.

Scientology as Religion: Five Traits

Is Scientology a religion? In order to answer the question, I use these substantial definitions that today many scholars (among them Aldo Natale Terrin, in his recent volume on Scientology: Terrin 2017) call “polythetic,” in that they put together several specific, common characteristics in a *set* of dimensions, including the following: 1) a set of beliefs affirming the existence of an *ad extra* world; 2) an organized community, which communicates information about belief; 3) an important authority as the source of truth; 4) ritual practices; and 5) an ethical-moral view of life.

Is it possible to find these traits in Scientology? Firstly, it should be recalled that L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986) himself, as early as in his 1954 *Phoenix Lectures*, when comparing Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism with spiritual knowledge, indicated that Scientology was the true realisation of Oriental religious philosophies, and states that it was in line with the great spiritual leaders of the West such as Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Later, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, Hubbard insisted on the “religious” nature of Scientology. “Scientology is a religion in the very oldest and fullest sense” (Hubbard 1968, 35), if we assume that “the word ‘religion’ itself can embrace sacred lore, wisdom, knowingness of gods and souls and spirits” (Hubbard 1968, 13). In a letter from the same period, Hubbard instructed Scientology staff to wear vestments recalling traditional churches. In places of worship the Church’s “Credo” and the crucifix should be plainly in evidence. At the same time, he wrote a book for Church ministers about Sunday services and other ceremonies (Hubbard 1976a). In 1970, Scientology’s book of prayers and sermons had been published (Hubbard 1970). Then, the journal *Advance!* saw the light, the earliest issues being dedicated to Scientology taking its place among the major world religions. Subsequent issues directly compared Scientology with other religions (e.g. Judaism, Jainism, Shintoism), concluding that Scientology was not only a religion but the completion of the spiritual quest implicit in these other faiths.

Two further books are relevant to this claim of Scientology to be a religion. *Scientology: A World Religion Emerges in the Space Age* (Hubbard 1974) aims to demonstrate that Scientology is the great universal twentieth-century religion. In 1998, the book *Scientology: Theology and Practice of a Contemporary Religion* was published, containing both published and unpublished writings, inter alia by scholars Bryan R. Wilson (1926–2004), Frank K. Flinn and J. Gordon Melton, and original documents, supporting Scientology’s arguments for calling itself a religion (Church of Scientology International 1998). Basing its argument on Joachim Wach’s (1898–1955) definition of religion as being founded on the three characteristics of doctrine, practices and forms of community, the book concluded that Scientology has a religious nature and the aim of raising its members’ spiritual awareness to a higher level.

There is no shortage of authors who contest this thesis. The first criticism is that Scientology does not have a unique identity but on the organizational level provides for a multinational series of institutions and institutes, each with

different facets and tasks, so that if one can talk about “religion,” it is confined to “one” only of these organizations. In this connection, Terrin points out that other lay Scientology organizations

may obscure the possible ‘religious’ nature of the principal organization, which is the ‘Church of Scientology.’ It is true that there are many organizations with mainly humanitarian backgrounds side by side with the Scientology religion, but how can these associations make Scientology less ‘religious’ or less ‘credible’? (Terrin 2017, 50).

The second criticism is that Scientology has taken advantage of its affinity with Hinduism and Buddhism for instrumental reasons. Indeed, at the beginning, in the early 1950s, Dianetics did not boast of having a “religious” nature but presented itself as mental therapy, and Scientology was seen as a science. The Oriental link, in this theory, is useful for justifying the idea of “religion” in Scientology and making it more respectable.

According to Terrin, however, the relationship between Scientology and the Orient appears as neither improvised nor instrumental. On the contrary, an overall view of Scientology’s doctrines shows that they are “permeated” by the entire Oriental world: the concept of “past lives” comes from the East; the *thetan* idea is Eastern and is close to that of *Atman*; spiritual freedom as the ultimate achievement is Buddhist, as is the sense of unlimited freedom of the *thetan* when it reaches salvation. “One might say that without its links to the Eastern world, Scientology would no longer be Scientology. One could even say that the call of the East is a *conditio sine qua non* of Scientology’s very doctrine” (Terrin 2017, 51).

Is Scientology really a religion? The *thetan* concept present in its theology removes any possibility of doubt as to the fact that it is. The notion of *thetan* immediately refers to the “spiritual,” to the extent that such a vision fully expresses the existence of the sacred and the supernatural based on what a human being is: an “immortal spirit.” We are dealing here with a worldview that may be compared with other religious and spiritual experiences. The *thetan* spirituality, which makes Scientology a religion, is a launching pad that Hubbard himself used when he wrote *The Volunteer Minister’s Handbook* and *Religious Influence in Society: Role of the Volunteer Minister* (Hubbard 1976a, 1976b)

In a few words, religion can be defined as belief in spiritual beings. More broadly, religion can be defined as a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with the ultimate problems of human life (Hubbard 1976a, LXXI).

The *thetan* is the “immortal spirit,” the “divine,” the “eternal” I, which unites, at the same time, the characteristics of the human and the divine. This concept is close to the Hindu idea of *purusha*, present in the *Samkhya-Yoga* system, where *purusha* is the divine, the eternal, the immortal, which lives in us and that we have the task of discovering. The concept is also close to the Gnostic worldview, where humankind carries within itself the “image of the divine” by means of a spiritual particle, which, having fallen into matter by mistake, feels the need to return to its origins, the *pleroma*, i.e. to the fullness of the divinity of which it is part. One might say that the *thetan* has the same characteristics and is therefore by its own nature the spiritual, the divine element in humans. Indeed, “the *thetan*—through the history of humanity—is the spiritual, which is the victim of matter and has been ‘imprisoned’ within matter itself” (Terrin 2017, 54).

In Scientology the path to salvation is no different from the spiritual road to total freedom, as in it is the case in the *Samkhya-Yoga* system and elsewhere in the East. Here, we can observe an analogy with the Oriental world of Hinduism and Buddhism. The objective of the *thetan* is not only to free himself from the slavery to MEST (Matter, Energy, Space, Time) but also to reach, by means of particular techniques, something resembling a “divine” state, also called an “original” or “native” state.

To return to the five dimensions, which Terrin considers as present in all religions, we find in Scientology, *firstly* (especially in the book *Dianetics*), a complex set of doctrines, beliefs and behaviours, which the faithful must observe in order to reach the state of *clear*. Similarly, the doctrine of the *thetan* offers a way to understand and interpret reality.

Secondly, we find a community organized around certain beliefs and practices common to all members, which the Danish theologian Dorthe R. Christensen (in *Scientology and Self-Narrativity: Theology and Soteriology as Resource and Strategy*) identifies as three basic ideas:

1. Every Scientologist has a notion of himself or herself as a “spiritual being” (a *thetan*).
2. The notion of *time track*; members believe they have lived past lives in their bodies and now, by a process of *auditing*, they can become aware of these past lives (reincarnation and karma); and

3. The belief that Hubbard's teachings derive from "discoveries," thanks to which a safe path to mental and spiritual freedom is available to everyone (Christensen 2009).

The *third* characteristic defining the concept of religion is the presence of a recognized authority. Here Hubbard is regarded as the sole master of the truth, understood as a doctrine with a practical and effective side that can be verified. The church's doctrine is considered a source of liberation only when applied exactly as proposed by the founder. The *Religious Technology Center* (RTC) was founded by Hubbard and some close collaborators in 1982 to supervise the authoritative, correct application of doctrine.

The *fourth* characteristic is the community dimension, built around the "Sunday service," which is comparable with the liturgical services of Protestant churches. In fact, a ritual dimension appears in Scientology both in the Sunday service and in the *auditing*. The whole world of Scientology is "ritually" organized. Its "prayers" refer to the great themes to be found in all religions: a sense of justice, a greater understanding of the Supreme Being, a deeper self-awareness, religious freedom, and spiritual advancement. Then there are "rites of passage"—weddings, funerals and baptism (*Naming Ceremony*). Finally, the *group processing*, which is held before the ceremony, aims at focusing the attention and instilling an increased awareness of the environment one is entering. It is a group auditing, to connect with the situation and augment self-awareness. All the texts of these rituals are presented as instructions for the minister and the deacon, and are included in the already mentioned book by Hubbard, *The Volunteer Minister's Handbook*.

The *fifth* characteristic is an ethical-moral view of life. It is based on favouring rationality at the service of the greatest good for the greatest number of "dynamics." A "dynamic" is an impulse to survive in a certain direction (the self, the family, the group, humanity as a whole, all living beings, the material universe, the spiritual universe, and the Supreme Being/God). The same awareness is raised in Scientology to increasingly high levels by various exercises. It aims essentially at becoming conscious of broader responsibilities in relations with others, and promotes a greater involvement in the society, for the good of both oneself and the community. Thus, "good" and "evil" are clearly distinguished in Scientology, based on a fundamental distinction about life. Whatever leads to greater survival, to "more" life, is positive; whatever leads to the destruction of

life, or to a negation of survival, is negative. This is the background against which the Church's "ethical code," its "credo," its *training* and *auditing*, and all its other projects for the betterment of the individual and humankind are set.

The *sixth* characteristic is the presence of God. In Scientology, God is identified as the "Eight Dynamic," whose essence is not yet well known, "what is beyond the concentric circles of existence and survival." This is parallel to the Gnostic worldview, where God is *ágnostos theos* (unknowable God). We may further add that, in both Gnosticism and Scientology, increased awareness (by the Gnostic student or the *thetan*) corresponds to a deep perception of God. The Eight Dynamic is the urge toward existence as "infinity," as the "Supreme Being." Contrary to the great Semitic religions, Scientology does not impose a belief in God on its members, but little by little, as the Scientologist progresses in the level of spiritual awareness, he or she will experience the eight dynamic and understand the force of attraction of infinity in human life.

A Different Scientology Narrative

Among the various characteristics listed in Terrin's volume, the most significant seems to be the idea of "salvation," which includes both "health" and "well-being." The notions of "health" and "salvation" are complementary, and they play a central part in every religion, including Scientology. The idea that *bodily health* and *spiritual salvation* are connected appears in several religion. The English word "health" comes itself from an anglo-saxon root meaning "whole," with the same meaning of the Greek *holos*. "Holy" also comes from the same root. Thus, there is an etymological exchange between the terms indicating physical and spiritual well-being.

In fact, health, spirituality, and well-being share a common ancestry in an ancient principle of wholeness. This is being rediscovered by several new religious movements in our days, insisting on concepts such as wholeness, spirituality, well-being, health, salvation. The individual capable of integrating health and well-being is holistic, one in whom the physical, psychic, and spiritual dimensions are well integrated. The concept of *holos* is the crossroad where spirituality, health, and prosperity meet. It is the nature of holism to safeguard individuals' health, satisfaction, and material success. It is no accident that some have noticed that today we are moving from a *fitness* spirituality to a so-called

wellness spirituality. From this, an idea of “meta-health” as a concept widespread in contemporary society is emerging.

In Scientology, this new frontier—the freedom of the spirit—is gradually attained by *eight dynamics* of openness towards ever-more totalising realities. This openness spreads like wildfire through the widening awareness of the self, humanity, and the entire world. All this is brought about by “growing” towards freedom, which requires distinct phases of development known as levels of OT (*Operating Thetan*). There are eight levels, representing what is called the “Bridge to Total Freedom.”

These levels of progressive freedom, which broaden more and more and grant “powers,” can be compared with the so-called *siddhi* in the Hindu and Buddhist world (Terrin 2017, 261). Given that the OTs are the most advanced stages on the road to freedom, and taking into account that the doctrines of these higher levels are not communicated but form part of “initiatric” (i.e. progressive) knowledge, many misunderstandings and fantasies have grown up about it over time, upon which Terrin’s otherwise thorough volume does not dwell.

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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 21st 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

phases of this study by two small grants from the J.M. Dawson Institute for Church-State Studies, located at Baylor University, and the Society for the Study of Metaphysical Religion.

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 20th 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 21st 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 Chogyé 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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**“The Most Misunderstood Human Endeavor”:
L. Ron Hubbard, Scientology, and Fine Arts**

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ABSTRACT: An important, but understudied, part of the teachings of L. Ron Hubbard refers to aesthetics and the arts. In the first part, the article explores Hubbard’s aesthetics and its connections with the larger system of Dianetics and Scientology. Hubbard’s ideas about art history, art and communication, color, perspective, and artistic techniques are also discussed. In the second part, the article reviews the works of several artists, some of them internationally famous, who took Scientology’s Art Courses and remained, or are today, active in Scientology, and asks the question whether and how Hubbard’s aesthetics inspired their productions.

KEYWORDS: Scientology, Church of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, Celebrity Centres, Scientology and the Arts.

I. Hubbard’s Gnostic Worldview and Aesthetics

Scientology’s Gnostic Worldview

Dianetics and Scientology represent two distinct phases of L. Ron Hubbard’s (1911–1986) thought. Dianetics deals with the mind, and studies how it receives and stores images. Scientology focuses on the entity who looks at the images stored in the mind. Mind for Scientology has three main parts. The analytical mind observes and remembers data, stores their pictures as mental images, and uses them to take decisions and promote survival. The reactive mind records mental images at times of incidents containing unconsciousness and pain, and stores these images as “engrams.” They are awakened and reactivated when similar circumstances occur, creating all sort of problems. The somatic mind,

directed by the analytical or reactive mind, translates their inputs and messages on the physical level (Hubbard 1950, 39). Dianetics aims at freeing humans from engrams, thus helping them achieving the status of “clear.”

Dianetics, however, leaves open the question of who, exactly, is the subject continuously observing the images stored in the mind. To answer this question, Hubbard introduced Scientology and moved from psychology to metaphysics. At the core of Scientology’s worldview there is a gnostic narrative. At the beginning, there were the “thetans,” pure spirits who created MEST (matter, energy, space, and time), largely for their own pleasure. Unfortunately, incarnating and reincarnating in human bodies, the thetans came to forget that they had created the world, and to believe that they were the effect rather than the cause of physical universe. Their level of “theta,” i.e. of the creative energy peculiar to life that acts upon the physical universe and is directed towards survival (the name comes from the Greek letter *theta*, used by the Greeks to represent thought), gradually decreased and, as they kept incarnating as humans, the part of mind known as the reactive mind took over.

The more the thetan believes to be the effect, rather than the cause, of the physical universe, the more the reactive mind exerts its negative effects and the person is in a state of “aberration.” This affects the Tone Scale, showing the emotional tones a person can experience, and the levels of ARC (Affinity – Reality – Communication). Affinity is the positive emotional relationship we establish with others. Reality is the agreement we reach with others about how things are. Communication is the most important part of the triangle: through communication, we socially construct reality and, once reality is consensually shared, we can generate affinity (Christensen 1999, 2009; Melton 2000; Lewis 2009; Urban 2011; Lewis and Hellesøy 2017).

Hubbard was familiar with the artistic milieu as a successful writer of fiction. However, he struggled for years on how to integrate an aesthetic and a theory of the arts into his system. In 1951, Hubbard wrote that “there is yet to appear a good definition for aesthetics and art” (Hubbard 1976a, 129). In the same year, he dealt with the argument in *Science of Survival*, one of his most important theoretical books. He returned often to the arts, particularly in 17 articles included in technical bulletins from 1965 to 1984, which form the backbone of the 1991 book *Art*, published by Scientology after his death (Hubbard 1991).

Aesthetics in *Science of Survival* (1951)

In *Science of Survival*, Hubbard explains that “many more mind levels apparently exist above the analytical level” (Hubbard 1951, 234). Probably “immediately above” (Hubbard 1951, 234) the analytical mind, something called the aesthetic mind exists. Aesthetics and the aesthetic mind, Hubbard admits, “are both highly nebulous” subjects. In general, the aesthetic mind is the mind that “deals with the nebulous field of art and creation” (Hubbard 1951, 234). And “the aesthetics have very much to do with the tone scale” (Hubbard 1951, 236). By introducing the aesthetic mind, Hubbard somewhat changed his usual model based on the interplay of the analytical and reactive minds.

One might expect that the aesthetic mind would be incapable of functioning until most engrams have been eliminated and the state of clear has been reached. Strangely, Hubbard claims that it is not so:

It is a strange thing that the shut-down of the analytical mind and the aberration of the reactive mind may still leave in fairly good working order the aesthetic mind (Hubbard 1951, 234).

“The aesthetic mind is not much influenced by the position on the tone scale,” although “it evidently has to employ the analytical, reactive, and somatic minds in the creation of art and art forms” (Hubbard 1951, 234).

Not that aberration is irrelevant for the artist. In fact, “the amount of aberration of the individual greatly inhibits the ability of the aesthetic mind to execute” (Hubbard 1951, 234). What amount of theta the artist initially owns is also important. “A person with a great deal of theta as an initial endowment may be potentially a powerful musician,” or visual artist, by reason of his aesthetic mind. However, the aesthetic mind cannot “execute” and produce art directly. It should operate through the analytical and reactive minds, “through both the analytical power of the individual and the aberrations of the individual” (Hubbard 1951, 234–35).

Being “a person of great theta” (Hubbard 1951, 235), as artists often are, is also a mixed blessing. Hubbard explains that

a person of great theta endowment picks up more numerous and heavier locks and secondaries than persons of smaller endowment (Hubbard 1951, 235).

Locks and secondaries are mental image pictures through which we are reminded of engrams. They would not exist without the engrams, but they may be very disturbing. Persons with a great amount of theta, including artists who use all this energy to produce art forms, “seek to control enormous quantities of MEST and other organisms” (Hubbard 1951, 235). The environment reacts to this attempt to control with what Hubbard calls counter-efforts and counter-attacks, through which engrams are used against the individual.

Even before Scientology offered a scientific explanation of these phenomena, they were obvious enough to be noticed but, Hubbard claims, they were often misinterpreted. Many claimed that it was normal, if not “absolutely necessary,” for an artist to be a “neurotic”:

Lacking the ability to do anything about neurosis, like Aesop’s fox who had no tail and tried to persuade the other foxes to cut theirs off, frustrated mental pundits glorified what they could not prevent or cure (Hubbard 1951, 235).

The dysfunctional artist was hailed as a counter-cultural hero. Being “crazy” (Hubbard 1951, 235) was regarded as a blessing for the artist.

Not so, Hubbard argues. Going down the tone scale is not good for anybody and is not good for artists either. The artist,

as he descends down the tone scale, becomes less and less able to execute creative impulses and at last becomes unable to contact his creative impulses (Hubbard 1951, 235).

It is a dangerous misconception, according to Hubbard, to believe that “when an artist becomes less neurotic, he becomes less able” (Hubbard 1951, 238). Regrettably, our world has programmed the artists by widely inculcating these false ideas. The consequence is that many artists “seek to act in their private and public lives in an intensely aberrated fashion to prove that they are artists.” Hubbard gives the example of “some young girl in the field of the arts living like a prostitute in order to convince herself and her friends that she is truly artistic” (Hubbard 1951, 238).

Such artists need auditing by Scientology in order to cure their misperception. Scientology, Hubbard promises, may “take a currently successful but heavily aberrated artist and (...) bring him up the tone scale.” The result will not only be that the artist will be happier as a human being. He or she will also become a better artist. Hubbard predicts a final outcome, after the auditing, where

his ability to execute what he conceives and the clarity with which he conceives it both increase very markedly. His aesthetic ideas do not become conservative or humdrum but become often wider and more complex (Hubbard 1951, 235).

This will be strictly connected with the tone scale. As the artist “rises up the tone scale, he adopts greater scope and robustness in his work” (Hubbard 1951, 236).

There may be a problem, Hubbard notes. Audiences may actually like arts that demonstrates “considerable aberration.” For instance, before the auditing, an artist might have been successful with “paintings [that] might have been strange and creepy, or music hauntingly morbid.” When the artist rises up the tone scale, however, the originality of the artistic expression is not altered. There is only a positive “increase in force of execution and deftness of communication.” Perhaps audiences liked a somewhat morbid music. But “the morbidity in his music, if it did not depend on how sad he was personally with life, does not disappear.” It is, however, expressed in healthier forms, and in fact in a variety of new and different languages, as “versatility increases” (Hubbard 1951, 236).

This is not to say that, as psychiatrists sometimes maintain, it is possible to judge the mental status of an artist by simply observing his or her art. “This, Hubbard objects, is somewhat on the order of a snail giving his [sic] opinion of the Parthenon by crawling through its reliefs” (Hubbard 1951, 236). A good artist can write in different styles and under different masks.

A good poet can cheerfully write a poem gruesome enough to make strong men cringe, or he can write verses happy enough to make the weeping laugh. Any able composer can write music either covert enough to make the sadist wriggle with delight or open enough to rejoice the greatest souls (Hubbard 1951, 236).

Grief or happiness as expressed in a work of art do not necessarily reveal the state of mind of the artist. Rather than examining only the artists’ works, Scientology deals with their personal problems through the auditing.

Hubbard’s vision of the arts, as proposed in *Science of Survival*, is also crucial for Scientology’s social program. Far from being merely peripheral, art is the key for the creation of a better world. “The artist, Hubbard writes, has an enormous role in the enhancement of today’s and the creation of tomorrow’s reality.” Scientology has a high consideration of science, but art operates “in advance of science” and “the elevation of a culture can be measured directly by the numbers of its people working in the field of aesthetics” (Hubbard 1951, 237). “A culture

is only as great as its dreams, and its dreams are dreamed by artists" (Hubbard 1951, 239).

Since the artist "deals in future realities, he always seeks improvements or changes in the existing reality. This makes the artist, inevitably and invariably, a rebel against the status quo." It is a "peaceful revolution" (Hubbard 1951, 237), and a free society needs not worry. Totalitarian states, on the other hand, are the enemies of the artists, while pretending to be their friends. A typical totalitarian state, Hubbard explains, "talks endlessly and raucously about its subsidization of the artist." But in fact,

it subsidizes only those artists who are willing to work for the state exactly as the state dictates. It regiments the artist and prescribes what he will do and what he will write and what he will think (Hubbard 1951, 237).

The suppression of genuine art, however, lowers the tone scale of society in general, with dramatic consequences:

A society which in any way inhibits, suppresses, or regiments its artists, is a society not only low on the tone scale but most certainly doomed (Hubbard 1951, 237).

Democratic governments, in principle, should not have these problems, but they run, according to Hubbard, a different risk. They "are prone to overlook the role of the artist in the society." In the United States, he exemplifies, as soon as artistic success is achieved, excessive taxes discourage the artist from further production. Thus,

democracy, avidly taxing its powerfully creative individuals into non-production, snatches from the artist any such fruits of victory and exacts an enormous penalty for the creation of any work of art.

Hubbard proposes a tax reform aiming at freeing,

completely, the artist. from all taxes and similar oppressions, and thus attract into the arts the most ambitious and able and invite them to pursue unchecked the creation of all the beauty and glory on which any culture depends if it would have material wealth (Hubbard 1951, 237–238).

The reasons for this proposed reform are not merely economical, and are connected to Hubbard's key idea that the prosperity of a society depends from the amount of circulating theta. Without enough theta, the reactive mind would dominate culture itself. "The artist injects the theta into the culture, and without that theta the culture becomes reactive" (Hubbard 1951, 238).

During history, Hubbard adds, art has not always been in its present unsatisfactory state. For example, “in the early days of Rome, art was fairly good.” Christianity revolted against the Romans, and had one good reason for its revolt, “Roman disregard for human life.” However, those who revolt always run the risk of being dominated by the reactive mind. It thus happened, Hubbard believed, that Christianity fell into a “reactive computation” and came to regard everything Roman as negative. He even claims that “for fifteen hundred years it was an evil thing to take a bath, because the Romans had bathed” (Hubbard 1951, 238).

Happily, “the Catholic Church recovered early and began to appreciate the artist.” However, the old anti-Roman and, therefore, anti-artistic prejudice resurfaced with Protestantism and eventually came to the United States. “Puritanism and Calvinism,” according to Hubbard,

revolted against pleasure, against beauty, against cleanliness, and against many other desirable things which are in themselves the glory of man (Hubbard 1951, 238).

The next step was a revolt against the revolt. In modern times, artists revolted against the Protestant and Puritan revolt against the classics and the arts. The problem was that, again, the reactive mind took over, and artists revolted against everything Protestant, if not everything Christian, including morality. Being a good artist came to be

commonly identified with being loose-moraled, wicked, idle and drunken, and the artist, to be recognized, tried to live up to this role. This feeling persists to this day and low-tone people often embrace the arts solely as an excuse to be promiscuous, unconventional and loose in moral.

“Artistic” women are often simply lost women, or so Hubbard claims, denouncing the “Great-Art-Can-Only-Be-Done-By-Moral-Lepers School” (Hubbard 1951, 238–39).

When artists come to seek help in Scientology, they are often full of “entheta,” i.e. theta that has been “enturbulated” and corrupted. There is even more entheta among art critics. The quantity of “entheta which has accumulated around the subject of aesthetics” is truly disturbing. A clear sign that entheta is at work, Hubbard insists, is that reasonable arguments are substituted by appeals to authority and that the science of art criticism is under-developed. “It is an axiom of Dianetics that the less is accurately known about a field of the humanities the more authoritarian will be that field.” In fact, “no more authoritarian field exists”

than art criticism, “since none of the principles of aesthetics have been accurately formulated” so far. The result is confusion and authoritarianism:

Any field which has critics galore, wherein a thousand different schools of divergent opinion can exist, where opinion is listened to with open mouths in lieu of reason by which any man can reach a conclusion, is an authoritarian field (Hubbard 1951, 239).

The whole field of the arts is “enturbulated” (Hubbard 1951, 239), and this has a direct and negative impact on society as a whole:

When the level of existence of the artist becomes impure, so becomes impure the art itself, to the deterioration of the society. It is a dying society indeed into which can penetrate totalitarianism (Hubbard 1951, 239).

In addition to the individual aesthetic mind, there is a collective “group aesthetic mind,” which is crucial for the well-being of any healthy society. Totalitarianism becomes a real possibility when in a society the group aesthetic mind becomes “almost wholly unable to operate” (Hubbard 1951, 239–40).

Hubbard concludes his discussion of aesthetics in *Science of Survival* noting that “there may be many levels of mind above the aesthetic mind” but we do know a lot about them. Therefore,

no attempt to classify any level of mind alertness above the level of the aesthetic mind will be made beyond stating that these mind levels more and more seem to approach an omniscient status (Hubbard 1951, 240).

He mentions, however, among the possible superior levels “a free theta mind, if such things exist” (Hubbard 1951, 25). This notion will become central for the subsequent development in Scientology of the notion of the “operating thetan,” a state where the thetan finally recovers his native abilities.

“What is Art?” (1965)

On 30 August 1965, Hubbard issued a technical bulletin that was crucially important for his theory of art (Hubbard 1976b, 83–85; Hubbard 1980, 1–4). He took again as his starting point that “art is the least codified of human endeavors and the most misunderstood.” The question about art “is one of the least answered of human questions.” He also reiterated the general principle of Dianetics according to which “that field containing the most authorities contains

the least codified knowledge.” Since “art abounds with authorities” (Hubbard 1976b, 83), obviously very little real knowledge exists.

Hubbard explained that it was now fifteen years that it had started considering how to “codify” the knowledge about art and discussing this theme with Donald H. Rogers, one of the members of Dianetics’ original circle, in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He announced that “this [the ‘codification’ of aesthetic theory] has now been done” (Hubbard 1976b, 83).

At first, art “seemed to stand outside the field of Dianetics and Scientology.” Hubbard, however, was not persuaded by this conclusion and eventually “made a breakthrough.” He realized that art and communication are closely connected. In fact, “ART is a word which summarizes THE QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION” (Hubbard 1976b, 83, capitals in the original). Scientology had already elaborated certain “laws” about communication. Now, they should be applied to the arts.

In 1965, Hubbard was ready to propose three axioms. The first was that “too much originality throws the audience into unfamiliarity and therefore disagreement.” Communication, in fact, includes “duplication.” If the audience is totally unable to replicate the experience, it would not understand nor appreciate the work of art. The second axiom taught that “TECHNIQUE should not rise above the level of workability for the purpose of communication.” The third maintained that “PERFECTION cannot be attained at the expense of communication” (Hubbard 1976b, 83, capitals in the original).

Hubbard believed that his approach to aesthetics was new with respect to both classic and contemporary theories of art. The latter emphasize “originality,” to the point that audiences are often surprised but, Hubbard maintained, not persuaded. The former sought perfection through technique. But, according to Hubbard, “seeking perfection is a wrong target in art.” The right target is communication. “One should primarily seek communication with it [art] and then perfect it as far as reasonable.” Too much perfection transports the artist into a realm inaccessible to the audience. “If perfection greater than that which can be attained for communication is sought, one will not communicate.” This does not mean that technical perfection is unimportant. The artist should seek the highest level of technical perfection compatible with effective communication. “Perfection is defined as the quality obtainable which still permits the delivery of

the communication” (Hubbard 1976b, 84). Often, the artist should be prepared to lower the level of perfection to allow communication to flow.

The same applies to technique. In the realm of art, communication is the first aim and a good technical rendition of the message is the second. But this second aim is always subordinate to the first. Technique should be as perfect as possible, but never so perfect as to compromise communication. “The communication is the primary target. The technical quality of it is the secondary consideration” (Hubbard 1976b, 84). If the technique endangers the transmission of the message, the artist should change the technique rather than the message.

It is, of course, also true that below a certain level of technique there is no art. But this, Hubbard insists, is precisely the difference between a professional artist and an amateur, a distinction he will return to in later years:

A professional in the arts is one who obtains communication with the art form at the minimum sacrifice of technical quality (...).

No communication is no art. To not do the communication for lack of technical perfection is the primary error. It is also an error not to push up the technical aspects of the result as high as possible (Hubbard 1976b, 84).

“Art for art’s sake”, Hubbard argues, always failed because it was “attempted perfection without communicating” (Hubbard 1976b, 84). We become artists when we learn how to communicate. Except in very rare cases, this does not come naturally, nor is achieved overnight. Normally, one becomes an artist gradually, reflecting on past failures to communicate. These are, in fact, engrams, and artists should be “rehabilitated” through Dianetics just as anybody else, yet considering that they have specific engrams of their own. In fact, “due to the nature of the Reactive Mind, full rehabilitation [of the artists] is achieved only through releasing and clearing” (Hubbard 1976b, 85).

It is not enough to communicate to ourselves. Artists should learn how to communicate to a wider audience: “A concept of the beholder and some understanding of his or her acceptance level is necessary to the formulation of a successful art form or presentation.” To determine how this result can be achieved, Hubbard returns to the premise that communication is based on familiarity. The beholder receives and understands the message if it is not too far away from what he or she regards as familiar. “All Art depends for its success upon the former experience and associations of the beholder” (Hubbard 1976b, 85).

Since beholders vary, there are no general rules. However, an artist should not easily conclude that communication fails because the audience is primitive, or its taste is not educated enough, or the message is too advanced and revolutionary. More often, the poor relationship with an audience is not caused by the audience itself, but by the artist's own engrams, based on previous failures. These engrams should be taken care of. "Scientology then is a must for any artist if he would succeed without heartbreak" (Hubbard 1976b, 85).

There are artists exhibiting "a lack of desire to communicate." This is how, Hubbard explains, old schools or forms of art decline and disappear. Some believe that they decline because, within a school or style, the artists of a later generation simply imitate those of the former and lack their masters' technical skills and genius. But the real problem is about communication, not "technology." Old forms decline because they become obsessed with technique and forget that the aim of art is communication. "All old forms become beset by technical musts and must nots and so cease to communicate" (Hubbard 1976b, 85).

There is also a "primary suppression," when a work of art is physically damaged or destroyed. On the other hand, "failing continuously to permit a non-destructive communication on the grounds of its lack of art is also suppressive" (Hubbard 1976b, 85). In-between these different forms of suppression lies art. Genuine art is the capacity to create works with the best technique and the maximum degree of perfection that are possible without harming communication.

Hubbard and Mathieu: "Art, More About" (1973)

When the thetan understands himself as the cause rather than the effect of the physical reality, *he* (the thetan is always referred to by Hubbard as male, although women are incarnated thetans too) perceives the world in a new way. If he masters the appropriate techniques, he is also able to produce art with a very high communication potential. On what role technique exactly plays, Hubbard mentioned in a bulletin of July 29, 1973 his discussions with "the late Hubert Mathieu" (Hubbard 1976c, 197). Although some who later wrote about Hubbard were unable to identify him or speculated he was a fictional character, in fact Mathieu (1897–1954) was a distinguished South Dakota illustrator and artist (Miller 1995), who worked for magazines Hubbard was familiar with.

Based *inter alia* on the ideas of Mathieu, Hubbard concluded that in the arts communication (the end) is more important than technique (the means), but technique is not unimportant. Artists who are well-trained can communicate in different styles, including the non-figurative, and the audience understands intuitively that they are real artists. Perceiving the world and representing it from the superior viewpoint of the thetan is not enough.

Hubbard illustrates this point with an anecdote, which may be real or fictional. In order to understand why certain ultra-modern works of art were successful, and others were not, he decided to write a story in an abstruse "acid prose" (Hubbard 1976c, 197) typical of cutting-edge novelists such as Gertrude Stein (1874–1946) or James Joyce (1882–1941)—and not typical at all of his usual fiction. Hubbard sent the story to the editor of a magazine that had published some of his short stories and, much to his surprise, was complimented for the quality of his new style and even invited to lunch to celebrate. Hubbard claims that he discussed the incident with Mathieu, who simply told him, "Well, you proved my point. There's no mystery to it. Basically you're a trained writer! It shows through" (Hubbard 1976c, 197).

This is the core of the 1973 technical bulletin "Art, More About." Three works of modern art may appear very similar. In the intention of their authors, they also try to convey the same message. Yet, only one is successful. Why? According to Hubbard (and Mathieu), the successful artist is the one who decided to use an ultra-modern style, perhaps abstract or surrealist, but would have been capable of producing a persuasive painting in a more traditional style as well. The audience instinctively recognized that this artist was not a charlatan. He (or she) didn't choose abstract art because he would not have been able to produce decent figurative works. No matter what style he used, his technique showed.

The key for successful art, Hubbard concluded, is "TECHNICAL EXPERTISE ITSELF ADEQUATE TO PRODUCE AN EMOTIONAL IMPACT" (Hubbard 1976c, 198, capitals in the original). Interestingly, to illustrate this point, Hubbard gives the example of the stage magician:

If he is a good magician he is a smooth showman. He isn't showing them how he does his tricks. He is showing them a flawless flowing performance. This alone is providing the carrier wave that takes the substance of his actions to his audience. Though a far cry from fine art, perhaps, yet there is art in the way he does things. If he is good, the audience is seeing first of all, before anything else, the TECHNICAL EXPERTISE of his performance.

They are also watching him do things they know they can't do (Hubbard 1976c, 198, capitals in the original).

The example is interesting because among the artists trained in contemporary Scientology's art courses there are stage magicians, such as Stan Gerson. I interviewed him in 2018, and he told me how he tries to apply Hubbard's rules on art as communication to stage magic. Almost anticipating these future developments, Hubbard defended in 1973 the legitimacy of stage magic as a form of art (Hubbard 1976c, 198). Stage magicians also deliver a message through an "adequate" technical expertise.

But "how masterly an expertise [should be]? Not very masterly. Merely adequate" (Hubbard 1976c, 199). Hubbard warned again that "a lot of artists are overstraining to obtain a quality far above that necessary to produce an emotional impact" (Hubbard 1976c, 200). Once the technique has been acquired, the artist should feel safe enough to focus on communicating the message and experiment with whatever style he or she would regard as appropriate. The audience, educated or not, would recognize true art at any rate.

Interacting with the Audience: "Art and Communication" (1977) and "Fine Arts Versus Illustrations" (1979)

In two technical bulletins dated 26 September 1977 and 15 April 1979, Hubbard moved one step further in his theory of art as communication, by proposing a distinction between fine art and illustration. Hubbard may have resented that Mathieu, of whom he thought highly, was always dismissed by critics as a mere "illustrator" (Miller 1995, 63). On the other hand, Hubbard did not think equally highly of critics:

Usually nothing is required of an 'authority' except to say what is right, wrong, good, bad, acceptable or unacceptable. Too often the sole qualification of the authority (as in poor teaching of some subjects) is a memorized list of objects and their creators and dates with some hazy idea of what the work was (Hubbard 1979, 320).

A key principle of Hubbard's thought is that errors arise when words are not defined. Fine arts and mere "illustration," and good and bad arts, are distinguished based on mere "'individual taste,' contemporary standards and, unfortunately, even envy or jealousy" (Hubbard 1979, 320). "Contemporary" standards are largely arbitrary, and Hubbard calls this "invalidative" or

"destructive" criticism, not to be confused with "constructive" criticism, which identifies the problems in the artist's communication and suggest "practical means of doing it better" (Hubbard 1979, 320).

In fact, Hubbard believes that the difference between art and illustration can be clearly defined, but only if we take into consideration *both* the artist and the audience. "True art always elicits a contribution from those who view or hear or experience it. By contribution is meant 'adding to it'" (Hubbard 1979, 319), while in illustration no contribution is solicited from the audience. The distinction may seem obscure, and Hubbard tries to explain it through an example:

An illustration is 'literal' in that it tells everything there is to know. Let us say the illustration is a picture of a tiger approaching a chained girl. It does not really matter how well the painting is executed, it remains an illustration and it IS literal. But now let us take a small portion out of the scene and enlarge it. Let us take, say, the head of the tiger with its baleful eye and snarl. Suddenly we no longer have an illustration. It is no longer 'literal.' And the reason lies in the fact that the viewer can fit this expression into his own concepts, ideas or experience: he can supply the why of the snarl, he can compare the head to someone he knows. In short he can CONTRIBUTE to the head. The skill with which the head is executed determines the degree of response. Because the viewer can contribute to the picture, it is art (Hubbard 1979, 319, capitals in the original).

As he reiterated in 1979,

The division between fine arts and illustrations is that fine arts permit the viewer to contribute his own interpretations or originations to the scene whereas illustrations are 'too literal' and give him the whole works (Hubbard 1980b, 331).

The distinction derives from both Hubbard's definition of art as communication and his theory of emotions. In true art, there is a two-way communication, which includes "the return flow from the person viewing a work" (Hubbard 1979, 319), where in illustration there is no such return flow. The artist tries to evoke emotions, but this can only be achieved if communication flows both ways:

To evoke an emotion in fine arts, the spectator must be invited to contribute part of the meaning. In a poster, the viewer is most often intended to be clobbered. In illustration, the viewer is intended to be informed. A work of fine art can elicit quite different emotional contributions from one member of an audience to the next as he is left free to some degree to contribute meaning and emotion at his choice. In fine arts, the viewer must supply something to make it complete. Fine arts evoke some chord in the viewer's nature or past (Hubbard 1980b, 331).

Hubbard believes that his distinction may also solve an intractable problem among art historians, whether photography is a form of art. The problem, he claims, has gone unsolved because historians limited themselves to consider “how much the photographer has contributed to the ‘reality’ or ‘literalness’ in front of his camera, how he has interpreted it.” Here again, Hubbard takes into consideration not only the photographer, but also the audience. “The point is whether or not [a] photograph elicits a contribution from its viewer. If it does, it is art” (Hubbard 1979, 319).

Amateurs vs Professionals: “Art in Its Basics” (1979) and “A Professional” (1979)

1979 was a productive year for Hubbard’s theory of aesthetics. Having distinguished between fine arts and illustration, he introduced a parallel, but not overlapping, distinction between amateur and professional artists in two technical bulletins dated 4 March and 10 June:

Anybody can turn out amateur junk. Who looks at it? Who would look at it even if they were paid? The distance between amateur junk and an effective product is accomplished by knowing and following the basic rules and using them expertly. When you add to this dexterous handling of materials and equipment and then add some experience you have a professional (Hubbard 1980a, 326).

The distinction may seem obvious, but it isn’t, and Hubbard uses considerable Scientology jargon to explain it. The professional is the artist who knows “the rules,” but not all rules are created equal. In order not to go “out of communication,” the “senior data” should be identified:

A=A=A is the way most people handle data, some of these A’s however, really have a thousand times the importance of other data (Hubbard 1980a, 326).

There are two tools an artist should use to become a professional, the “ideal scene” and the “memory library.” Both concepts are important for Scientology. In 1970, Hubbard established as a basic rule that “a person must have an ideal scene with which to compare the existing scene” (Hubbard 1974a, 21). An “ideal scene” is how something should be to achieve its purpose. Scientologists are taught to compare the “existing scene” with the “ideal scene” to identify and remedy “situations,” i.e. serious departures of the existing scene from the ideal scene (Hubbard 1974c). Examples range from the mundane to the historical. The

“ideal scene” of a shoe shop is the sale of shoes capable of satisfying its customers in certain hours of the days and days of the week. If the shoes do not make the customers happy and willing to return, a “situation” is created in the shape of a significant departure from the ideal scene (Hubbard 1974c, 40–41).

But it was also the case that the situation in France before 1789, or in Russia before 1917, was perceived as a significant departure from the ideal scene. Only, the ideal scene for a nation is much more difficult to grasp, and therefore the French and Russian revolutions, in Hubbard’s opinion, largely failed:

Violent revolution comes about when the actual Ideal Scene has not been properly stated and when it excludes significant parts of the group. It’s no good having a revolution if the end product will be a FURTHER departure from the Ideal Scene (Hubbard 1974c, 39).

Interestingly, in his 1970 discussion of the ideal scene, Hubbard took art and aesthetics into account, while emphasizing that the artistic is not the *only* element of an ideal scene:

There are many factors which add up to an ideal scene. If the majority of these forward the purpose of the activity, it can be said to be a sane ideal. If an ideal which does not forward the activity in any way is the ideal being stressed then a fixed idea is present and had better be inspected. This could be said to be a very harsh utilitarian view of things. But it is not. The artistic plays its role in any ideal. (...) An ideal studio for an artist could be very beautiful or very ugly so long as it served him to produce his art. If it was very beautiful yet hindered his artistic activities it would be a very crazy ideal scene. A handsome factory that produced would be a high ideal. But its nearness to raw materials, transport and worker housing are the more important factors in an ideal of a factory (Hubbard 1974b, 24).

When discussing the professional artist in 1979, Hubbard built on these principles and insisted that a professional,

when he views things, he looks for what’s good in them and neglects the poor, low-grade things. The reason he does this is so he has an ideal scene. Without an ideal scene, he just operates off technical data and produces, artwise, a low quality product and isn’t a professional. Without an ideal scene, he can never get a preconception of the shot. In viewing things that approach an ideal scene, the true professional works out how they did it and when presented with similar tasks of production, can bring off things which approach an ideal scene in his own work (Hubbard 1980c, 346).

While the amateur “looks at everything as to whether he ‘likes them’ or ‘not likes them,’” the professional “accumulates ideal scenes” and builds “a memory library to compare his own products to” (Hubbard 1980c, 346). A “memory library” should not be confused with the “memory bank,” which in Scientology

corresponds to the reactive mind. While the memory bank is a collection of engrams, a memory library is a collection of ideal scenes.

For an example, here is how a Scientology photographer, quoting the above passage by Hubbard, explains how to use the memory library for taking pictures of his children:

Point here is that I find it quite useful to browse similar pictures on Flickr from great photographers, look at things I really like, and then work out how it is that they did them. Then, I strive to create similar effects myself—or, when presented with cute situations, I have a sort of ‘memory library’ to compare to. An example was a friend who I saw took some amazing photos of his daughter on the beach. He had some neat photos taken down low where the sand blurred out as the beach faded into the distance. So, I tried getting a similar effect with mine, last time we hit the beach when we were in Florida (“Tad (Scientology Parent)” 2011).

A diligent “Scientology parent” knows that, to produce artistic photographs of his children, he first needs to collect ideal scenes into an adequate memory library.

Art Techniques (1980–1984)

Almost to the end of his life (1986), Hubbard continued to investigate the relationship between artistic creation and technique. He realized that too much insistence on technique could lead to the conclusion that art was perspiration only, with a limited role for inspiration. He cautioned that artistic creation, just as any other creation, should be a joy for the artist:

Force yourself to smile and you’ll soon stop frowning. Force yourself to laugh and you’ll soon find something to laugh about. Wax enthusiastic and you’ll very soon feel so. A being causes his own feelings. The greatest joy there is in life is creating. Splurge on it! (Hubbard 1984b, 416).

In one of his latest utterances on art, dated 10 March 1984, Hubbard also reminded artists that, although messages not communicated through appropriate technique would never reach the audience, the message itself remained essential:

Successful works of art have a message. It may be implicit or implied, emotional, conceptual or literal, inferred or stated. But a message nonetheless. This applies to any form of art (...).

Many elements and much expertise go into the creating of successful works of art. Dominant amongst them is message, for this integrates the whole and brings comprehension and appreciation to those for whom it is intended. Understanding is the

base of affinity, reality and communication. A message is fundamental to understanding" (Hubbard 1984g, 555).

The dialectic relationship between message and technique, on the other hand, becomes part of the technique itself through the notion of "montage," defined by Hubbard as a four-stage sequence, "a formula that helps one to achieve clear aesthetic communication of art" (Hubbard 1984a, 6):

1. Figure out what your message is.
2. Decide to communicate the message.
3. Put things or arrangements in that contribute to the message.
4. Take out or exclude things or arrangements which don't contribute to it (Hubbard 1984a, 5).

A montage is "a series of shots with one message" (Hubbard 1984a, 5). Shots should not be confused with scenes or pictures. A picture is a scene communicating a message, while

A shot is anything and it has no message in its own right and doesn't talk unless connected to other shots (...).

Individual shots in a montage have little meaning in themselves individually but when cut together deliver a single message. By confusing (...) a montage shot and a scene, one gets very little audience reaction and after all, that's the name of the game (Hubbard 1984a, 5).

Montage consists of "integration" of different, and compatible, shots, and without integration "you don't have art" (Hubbard 1984a, 6). The language comes from cinema, but integration is the technical key of all arts.

Integration is learned, sometimes painfully, although for certain happy few the skills can also be "native" (Hubbard 1984c, 534). To learn, artists should become able to look at their own works in two very particular ways. The first is defined by Hubbard as the capacity

to view any piece of work in a new unit of time each time one views it. One has to be able to sweep aside all past considerations concerning any piece of work which has been changed or is under handling and see it or hear it in a brand-new unit of time as though he had never heard of it before. By doing this, he actually sees or hears exactly what is in front of him, not his past considerations concerning it (Hubbard 1984c, 534).

This may seem complicated, but Hubbard claims it is the secret explaining why many artists fail. When they look at their works, they do not see them as they

really are *now* but still perceive their precedent versions they were not happy about, which have been corrected in the meantime:

Some painters, for instance, will redo and redo and redo a painting up to an inch thick of paint when, possibly, several of those redos were quite acceptable. But he continued to try to correct the first impressions which were no longer there. By not viewing his painting in a new unit of time as though he had never seen it before, he cannot actually get a correct impression of what is in front of him (Hubbard 1984c, 534).

Hubbard claims that professional artists are actually aware of this problem, and try to overcome it by looking at their works in a mirror or through a reducing glass rather than directly. This relates to the second skill any artist need: the ability of seeing each work from the point of view of the intended audience, which may be very much different from the professional point of view of the artist. Obviously, the second skill presupposes the first, since the audience would look at the work of art in its present version, and would be unaware of any previous version still present in the artist's mind. Summing up,

what really separates the flubbers and amateurs from the professional are these two skills. One has to be able to view or hear anything he is working on at any time in a brand-new unit of time. And one has to be able to see or hear his production from the viewpoint of the eventual audience. In other words, the really excellent professional can be fluid in time, not stuck in the past and can be facile in space location. There is no reason why one should be stuck on the time track or fixated in just his own location in space. Actually, just knowing that these skills can exist is often enough the key to acquiring them (Hubbard 1984c, 536).

Armed with these two skills, the artist will be able to build the work of art as integration and composition. Composition and integration are not synonymous, but are strictly related. Hubbard claimed that composition had not been clearly defined before him, and this lack of a definition became the source of much confusion. For him, composition is the sum of "any or all of the actions necessary to integrate and give meanings to a message" (Hubbard 1984f, 543). These "actions" are obviously different in different forms of art. For example, for a painter the elements of composition will be "the actual objects to be shown, color, color harmony and color depth, depth perspective, geometric design and the use of mood lines, and calligraphy" (Hubbard 1984f, 542). Some of these elements are discussed by Hubbard in more details than others.

As for "the actual objects to be shown," Hubbard believes that each work of art should have a "center of interest." Two or more centers in general do not create integration but confusion: putting them together is theoretically possible, but

very difficult. Here, Hubbard is close to those religious critics of modern art, such as Hans Sedlmayr (1896–1984), who lamented the “loss of the center,” making contemporary works more difficult to understand (Sedlmayr 1948).

For Hubbard, the center of the work, and the main ancillary objects, should be clearly identified and identifiable (Hubbard 1984f, 543–44). More subtly, they should also determine the dominant and secondary geometric shapes in the composition. Here, Hubbard also introduces the notion of “mood lines,” i.e. abstract line forms that influence the audience’s emotional response (Hubbard 1984f, 544). Vertical lines communicate drama and inspiration, horizontal lines, happiness and calm, and so on. There are several systems of mood lines described in manuals for artists. In the posthumously collected edition of Hubbard’s bulletins on art (Hubbard 1991, 76–77). Scientology used the system of mood lines developed by visionary landscape architect John Ormsbee Simonds (1913–2005). Simonds’ theory of form was influenced by Zen Buddhism and by Anthroposophical theories he was exposed to through his mentor at Harvard, Marcel Breuer (1902–1981), formerly of the Bauhaus (Cramer 2005).

Another common tool Hubbard recommended to artists, the color wheel (Hubbard 1984e, 539–540), was promoted in his times through references to market surveys, but in fact had been first used in a different context by Robert Fludd (1574–1637) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) (Godwin 2017). Like many Theosophists (and market researchers), Hubbard believed that colors correspond to specific emotional states.

Hubbard suggested the systematic use of the wheel for exploring color harmony and color association. The principles he mentioned were fairly standard, and referred to the positions of the colors on the wheel: (a) “direct harmony,” or use as complementary of the color directly opposite the key color; (b) “related colors,” or use of colors immediately adjacent to the key color; (c) “split complementary,” or use of the colors directly adjacent to the complementary color identified through direct harmony; and (d) “triadic harmony,” or use of the colors two spaces to either side of the complementary color. Hubbard, however, advised that “when you use triadics and splits, they have to be in small areas” (Hubbard 1984e, 539).

In addition to harmony and association, Hubbard mentioned color depth, defined as

the apparency [sic] of depth (relative distance from the viewer) characteristic of different colors and depending on the background against which they appear (Hubbard 1984e, 540).

“Warm colors appear to advance while cool hues recede from the observer” (Hubbard 1984d, 537). Color depth is in turn relates to “depth perspective,” constructed through a variety of techniques, of which Hubbard claimed in 1984 to have offered “the first codification” (Hubbard 1984d, 538). His classification distinguishes between (1) depth by aerial perspective (“distant areas go hazy; near areas go sharp”); (2) depth by color; (3) depth by linear perspective; (4) depth by light; (5) depth by shadow, or by “light as shadow”; (6) depth by solidity, as “solidity of shapes is different than shadow actions. The solidity itself is special. A thing can be drawn to be solid. Then one can add perspective”; (7) depth by focus (“things when quite near are sharp. Things that are far are a bit blurry”); and (8) depth by lateral movement (Hubbard 1984d, 537–538).

Finally, Hubbard examined the cases when a text should be integrated into a work of art. It is important, he notes, that calligraphy, or the style of type or lettering, integrates with the rest of the work:

From the viewpoint of integration, flowing color patterns or lines have no integration whatsoever with a sharp, modernistic style of typeface. The type doesn’t align with the art form, so the two don’t integrate. They don’t seem to belong together, so they don’t seem to be art. To integrate with flowing color patterns, the calligraphy or lettering would have to fit with lines that give the impression of “in motion” or “flowing” or something similar. Different color patterns or geometric lines would require different types of calligraphy. In other words, in an ad or other design the calligraphy or type style should align and integrate with the art form used. And the type style itself should agree with the colors (Hubbard 1984f, 545).

Ultimately, integration remains the key of the whole discussion of art techniques by Hubbard.

II. Scientology and the Artists: Some Examples

Among modern new religious movements, Scientology is unique for its conscious effort of transmitting its worldview to the artists, at the same time teaching them how to be more apt at communicating their art to their audiences, through its courses and seminaries taught in its Celebrity Centres. Yet, Scientology’s influence on artists is understudied. One of the reasons lies in the attacks and discrimination some artists have received because of their association

with Scientology, particularly in Germany. There, abstract painter and textile artist Bia Wunderer is one of the artists who had exhibitions cancelled because she was “exposed” as a Scientologist (here, as elsewhere in this paragraph, I rely on personal interviews rather than on written sources). This made some artists understandably reluctant to discuss their relationship with Scientology. However, in Germany, of all places, artists were involved in Scientology since its beginnings. When he died in 2015, painter and sculptor Waki Zöllner (1935–2015), who had joined Scientology in 1968, was the German with more years of Scientology training.

The most famous international artist who took Scientology courses for several years, starting in 1972, was the Austrian-born Gottfried Helnwein (b. 1948). He became increasingly involved in Scientology’s activities, with all his family, and was attacked by anti-cult critics, who promoted even a book against him (Reichelt 1997). This generated in turn court cases and Helnwein’s increasing reluctance to discuss his religious beliefs.

In 1975, Helnwein told Stuttgart’s Scientology magazine *College* that “Scientology has caused a consciousness explosion in me” (Helnwein 1975). In 1989, in an interview in Scientology’s *Celebrity*, Helnwein elaborated that Scientology offers to artists invaluable tools to survive in a world often hostile to them, but also gave him a “new viewpoint” and an understanding how “people would react to my art” (Helnwein 1989a, 10–11).

American novelist William Burroughs (1914–1997) took several Scientology courses between 1959 and 1968. Later, he rejected Scientology as an organization, while maintaining an appreciation for its techniques. In 1990, he wrote an essay about Helnwein, calling him “a master of surprised recognition,” which he defined as the art “to show the viewer what he knows but does not know that he knows” (Burroughs 1990, 3). In this sense, “surprised recognition” may also describe the moment when a thetan “remembers” his true nature.

Helnwein’s unique style and approach to reality, a “photorealism” where paintings often look as photographs (but aren’t), derive from multiple sources. Ultimately, however, we can perhaps see in Helnwein’s works an attempt to depict the world as a thetan sees it, finally realizing he is its creator. Seen as it really is, the world is not always pleasant, and includes suppression and totalitarianism. Some of Helnwein’s most famous paintings include suffering children. Helnwein exposes there the society’s unacknowledged cruelty. But

there is also hope. The artist is aware of Hubbard's ideas about children as spiritual beings occupying young bodies. Armed with the technology, children can survive and defeat suppression.

Criticizing psychiatry's abuses is a cause dear to Scientologists. In 1979, leading Austrian psychiatrist Heinrich Gross (1915–2005), who participated in the Nazi program for the euthanasia of mentally handicapped children, defended himself by stating that children were killed in a somewhat humane way, with poison. Helnwein reacted with a watercolor, *Lives Unworthy of Being Lived*, depicting a child "humanely" poisoned by Gross (The State Russian Museum 1998; Schröder and Lahner 2013).

Helnwein also looked provocatively at Nazism and the Holocaust as an evil the German and Austrian society still refused to confront. In his famous *Epiphany I* (1996), the child may or may not be a young Adolf Hitler (1889–1945), but the Three Kings are clearly Nazi officers. Helnwein wants the audience, as Hubbard suggested, to contribute part of the meaning and to understand by itself.

Born in 1948, Helnwein reports how he escaped from Vienna's suffocating conformism through comics, something the Austrian educational establishment did not approve of at that time. He maintains a fascination for Disney's Donald Duck and the creator of several Donald stories, Carl Barks (1901–2000), who became his friend. Both Mickey Mouse and Donald are featured in Helnwein's work. Barks, Helnwein wrote, created a

decent world where one could get flattened by steam-rollers and perforated by bullets without serious harm. A world in which the people still looked proper (...). And it was here that I met the man who would forever change my life – a man who (...) is the only person today that has something worthwhile saying – Donald Duck (Helnwein 1989b, 16).

Perhaps, again, Barks' Duckburg became a metaphor for Helnwein of the "clear" world created by a technology capable of restoring the thetans to their proper role. In 2013, Helnwein was honored by a great retrospective at Vienna's Albertina, which attracted 250,000 visitors, a far cry from when the artist was discriminated as a Scientologist.

While Helnwein became reserved on his relationship with Scientology, other artists declared it openly. Scientology through its Celebrity Centres also created a community of artists, knowing and meeting each other across different countries, continents, and styles. Several Scientologist artists decided to live either in Los

Angeles or in Clearwater, Florida, near the main centers of the Church of Scientology.

Scientologist artists do not share a single style, as is true for artists who are Theosophists or Catholics. For example, German-born Carl-W. Röhrig (b. 1953), currently residing in Switzerland, calls his art “fantastic realism” and is also influenced by fantasy literature, surrealism, and popular esotericism (von Barkawitz 1999), as evidenced by his successful deck of tarot cards (Röhrig and Marzano-Fritz 1997). There are, however, common themes among Scientology artists, as evidenced in interviews I conducted with a number of them (the subsequent quotes, unless otherwise indicated, are from those interviews).

Röhrig is among the few Scientologist artists who included explicit references to Scientology doctrines in some of his paintings, including *The Bridge* (2009), i.e. the journey to become free from the effects of the reactive mind. Röhrig and other artists who are Scientologists, including the American Pomm Hepner and Randy South (aka Carl Randolph), also contributed murals to churches of Scientology around the world. California Scientologist artist Barry Shereshevsky devoted several paintings to the ARC triangle. California sculptor D. Yoshikawa Wright moved “from Western to more Eastern thought,” rediscovering his roots, and finally found in Scientology something that, he says, “merges East and West.” About his *Sculptural Waterfalls*, he comments that the stone represents the thetan, the water the physical universe as motion, and their relationship the rhythm, the dance of life. Another Scientologist sculptor (and painter), the Italian Eugenio Galli, experiments with rhythm and motion through different abstract compositions all connected with the idea of “transcendence,” i.e. transcending our present, limited status.

Artists who went through Scientology’s *Art Course* all insisted on art as communication. Winnipeg-born New York abstract artist Beatrice Findlay told me that “art is communication, why the heck would you do it otherwise?” She also insisted that Hubbard “never said abstract art communicated less” and had a deep appreciation of music, a form of abstract communication par excellence. Hubbard’s ideas about composition are translated by Findlay into peculiar abstract lines and color (Carasso 2003). At least the name of another Canadian abstract artist who was once a Scientologist, Richard Borthwick Gorman (1935–2010), should be mentioned here, since recently anti-Scientologists, in a bizarre development, claimed that his 1968 new covers for some of Hubbard’s books

carried subliminal messages and were an attempt at brainwashing those who would look at the covers (Shaw and Raine 2017).

Other Scientologist artists apply the same principles to a more traditional approach to landscape. They include the Italian Franco Farina, the Canadian Ross Munro, and the American Erin Hanson, whose depictions of national parks and other iconic American landscapes in a style she calls “Open Impressionism” won critical acclaim (Hanson 2014; Hanson 2016).

Pomm Hepner is both a professional artist and a senior technical supervisor at Scientology’s church in Pasadena, as well as a leader in Artists for Human Rights, an advocacy organization started by Scientologists. As Scientology taught her “on the spiritual world,” she evolved, she says, from “pretty things” to “vibrations,” from “a moment that exists to a moment I create... I can bring beauty to the world and no longer need to depend on the world bringing beauty to me.” By adopting the point of view of the thetan, she tried to “reverse” the relationship between the artist and the physical universe. A similar experience emerges in the artistic and literary career of Scientologist Renée Duke (1927–2011). Although she had painted before, she became a professional painter only later in life, after she had encountered Scientology (Duke 2012).

There is a difference between how Scientologist artists were discriminated against in Europe and some mild hostility their beliefs received occasionally in the U.S. However, they all stated in my interviews that modern society is often disturbed by artists and tries to suppress them, singling out psychiatry as a main culprit, a recurring theme in Scientology. *The Trick Cyclist* by Randolph South depicts well-known psychiatrists and “was created to draw attention to the evil practice of psychiatry.” Most Scientologist artists share an appreciation of Helnwein, although they may be very far away from both his art and his persona. Some address the theme of suffering children with obvious Helnweinian undertones. The youngest child of L. Ron Hubbard, Arthur Conway Hubbard (b. 1958), himself became a painter and studied under Helnwein, although he also produced works in a different style. In some of his paintings, he used his own blood.

Pollution as a form of global suppression and Scientology’s mission to put an end to it are a main theme for Röhrig. Landscapes and cultures in developing countries are also in danger of being suppressed. This is a key subject in the work of Swiss Scientologist artist Claude Sandoz, who spends part of his time in the

Caribbean, in Saint Lucia. Exhibitions of Sandoz’s works, which blends Caribbean and European themes and styles, took place in several Swiss museums (see Stutzer and Walser Beglinger 1994).

Some of those who took Scientology’s *Art Course* are “commercial” artists. The course told them that this is not a shame and hailed success as healthy. They believe that the boundary between commercial and fine art is not clear-cut. Some of them were encouraged to also engage in fine arts. Veteran Scientologist artist Peter Green, who also produced one of the most famous portraits of Hubbard, claims he understood through Scientology that commercial artists are not “coin-operated artists,” but have their own way of communicating and presenting a message. Green manifested this approach in his iconic posters, such as a famous one of Jimi Hendrix (1942–1970). Green also contributed to horror comics magazines published by the Warren company in California, and keeps producing his successful *Politicards*, i.e. trading and playing cards with politicians (see Kelly 2011). He insists that you can “paint to live and remain sane. And in the end, you may live to paint too.” Randy South insisted that, even when working for advertising, artists may “perceive the physical universe” as “not overwhelming spirituality” but “vice versa.” He added that “Hubbard said that life is a game. I want to play the game, and it’s fun.”

The portraits of another Scientologist artist, Robert Schoeller, are sold for commercial purposes, but he believes that “by painting somebody I make him spiritual.” In fact, there have been museum exhibitions of his portraits around the central theme of spirituality. Similar considerations may be made about an Italian portrait artist, Domenico Mileto, and for Jim Warren’s popular lithographs and Disney-related themes. Other Scientologist artists became photographers and cartoonists. Carolyn Kelly (1945–2017) was the daughter of well-known American cartoonist Walt Kelly (1913–1973), the creator of *Pogo*. She was a cartoonist and illustrator in her own right, and was among those who designed her father’s *Pogo* when the strip was shortly revived in the 1990s.

Some (but not all) Scientologist artists took an interest in popular esoteric discourse. Before meeting Scientology, Pomm Hepner, was exposed to Anthroposophy by studying at a Steiner school. Röhrig uses the Tarots as well as the Zodiac. He explains he doesn’t believe in the *content* of astrology or Tarot, as “they are effects and as a Scientologist you try to be cause,” but they provide a widely shared *language* and are “a very good tool to communicate.” Other

Scientologist artists approach in a similar way Eastern spirituality. For instance, Marlene Rose's glass sculptures often feature the Buddha. Rose is one of the artists who decided to live in Clearwater, Florida, near the Flag headquarters of the Church of Scientology. The area offers a favorable environment for artists working with glass and in April 2017 nearby St. Petersburg opened the Imagine Museum devoted to this artistic medium, with Marlene Rose featured in the opening exhibit.

"We were one hundred students doing the same [Scientology] course. Suddenly, the room took the most beautiful characteristics. Everything became magical. I became more me. The room did not change but how I perceived it changed," reported Susana Díaz-Rivera, a Mexican Scientologist painter. Several artists told how the "static" experience, which in Scientology language means realizing your nature as thetan, completely changed how they perceive the world. Then, "art is about duplicating what you perceive. Perception is communication," as Yoshikawa Wright told me. Díaz-Rivera struggled to recapture and express this perception of herself as a thetan. She tried both painting and photographing in different locations, including Rome and Los Angeles, and using mirrors. "The spiritual part, she said, emerges through the mirrors."

Scientology, the artists who attended its courses reported, offers to the artist a number of suggestions, aimed at "putting them back in the driver's seat" (Peter Green) of their lives, exposing the "myth" of the dysfunctional, starving artist. Scientology also creates and cultivates a community of artists, and does more than offering practical advice. By interiorizing the gnostic narrative of the thetan, artists learn to perceive the physical universe in a different way. Then, they try to share this perception through communication, with a variety of different techniques and styles, inviting the audience to enhance their works with further meanings.

Sixty-two sculptures in the Grand Atrium of the new Flag Building in Clearwater, Florida, inaugurated in 2013, illustrate the fundamental concepts of Scientology. The fact that these concepts had to be explained to the artists, none of them a Scientologist, is significant. Artists who are Scientologists normally are inspired by Scientology in their work, but prefer not to "preach" or illustrate its doctrines explicitly. On the other hand, although not realized by Scientologists,

the Flag complex of sculptures is part and parcel of an art inspired by Hubbard and Scientology.

In 2008, the Los Angeles magazine *Ange* described the circle of young artists who are Scientologists, including painter and novelist Mercedes Helnwein (Gottfried Helnwein's daughter) and promising abstract artist Vanessa Prager as the "first generation of casual Scientologists," whose religious affiliation caused less controversy (Brown 2008). Visual arts seem to offer an ideal window to discuss the worldview and multiple influences of Scientology independently of the usual legal and other controversies.

III. Conclusion

Although neglected by critics, aesthetic theory appears to be an important part of Hubbard's system. The founder of Scientology left to his religion a complete set of theoretical tools about art, artistic techniques, and art history. They contribute to explaining why the impact of Scientology on visual artists has been significant, and why post-Hubbard Scientologists still devote a substantial amount of time to spreading their founder's ideas about the arts among artists, something that goes well beyond the recruitment of celebrities for public relations purposes.

Ultimately, Hubbard saw the lives of successful individuals as works of art themselves: "Living itself is an art form" (Hubbard 1976c, 199). Writing in 1976, he started, not without humor, by mentioning an art of physical appearance and dressing:

One puts up a mock-up. It doesn't happen by accident. One has to know how to wash his nylon shirts and girls have to know what mascara runs and that too many candy bars spoil the silhouette, quite in addition to the pancreas. (...)

Even a beard and baggy pants require a certain art if they are to be the expertise adequate to produce an emotional impact (Hubbard 1976c, 199–200).

However, he soon became very much serious:

Some people are themselves a work of art because they have mastered the small practical techniques of living that give them a quality adequate to produce an emotional impact even before anyone knows their name or what they do (Hubbard 1976c, 1999).

Although he didn't mention it explicitly, one can follow Hugh Urban in thinking that Hubbard both cultivated the romantic ideal of living his life, as a thinker and religious founder as well as an artist, as the ultimate work of art, and is perceived by his followers (inter alia) as the physical embodiment of what art is all about (Urban 2017).

Hubbard rarely mentions the word "beauty" in his writings consecrated to the arts. However, it is very much implied there that the supreme beauty Scientology has to offer is the enlightened life of the realized individual, from the clear to the operating thetan, of which Hubbard himself is regarded as the model. That good lives are the highest works of art has been proclaimed by several religions, old and new. The Roman Catholic Church presented this doctrine in a 2006 document on beauty (Pontifical Council for Culture 2006).

There is, however, a significant difference, and one that is crucial for understanding the nature of Scientology. The beauty of a saintly life in the 2006 Vatican document does not derive from a technique, but from a personal relationship with God incarnate as Jesus Christ. The Roman Catholic Church reiterated in 2018 in the doctrinal letter *Placuit Deo* that its spirituality is very much different from Gnosticism, where salvation (and beauty) are achieved through knowledge and techniques (Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith 2018). Scientology remains a modern Gnosticism, and Hubbard's offer is that of a religious technology that, when correctly applied, would infallibly produce happiness for the individuals and the world, as well as beauty and effective communication through art.

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Research Notes

Scientology, Anti-Cultists, and the State in Russia and Hungary

On October 5–6, 2017, Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania, hosted the conference Religion(s) and Power(s), organized by the the Lithuanian Society for the Study of Religions in co-operation with the Estonian Society for the Study of Religions and the Latvian Society for the Study of Religion. We publish the texts of the session “Cults, Anti-Cultists, and Power in Russia. Anti-Extremism Laws and the Case of the Church of Scientology.” To document how Russian concepts of “spiritual security” are being exported in other countries, we also include a paper on Hungary by Patricia Duval, from the seminar Religion and Civil Society in the Post-Soviet Era: Central Asia and Beyond, co-organized by CESNUR at the American University of Central Asia, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on March 19–20, 2018.

The Social Construction of “Extremism” in Russia: From the Jehovah’s Witnesses to Scientology and Beyond

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ABSTRACT: After the 2017 “liquidation” of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Russia moved to liquidate other new religious movements, including the Church of Scientology. While international criticism often focused on the Russian anti-proselytization laws of 2016, it was in fact the anti-extremism law of 2002, as amended in 2006, that became the main tool for “liquidating” unpopular minorities. In the Russian context, the local anti-cult movement led by Alexander Dvorkin and by radical sectors of the Orthodox Church, accredited itself as the custodian of the nationalist doctrine of “spiritual security,” aimed at shielding Russian from “foreign” spiritual and cultural influences.

KEYWORDS: Scientology, Scientology in Russia, Alexander Dvorkin, Anti-Cult Movement in Russia, Anti-Extremism Laws in Russia, Religious Liberty in Russia.

Introduction

In 2017, the Supreme Court in Russia confirmed the “liquidation” of the Jehovah’s Witnesses as an “extremist” group (Arnold 2017a). Steps were taken towards a similar “liquidation” as “extremist” of the Church of Scientology, whose churches were raided and whose leaders in St. Petersburg were arrested (information about the case of the Church of Scientology in Russia is also derived from copies of court documents in the archives of CESNUR, Torino, Italy).

“Extremism” is a broad notion in Russia. Based on anti-cult propaganda, the prosecutor in Tomsk asked a local court to ban an ISKCON Russian translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* as “extremist.” The case generated widespread protest in India, which the Russian ambassador to India tried to placate by describing those trying to ban the *Gita* as irrelevant “madmen” (Corley 2012). Although the prosecutor lost the first-degree case in 2011 and the appeal in 2012, accusations of extremism against the *Bhagavad Gita* are still heard in Russia (Corley 2012).

Banned in Russia as “extremist” were also the works of renowned Turkish Islamic theologian Said Nursi (1878–1960), including his famous *Risale-i Nur* (Arnold 2016a). Nursi’s books are also quoted by *some* Muslim fundamentalists, but so is the *Quran*, and most of Nursi’s followers are certainly not radical (Vahide 2005, Markham and Pirim 2011).

On July 14, 2017, the District Court of Sochi also banned as “extremist” the book *Forced to Convert* by the German rabbi Marcus Lehmann (1831–1890), on forced conversions of Jews to Christianity in Poland and Lithuania in the Middle Ages. The decision was strongly condemned by Boruch Gorin, the spokesperson for the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (Arnold 2017c).

In 2016, as part of the so called Yarovaya laws, Russia introduced provisions prohibiting proselytization on behalf of religious minorities outside of religious buildings. They were condemned by most international organizations but are now systematically enforced, as shown in the following table (compiled based on Arnold 2017b and listing cases prosecuted between June 2016 and July 2017):

Religious Groupings	Cases Prosecuted
Protestant/Evangelicals (excluding Baptists)	58
Jehovah’s Witnesses	40
Baptists	26
ISKCON (Hare Krishna)	12
Muslims	9
Miscellaneous Jews/Kabbalah	3
Seventh-day Adventists	3
Unidentified Christians	2
Dissident Orthodox	2
Salvation Army	1
New Apostolic Church	1
Mormons	1
Neo-Pagan	1

Table 1: Anti-proselytization cases prosecuted between June 2016 and July 2017

However, even more dangerous for religious minorities are the anti-extremism provisions of 2002, introduced after 9/11 and amended in 2006 after the “Russian 9/11” or “the 9/11 of children,” i.e. the terrorist attack in Beslan, North Ossetia, of September 1–3, 2004, where 354 were killed, including 186 children. The law was originally intended as a weapon against radical Islamic fundamentalism. With the amendment of 2006, “extremism” can be found even without actual violence or incitement to violence (Arnold 2016b).

Four Criteria for “Extremism” in Russia

By moving from the Jehovah’s Witnesses to the second main target, Scientology, four criteria for identifying “extremism” emerged—other than violence or incitement to violence, which are admittedly absent in these cases:

1. *Exclusiveness.* According to the Russian “experts” and courts, “extremist” movements claim that they preach the only way to salvation, and that all the other religions (including Christianity as taught by the Russian Orthodox Church) are false or limited.

2. *“Breaking Families.”* The Russian interpretation is that “extremist” groups “break families,” because if only one spouse joins, or leaves, the movement, divorce is the outcome in most of cases. True or false information about divorces of celebrities, such as Tom Cruise (a Scientologist) is also mentioned as evidence.

3. *Mistreating Ex-Members.* It is argued that “extremist” groups “violate the dignity” of former members, by suggesting that members avoid any contact with them, even when they are close relatives.

4. *Economic Crimes.* Finally, it is claimed that under the guise of religion “extremist” movements commit economic crimes, including systematic tax evasion.

The main problem is not that the accusations are false. It is that they *can be applied to almost any religion*:

1. Most religions proclaim that they offer the only path to salvation. This is obvious for Islam but was reiterated by Catholicism in the Vatican declaration *Dominus Iesus* of 2000 (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2000), although it is perhaps less emphasized by the present Pope. And it would not be difficult to collect statements by dignitaries of the Russian Orthodox Church claiming that all other religions are false, and some are in fact directly controlled by the Devil.

Critics insist that Scientologists emphasize that theirs is the unique “technology” capable of saving the planet. While this is true, Scientology clearly teaches that one can become a Scientologist and maintain his or her previous religion, although there may be theological problems in reconciling different beliefs. As it has been observed, from a strictly religious point of view Scientology is one of the *less* exclusivist movements in the world (Neusner 2003, 221–236).

2. When only one spouse changes his or her religion, divorce is frequent—in all religions. This can be documented through the case of India, where family law allows for automatic divorce in case of conversion of one spouse to a different religion, and tens of thousands of applications for “conversion divorce” are filed every year (see e.g. Garg 1998).

3. Until a few years ago, the Catholic Church regarded those excommunicated as “vitandi,” a Latin word meaning “persons to be avoided” (Testo and Turchi 1936). Many religions have policies of forbidding any communication between members and “apostate” ex-members, including groups we normally regard as nice and peaceful such as the Amish (Wiser 2014). And for some Islamic schools, political parties, and governments, the “apostate” who has left Islam may be punished with the death penalty (Pew Research Center 2013).

4. Almost all religions have been accused, in one country or another, of greediness and tax evasion, a perpetual argument used in anti-religious propaganda by atheists.

Some such accusations are demonstrably false. Galina Shurinova, executive director of the Church of Scientology in St Petersburg, was arrested and accused inter alia of selling courses and books without having properly registered Scientology as an organization. In fact, Shurinova had repeatedly tried to incorporate the Church, but registration was denied, despite a 2015 decision by the European Court of Human Rights condemning this refusal (European Court of Human Rights 2015: Shurinova herself was a petitioner in that case).

The Context: “Spiritual Security”

The use of the category of “extremism” in Russia may seem irrational. But it is important to understand how it has been socially and politically constructed, and by whom. Russia’s main anti-cult organization, the Saint Irenaeus of Lyons Centre, has worked for more than twenty years to promote the notion. Its leader, Alexander Dvorkin, became the president of the Justice Ministry’s Expert Council for Conducting State Religious Studies Expert Analysis, a key actor in the cases for banning groups and books as “extremist” (Human Rights Without Frontiers Correspondent in Russia 2012).

Although Dvorkin's extreme methods and his cavalier attacks against (inter alia) the Mormons, the Baha'is, Hinduism, and Islam have often embarrassed the government and the Russian Orthodox Church, he has also been used by circles promoting "spiritual security" as part of the Russian concept of national security. In the *Russian National Security Concept* (2000), we read that "Russian Federation's national security also includes protecting the cultural and spiritual-moral legacy and the historical traditions and standards of public life and preserving the cultural heritage of all Russia's peoples. There must be a state policy to maintain the population's spiritual and moral welfare, prohibit the use of airtime to promote violence or base instincts, and counter the adverse impact of foreign religious organizations and missionaries" ("National Security Concept of the Russian Federation" 2000, IV).

Ironically, Russian judges sat in the Nuremberg Trials of 1945–1946, where Nazi leaders were accused of having persecuted Jews and members of religious minorities based, inter alia, on a concept of German "spiritual health" to be preserved and protected against "foreign" spiritual influences (Gonen 2000, 31).

The Russian approach is also being exported to "friendly" countries, such as the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, Belarus, Serbia, and Hungary (EIFRF 2017). Dvorkin is the vice-president of the European anti-cult federation FECRIS. As economic support to FECRIS by other countries is drying out, Russian hegemony on European anti-cultism is a concrete possibility. It is also paradoxical, because most European anti-cult organizations are deeply secular, while Dvorkin represents a radical faction of the Russian Orthodox Church (Human Rights Without Frontiers Correspondent in Russia 2012).

Conclusion

Doctrines of "spiritual security" have no place in the European Union and are also incompatible with international conventions on human rights and religious liberty that Russia has executed and ratified. Religions should be able to compete freely and to proselyte, without undue state restrictions. Non-traditional religions cannot be discriminated because they do not fit within the boundaries of a nationalist/traditionalist ideology.

At the same time, I believe that a dialogue should be promoted, reassuring nations that went through the tragic experience of Communism, that nobody wants to impose to them a secular model dismissing traditional identities or religions as irrelevant. Creative solutions exist, guaranteeing both the recognition that certain religions are uniquely part of the history of their countries and the liberty mandated by the international convention for the religious minorities.

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The Provisions Against Religious Extremism and Illegal Business Activity as Instruments for Outlawing Religious Minorities in Russia: The Case of the Church of Scientology

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ABSTRACT: This paper, presented at the Kaunas conference *Religion(s) and Power(s)* of October 5–6, 2017, has been updated with remarks I made at the seminar co-organized by CESNUR at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on March 19–20, 2018. Its starting point is that the policy of discrimination towards religious minority groups is increasing in Russia. It is one of the consequences of the alliance of the Kremlin and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which is a part of the government's strategy of turning more conservative and isolating Russia from the Western world. The two main legal instruments for outlawing religious minorities are two articles of the Criminal Code: 282 (against extremism) and 171 (against illegal business activity). As the authorities quickly found out, the public fear of religious terrorism, combined with suspicions of illegal enrichment of foreign-based groups, made it quite safe for them to get rid of unwanted religious groups by using these tools. The objections of a small number of defenders of religious freedom inside of Russia, including religious scholars, were dismissed. The indignation such discriminating policy raises abroad only proves to the Kremlin that it is indeed on the right track, making Russia an invincible fortress against the morally corrupted West.

KEYWORDS: Scientology, Jehovah's Witnesses, New Religious Movements in Russia, Extremism in Russia, Repression of Illegal Business Activity in Russia.

Introduction

In November 2015, the Moscow City Court banned the activities of the Moscow branch of the Church of Scientology. In June 2016, the Supreme Court dismissed Scientology's appeal and supported the decision. The Russian Ministry of Justice won the case after many years of fighting with Scientology. What are the reasons of this prolonged battle?

Basically, there are two of them. The first is the position of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which considers Scientology to be a “destructive organization”. Inside the ROC, there are two conflicting opinions. Some of its “experts” argue that Scientology is a dangerous heretical cult, the others say it has nothing to do with religion and is just a method of psychological manipulation with purely commercial goals. The Ministry of Justice seemed to like the second version, and its experts argued that, as the Church of Scientology registered its name as a trademark in the United States, it could not call itself a religious organization. The Moscow City Court and the Russian Supreme Court both accepted this argument and mentioned it in their decisions.

An Informal Concordat

The opinion of the ROC played the major role in the court decisions because of its close ties with the present Russian regime. Putin’s Kremlin carries on the conservative policy of traditional values, and considers the ROC its close ally. The Constitutional clause of State/Church separation stays intact, but in reality it is violated all the time. The State subsidizes the Church, and the latter gives it its full ideological support. A kind of informal concordat is played out between the two actors.

The second reason of outlawing Scientology is secular in nature. The anti - Western and in particular anti-American mood prevails in Russian foreign policy nowadays, and practically all NGOs financed by foreign sources have been outlawed lately. Scientology was founded in the USA and obviously plays into the hands of Russia’s enemies, according to the logic of Russian law enforcement agencies like FSB.

This logic is openly shared and supported by the ROC. The chairman of the “Orthodox Rights Committee of the All-Russia People’s Council under the auspices of patriarch Kirill,” Roman Silantieiev, told *RIA News Agency* in 2017:

When Americans declare Russia to be its major enemy and do it regularly, the attitude towards religious organizations, which are based on the territory of the potential or rather real enemy now, somehow changes (*RIA News Agency* 2017).

He added that further strict measures towards NRMs of foreign origins would be justified.

However, denying the religious nature of Scientology met with the indignation of practically all Russian experts in the field of religious studies. They argued that the world scientific community recognizes the religious status of Scientology, mentioning such names as Bryan R. Wilson (1926–2004), J. Gordon Melton and Massimo Introvigne. I also participated in this discussion. My argument ran like this. According to a widely spread opinion, we live in a post-secular time, when the rebirth of religion goes side by side with the process of secularization. That's why the border between the secular and the religious is not rigid anymore. It is on this border that new religious movements appear, and this is why in some of them the religious goals are reached by rational means (Falikov 2007, 167).

Scientology is one of the best examples of such new religious movements. And this explains why it is misunderstood by older religions, which are very much indignant that it does not obey traditional rules. For example, it uses a mechanical device known as E-meter for its practice reminiscent of confession. On the other hand, the authorities are afraid of a religion that steps over secular territory and even registers its name as a trademark. All these fears and misunderstandings are added to the political reasons mentioned above, and make a public enemy out of such new religious movements. But if the State had based its religious policy on the opinions of real experts, it could have avoided all this.

Such arguments did not influence the court decisions, but the Russian authorities obviously did not like the fact that the majority of religious scholars objected to them so strongly. I do not want to exaggerate the political influence of my professional community: in fact, it is absolutely minimal. It did not help to change the strategy of the State, but might have contributed to changing its tactics. At least, the outlawing of another religious minority was implemented based on different legal instruments. I mean the Jehovah's Witnesses, which were banned in Russia on accusations of extremist activity in April 2017. The Supreme Court dismissed their appeal quickly, in July 2017, and since that time the Jehovah's Witnesses are outlawed in Russia as an extremist organization.

The Use of Anti-Extremism Laws Against the Jehovah's Witnesses

Crimes motivated by prejudice or, as stated in Russian law, "ideological, political, racial, national or religious enmity, as well as hatred or enmity towards a social group," are classified as extremist crimes under article 282 of the Criminal

Code. This means that the determining factor in qualifying an activity as extremist is the suspect's motivation. The stress on motivation puts the article in the field of subjectivity, but the authorities did not take it into consideration. According to official statements, the necessity to fight terrorism was the main reason for developing anti-extremism legislation. However, Russian legal observers objected that the law could not meet this purpose: the expansion of acts that could be considered extremist crimes, and the doubling of the number of materials recognized as extremist and included in the list of banned publications, led to a situation where "anything from a piece of detective fiction to a postmodernist painting can be viewed as extremist" ("282-е Предупреждение" 2017). Because of the nature of the legislation and problems with its enforcement, "public trust in anti-extremism legislation and the government's ability to fight extremism through the existing legal arsenal was lost completely" ("282-е Предупреждение" 2017).

However, the skepticism of legal observers did not stop the Ministry of Justice from using article 282 against the Jehovah's Witnesses. The religious group was completely banned in Russia and its 396 branches were liquidated. This decision was accompanied by an international outcry about the violation of religious freedom but inside of Russia it didn't meet with many objections.

51% of respondents to a survey from Russia's leading independent polling agency, the Levada Center, said that they "definitely" approved of the banning of Jehovah's Witnesses activities. A further 28% said they were at least somewhat supportive. Meanwhile, just 3% said they were definitely opposed to the decision, which was initially made by Russia's Justice Ministry in April 2017. At the same time, of the 1,600 people surveyed, only 13% said they knew about the case against the Jehovah's Witnesses in detail. A further 34% said they had heard something, but 50% replied that they did not know anything about the case. In a separate question, whether people knew who the Jehovah's Witnesses were, 20% said that they had never heard of them, with another 10% undecided. 49% responded by stating that the group was a "Christian *sekta* (cult)" (Levada Centre 2017).

Obviously, Russian legal observers were not right when they said that the public did not have any trust in anti-extremism laws. Just the opposite proved to be true. Two elements can explain it. First, the majority of the population is very much afraid of the terrorist threat. Second, the public in general is strongly biased

against the Jehovah's Witnesses. The fact is that the word *sekta* (the Russian equivalent of "cult") has a very negative connotation in Russian parlance. When respondents answered that the Jehovah's Witnesses were a *sekta*, it meant they regarded them with mistrust and fear. I will return to the reasons of this negative public attitude when discussing the Church of Scientology.

The Use of Anti-Extremism Laws Against Scientology

Inspired by this mixture of indifference and approval of their actions, the authorities decided to use article 282 against other religious minorities. Scientology was their primary choice. Actually, this line of attack was not something completely new. Prominent Russian anti-cultists such as Alexander Dvorkin have accused Scientology of extremism for many years. Its American origin made it no less suspicious than the Jehovah's Witnesses. But now the Ministry of Justice took the affair into its hands. And it was Dvorkin again who supplied it with the information "proving" that all the other Scientological organizations in Russia like the Center of Dianetics, Narconon, etc. were directly connected with Scientology and should also be banned. He also hinted that they had better be banned as extremist:

It is obvious that the founder of Scientology [L.] Ron Hubbard [1911–1986] incited hatred to many people based on their attitude towards Scientology. According to his teachings, they are 'suppressive persons,' as they do not accept Scientology and criticize it. Such people are incurable and they should be discriminated against, deprived of their property and even killed. These are his literal words (...) and they are a real demonstration of extremism, it seems to me (*RIA News Agency* 2017).

The Ministry of Justice wholeheartedly followed the advice of Dvorkin, who is the leading member of its experts' committee.

In June 2017, Sahib Aliyev, Ivan Matsitsky, Anastasia Terentyeva, Constance Esaulkova and Galina Shurinova, who were the leaders of the St. Petersburg branch of the Church of Scientology, were arrested. They had been charged with participation in an "extremist" organization, incitement of hatred, and illegal business activities. This combines article 282 with article 171, the latter dealing with illegal business activity. In August, the court dismissed the appeal of the lawyers of the arrested.

Is there any real basis for such arrogant accusations? Yes, we can find both the notions of “suppressive person” (abbreviated “SP”) and of “potential trouble source” (abbreviated “PTS”) in Scientology. As it is defined in the *Scientology Handbook*:

The PTS is a person who is in some way connected to and being adversely affected by a suppressive person. He is called a *potential* trouble source because he can be a lot of trouble to himself and to others (Church of Scientology International 1996–2018).

The definition of SP sounds like this:

It is a person who seeks to *suppress*, or squash, any betterment activity or group. A suppressive person suppresses other people in his vicinity. This is the person whose behavior is calculated to be disastrous. ‘Suppressive person’ or a ‘suppressive’ is another name for the ‘antisocial personality’ (Church of Scientology International 1996–2018).

The approach to the PTS is well developed in Scientology. They should be disconnected from SP and persuaded to change. But all these techniques are far from “inciting hatred,” as anti-cultists like Dworkin try to demonstrate. The hardest disciplinary measure applied to PTS is depriving them from auditing, if all the other psychological instruments do not work. It can be compared to depriving sinners from communion in Christianity, but I doubt that Dworkin and his colleagues would ever call the latter “inciting hatred.”

“Illegal Business Activities”

Now let’s have a brief look at the accusations of illegal business activities. Within each organization of Scientology there are two branches. One is the religious community proper, with no right to carry on a commercial activity, and the other a commercial branch, which sells books. They are often housed in the same building and the members of the religious community sometimes are working in the commercial branch, but in their organizational aspect they are different. This double structure is well-documented by Scientology itself and is explained by experts of religions (I have already mentioned the nature of Scientology, at the border between the religious and the secular). But I suspect that the police just do not want to take these documents and scholarly arguments into consideration. And the accusations of illegal business activities are used as just another instrument of suppression like the ones of extremism.

In the case of the St. Petersburg Scientologists, there is a formal pretext to accuse them of illegal commercial activity. In 2014, the European Court of Human Rights recognized the refusal to register the local religious organization of Scientology as a violation of the European Convention (European Court of Human Rights 2015). However, the Church of Scientology of St. Petersburg is still unable to register to this very day. It cannot have a bank account because of this, and has to raise funds privately. The picture looks like this: your rights are violated and this fact is recognized internationally but not in Russia. So it is the state that is in breach of the international rules. You try to survive, but in the process violate some minor domestic rules introduced by the state. It is a kind of Catch 22 situation, as rightly noticed by Massimo Introvigne in his oral presentation [at the Bishkek seminar]. Anyway, regardless of the formal validity of the charge of illegal business, imprisonment is clearly disproportionate to the offense.

I should also add that the arrested leaders of the Church of Scientology of St. Petersburg were exactly those people who took Russia to the European Court and won the case. It is obvious that in this case the anti-extremism provisions were used not only to take a revenge but also to effectively silence them. The leaders of the banned Moscow branch also took the authorities to the European Court, and there are many chances that they would win. That is why it is not surprising at all that recently they were threatened with the investigation of their commercial activity, and I expect that anti-extremism provision will be added to it sooner or later. I think we can now define what role articles 282 and 171 have started to play in Russia lately. It is the role of a gag.

On January 17, 2018, the NGO Memorial, the main Russian organization for the protection of human rights, declared the five arrested leaders of the St. Petersburg branch of Scientology “political prisoners” and demanded their release. It was an important move, as Memorial has a good reputation and strong moral authority among Russian intelligentsia. However, just because of it the Kremlin constantly attacks Memorial, and recently declared it a “foreign agent” in an effort to ruin this credibility. The support of Memorial may be only symbolic for Scientologists, and would hardly influence the court’s decision in their favor. Just the opposite can take place. When a “foreign agent” tries to help Scientology, it only proves its guilt.

The Smear Campaign Against Scientology in Russia

The public attitude to Scientology in Russia is rather negative, and resembles that to the Jehovah's Witnesses. To a large extent, it has to do with the smear campaign in the media. Lately, Russian newspapers and TV channels owned by oligarchs close to Putin are becoming the instruments of state propaganda. This process aggravated after the Russian aggression against the Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimean peninsula. To obtain objective information from them is getting more and more difficult. Those media outlets that until a few years ago published such information now get frightened by the anti-extremism law, which plays a role of censorship (although censorship is forbidden by the Constitution), and stop doing it. I know it from my own experience, as my column on religion in *gazeta.ru*, which I wrote for twelve years, was closed in 2016. The newspaper's lawyers told me they did not want to run into trouble, because it would be practically impossible to resist an allegation of extremism in court. This is another example of the misuse of anti-extremism law, but it would need a separate consideration.

Instead, many articles appear in the media, which are written from the anti-cultists' position, citing prominent anti-cultists as experts. This smear campaign is exploiting the ignorance of the wider public, convincing the Russians that Scientology is a dangerous brainwashing American cult. According to the report of The Center of Information and Analysis "SOVA" in Moscow:

A growing number of 'exposures' in the press have led to a more suspicious attitude toward Scientologists in the wider society. Local authorities put an end to cooperation with the Scientologists in the context of anti-drug campaigns. Scientologist communities started experiencing problems with renting premises; their centers were constantly inspected for compliance with sanitary norms, safety rules, and so on. In addition, Scientologists have been accused of illegal entrepreneurship, collecting personal data (because of the 'stress testing' practiced by the Scientology Church), and illegal use of video and audio surveillance devices. Several criminal and administrative cases of this kind were initiated. Law enforcement agencies regularly conduct searches in the Scientology Centers in different regions, seizing papers and equipment, often with procedural violations (Kravchenko 2018, 20).

FSB makes leaks to the media, arguing that the fact that Scientologists collect personal data proves that they are spying against Russia, as all this information goes directly to the CIA. We can expect that the next legal instrument against

Scientology might be a very hard provision: article 276, on espionage (see *Versia* 2017).

Conclusion

The alliance of the Kremlin and the ROC will surely strengthen in the future. It is part of the long-time Kremlin strategy of turning to arch-conservative positions and isolating Russia from the Western world. Putin was reelected on March 18, 2018, as everybody in Russia was sure he would, and I am quite convinced that the discriminating policy towards religious minority groups will go on. Obviously, a very mighty instrument for outlawing them has been found. This is a Molotov cocktail of two articles of the Criminal Code —282 and 171—, against extremism and illegal business activity. As the authorities found out, the public fear of religious terrorism, combined with suspicions of illegal enrichment of foreign-based groups, makes it quite safe for them to get rid of unwanted religious groups this way.

The objections of a small number of defenders of religious freedom, including religious scholars inside of Russia, are not taken into consideration, as they can be easily dismissed. You can argue about the religious nature of Scientology as long as you want, the authorities seem to say to us, but you cannot put under scrutiny the issues of national security, it is not your field of competence. The moral support of the Scientologists by Memorial is regarded by the authorities in the same vein, and made worse by the fact that this NGO is blacklisted as a “foreign agent.” As for the outcry abroad, it only proves to the Kremlin that it is on the right track, making Russia an invincible fortress against the morally corrupted West.

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What Is Really Happening in Russia? A Response to Prof. Introvigne and Prof. Falikov

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ABSTRACT: The author discusses the papers of Massimo Introvigne and Boris Falikov within the framework of the activities against the “cults” of the Orthodox Church and the anti-cult movement in Russia. In the first part, he compares Introvigne’s and Falikov’s respective approaches to the legal background of the anti-cult campaigns in Russia. He also emphasizes the argument used by Russian anti-cultist and courts, that the fact that certain movements registered their names as trademarks in the United States proves that they are commercial rather than religious organizations. This argument appears to be based on a misunderstanding, as all major religions, including an umbrella organization of which the Russian Orthodox Church is part, also registered trademarks in the United States. In the second part, the text discusses the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the anti-cult movement in Russia, and whether a dialogue on religious liberty with Russian Orthodox milieus is really possible.

KEYWORDS: Scientology, Scientology in Russia, Anti-Cult Movement in Russia, Anti-Extremism Laws in Russia, Religious Liberty in Russia.

Introduction

The papers by Professor Falikov and Professor Introvigne start from recent events in Russia: the “liquidation” of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the attempt by the Russian authorities to similarly “liquidate” the Church of Scientology. Both emphasize that several other groups are in danger of being “liquidated.” For a Westerner, the word “liquidation” sounds somewhat sinister and has definite echoes of the Stalinist era. Both papers, however, engage in two valuable exercises. The first is to explain on which legal grounds groups have been or are being “liquidated” in Russia. The second is to understand why these

“liquidations,” unanimously condemned by all the international organizations, did not elicit a particular criticism in Russian public opinion, outside the small circles of human rights activists and academic scholars of religion. The latter’s opinions, Falikov tells us, are not regarded by the government as particularly relevant. I would discuss these two subjects separately.

The “Liquidations”: Legal Grounds

Introvigne explains that, while the part of the so called Yarovaya Laws of 2016 severely restricting proselytizing and missionary efforts by religions other than the Russian Orthodox Church provoked an international outcry by religious liberty activists, in fact these laws are not the main legal ground for the “liquidations.” Not that these laws are unimportant: in fact, several churches, including the Mormons, are now prevented in Russia from carrying out the missionary efforts they deploy in most countries of the world. Statistics quoted by Introvigne also show that many groups are affected. However, “liquidations” are based on a different law, which was passed in 2002 against extremism and ostensibly targeted radical fundamentalism Islam. Its provisions were tightened in 2006.

Falikov agrees on the centrality of the anti-extremism laws. However, he adds another weapon used to support the “liquidations.” To Article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code, dealings with extremism, he adds Article 171, on illegal commercial activities. Introvigne includes illegal commercial activities within the tests used to prove that a group is extremist. Whether prosecutions under Article 282 and Article 171 are autonomous or chain-connected is an interesting legal question, but does not change the substance of the matter.

How is a group identified as “extremist” and, as such, becomes eligible for “liquidation” in Russia? Introvigne lists three criteria, in addition to illegal commercial activities, used for identifying “extremist religious groups”—political dissidents have also been prosecuted under Article 282, based on different criteria.

The three criteria mentioned by Introvigne are: claiming that a religion is the only true path to salvation, breaking families, and mistreating ex-members. As a sociologist of religions, I agree that these accusations are not technically “false”

when applied to most new religious movements. Most claim that theirs is the only truth that would really save the world. Separations and divorces do occur frequently when only one of the spouses convert to the movement or leave it. Ex-members, particularly those sociologists call “apostates,” i.e. those who militantly oppose the group they left (Bromley 1988; 1998), are not particularly popular among new religious movements. Members may be counseled to avoid further contact with apostates, even if they are their relatives. Russian court decisions and anti-cult propaganda amplify these elements, with obvious exaggerations, but do not invent it. However, as Introvigne points out, these are not distinctive characters of new religious movements and in fact are found in all major religions or at least in some groups widely recognized as part of them.

I would add one observation about the alleged commercial character of some movements Russia is trying to “liquidate,” particularly the Church of Scientology. Falikov emphasizes that one of the arguments used against Scientology by the “experts” appointed by the Russian Ministry of Justice is that, as the Church of Scientology registered its name as a US Trademark it can’t call itself a religious organization. I am not a lawyer, and am rather seeing this as further evidence of the gulf separating the Russian and the Western understanding of religion. In the West, when a schism occurs—and schisms are extremely frequent in religion—often both parties would like to keep using the same name. Since religions in the West operate without any particular need to register themselves with the state, there are no governmental bodies competent to decide which one among two groups separated by a schism is entitled to use the original name. In fact, in the United States and in the European Union, the attempt by the state to interfere in such questions would be considered a gross breach of the principle of church-state separation.

As a consequence, these controversies are solved by civil courts based on the principles of trademark law. Trademark litigations between religious bodies are common, and religions have learned that they should register their trademarks in order to prevail there. Perhaps the Russian experts have been misled by the fact that U.S. trademark certificates indicate a date of “first use in commerce.” This, however, is a standard formula. Without supplying a date of “first use in commerce,” you cannot register a trademark in the United States.

My point, here, is that owning a registered trademark in the U.S. is by no means a strange peculiarity of the Church of Scientology. Even a layperson can

easily conduct American trademark searches online, using the free data base of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (my wife, though, is something more than a layperson as she is a professional domain name consultant, and domain names and trademarks frequently interact: she helped me in the search). We found, without going into any particular depth, several hundred trademarks owned by religions and protecting their names.

The search also convinced me that there can be no single US trademark for “Orthodox Church” and registration would be denied, since there are hundreds of different Orthodox Churches in the USA and arguably the name would be regarded as not registrable as generic. However, some old and more established Orthodox Churches insist that they, and only they, can be called “canonical Orthodox Churches.” “Orthodox” may be a generic designation but “canonical Orthodox,” they argue, is not. We checked whether the “canonical Orthodox Churches” tried to register a trademark in the U.S., and I am happy to report that they did.

Probably not knowing what was going on in Russia with Scientology, the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the U.S.A. on March 5, 2014 filed two trademark applications for ASSEMBLY OF CANONICAL ORTHODOX BISHOPS and got them registered on March 10, 2015, alleging a “first use in commerce” (note the word “in commerce”) in 2010. They were later assigned to the the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in North and Central America (Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America 2015a; 2015b). The American affiliates of the Patriarchate of Moscow, i.e. of the Russian Orthodox Church, are part of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA (Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA 2017). Put simply, this means that, when operating in the U.S., the Russian Orthodox Church “did as the Romans (or the Americans) do,” and, through an umbrella organization it belongs to, registered a trademark.

Of course, it did nothing strange. So did the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations, popularly known as Orthodox Union and representing Orthodox Judaism in the U.S. (Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America 2007), the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, i.e. the Catholic Church in the U.S. (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2003), and several hundred other religious organizations.

If registering a trademark in the U.S. is ground for banning a religion as “not really religious” in Russia, then Russians should ban the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Judaism, and even the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as pretty much everybody else.

The “Liquidations”: Cultural Motivations

The legal grounds for the “liquidations” seem indeed very weak. Both papers remark that criteria for identifying books or organizations as “extremist” in Russia are eminently subjective. Almost any group the authorities happen to dislike may be labeled as “extremist.”

Notwithstanding this situation, Falikov remarks that, at least according to polls, the governmental anti-cult policy meets with the approval of the majority of the Russian voters, although they confess not to be well informed about the issue. Both Introvigne and Falikov note the role of the anti-cult movement, which in Russia is not secular, as it is in several Western countries, but is largely organized by institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Falikov, a Russian, is more pessimistic about the future and regards the alliance between the Putin government and the Russian Orthodox Church as strengthening, as part of a strategy by the Kremlin of isolating Russia from Western culture as much as possible. Introvigne, a non-Russian, is equally pessimistic about Vladimir Putin and his utopias of “spiritual security” in Russia, but more optimistic about possible future developments. He does not believe that a dialogue with sectors of the Russian Orthodox Church about religious liberty, as difficult as it seems now, will remain impossible. He places some hope in the fact that at least some Orthodox priests and bishops may in the future adopt a more moderate attitude, and repudiate the most extreme anti-cultists such as Alexander Dvorkin.

I would add, in conclusion, that this hope seems to be shared by the Vatican. The Catholic Church has expressed concern for the state of religious liberty in Russia after the “liquidation” of the Jehovah’s Witnesses (Luxmoore 2017). On the other hand, Pope Francis has been the first Pope to meet a Patriarch of Moscow, and on August 20-24, 2017, Cardinal Pietro Parolin was the first Vatican Secretary of State to pay an official visit to Moscow, where he met with

both the Patriarch and Putin. Religious liberty was on his agenda. The Russian Orthodox Church was experimenting a dose of its own medicine in Ukraine, where the faction of the Orthodox Church loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate was in turn threatened with “liquidation.” It was keen to point out that Cardinal Parolin expressed his solidarity to the Patriarch and condemned the discrimination against the pro-Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine (Rozanskij 2017). But the Vatican Secretary of State also published a press release on his Moscow visits, where he added that he also called for “religious freedom in all States and in all political situations” (Cernuzio 2017).

The incident shows that dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church on religious liberty is indeed a complicated affair. Time will tell whether or not the exercise is purely futile.

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Religious Discrimination and State Neutrality: The Case of Scientology in Hungary

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ABSTRACT: Hungary's Religion Law of 2011 led to the de-registration of hundreds of previously registered churches, and introduced several forms of discrimination against religious minorities, denounced by the European Court of Human Rights and by Hungary's own Constitutional Court. The Hungarian government has shown a special hostility against the Church of Scientology, whose premises have been repeatedly raided under various administrative pretexts. In 2018, the Central District Court of Buda ruled that one such raid was disproportionate and illegal. However, the government's campaign against Scientology continues.

KEYWORDS: Scientology, Church of Scientology, Scientology in Hungary, Hungarian Religion Law 2011, Religious Liberty Issues in Hungary.

The Religion Law of 2011

Just like other Eastern European countries, Hungary adopted a liberal legislation in the aftermath of the fall of Communism to consecrate freedom of religion and belief. However, subsequent political developments aimed at restoring Hungarian religious “heritage” and repressing non-traditional religious denominations (Introvigne 2018).

The 1990 liberal law guaranteeing the right of freedom of conscience and religion for all and prohibiting discrimination has been replaced in 2011 by a new law on religion (known as the Religion Law), which has stripped approximately 200 religious communities of their legal personality. It also established a two-tier system, where the status of “churches” should be politically approved and non-

recognized religious organizations are second-rate groups of parishioners deprived of the legal protection afforded to “churches.”

In 2011, the new Religion Law de-registered all but 14 of the more than 350 previously-registered religious groups. Apart from the recognized churches, listed in the Appendix to the 2011 Church Act, all other religious communities previously registered as churches lost their status as “churches” but could continue their activities as “associations.” If intending to continue as “churches,” religious communities were required to apply to Parliament for individual recognition as such.

To “re-register” and gain legal status as “churches” again, these de-registered groups had to win a two-thirds majority vote of the Hungarian Parliament, which politicized the process, violated the duty of the state to be neutral in religious matters, and engaged in discrimination against minority denominations.

By February 2012, the Parliament had denied the re-registration applications of 66 of the 84 previously-registered churches that had applied, without providing a substantive explanation for its denials. Among those lawfully registered churches that were denied re-registration were Christian churches, including Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, the Church of Scientology and Buddhist, Hindu, and Jewish groups. Many of these churches were found to fulfill all of the conditions of the 2011 Religion Law, but they were rejected anyway.

Denial of registration as churches also deprived these religious groups of their financial means of existence, since it deprived them of their right to the one percent of income tax, which taxpayers may donate to churches.

In February 2013, Hungary’s Constitutional Court found that the de-registration of lawfully recognized churches was unconstitutional, in a ruling that repealed parts of the 2011 Religion Law. The Constitutional Court also required the National Assembly to adopt legislation that would allow taxpayers to donate one percent of their income tax to any religious organization of their choosing, either registered or not, and gave the Assembly the deadline of December 31, 2017 for this task. To this day, no such legislation has been enacted.

Professor and attorney Szabolcs Hegy, of the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, made the following statement in an interview published in 2017:

The transition from church to religious organization went smoothly for some churches, which had the financial and human resources necessary to make this adjustment. But there were churches that were unable to make this transition and ended up closing down. Other churches moved their activities outside of the country, leaving Hungary behind. Many of the churches closed, and a few transitioned to operating as religious organizations (Novak 2017).

On April 8, 2014, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in *Magyar Keresztény Mennonita Egyház and others v. Hungary* that Hungary's 2011 Religion Law violated Articles 9 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantee the fundamental rights of freedom of religion and freedom of assembly and association (European Court of Human Rights 2014).

Nevertheless, this Religion Law remains unaltered and in force to this day. It continues to be used by the government to discriminate against minority religious groups and individuals it targets. According to the State Department's IRF Report on Hungary for 2016:

- During that year, Hungarian courts closed out the cases of 13 de-registered churches, which had no remaining assets for the government to liquidate.
- Many smaller congregations, mostly Christian but also Jewish and Buddhist, continued to struggle to survive following their de-registration.
- Islamic organizations reported incidents of discrimination by government officials and politicians, and there were numerous reports of perceived anti-Muslim rhetoric by government officials and politicians, including at the highest levels.
- Anti-Semitism was on the rise (U.S. Department of State 2016).

The Case of the Church of Scientology

Unfortunately, the situation is worsening. The government is now creatively and aggressively using other laws to target and criminally investigate at least one church that was lawfully registered under the 1990 Religion Law, then unconstitutionally de-registered under the 2011 Religion Law and thus forced to register and operate as an association. This is the Church of Scientology, against which Hungarian government officials made public statements to declare their intention “to restrict the activities of Scientologists” (Introvigne 2018).

In practice, the religious discrimination taking place regarding the Church of Scientology and its parishioners in Hungary has primarily manifested itself in the following ways:

(a) Bad faith denial of a Certificate of Occupancy that would allow the Church of Scientology of Budapest to lawfully occupy its place of worship

This constitutes a violation of the right of the Church of Scientology and its parishioners to religious freedom. In May 2016, the Hungarian authorities denied the Church's Certificate of Occupancy (COO) because of incomplete work done on the electrical installation in the building. The Church appealed the decision and undertook corrective work to remedy the deficiencies. In June 2016, an inspection of the authorities concluded in writing that the building was finished and could be occupied. However, no COO was issued, and the local government issued a Prohibition Order in October 2016, stating that the Church must vacate the premises. In January 2017, the Church filed an action in the Administrative and Labor Court of Budapest, requesting cancellation of the Prohibition Order, which was denied on 12th October, 2017. The Church has appealed this ruling and the Supreme Court of Hungary on 15 November 2017 suspended the execution of the Prohibition Order pending a decision on the merits. If the Order is finally upheld, the Church faces sanctions for its continued occupation of its main house of worship in Hungary.

(b) Bad faith application and discriminatory enforcement of the Data Protection Law

Action taken on the basis of Data Protection Law has resulted in the arbitrary seizure of all the parishioners' files, including pastor-penitent files, and an undue interference with the exercise of core religious rights of Scientologists in Hungary.

The government is using data protection not as a shield to safeguard Hungarian citizens but as a sword to violate the rights of Hungarian Scientologists to privacy and religious freedom. According to the Government, only members of "recognized churches" can benefit from protection in this regard.

This situation is so discriminatory that it cannot be regarded as proportionate to any legitimate aim pursued, nor necessary in a democratic society. Hungary is currently the only country in the world that has seized and refuses to return such folders consisting of sacred and confidential pastor-penitent communications. Worse, the Data Protection Authority (DPA) has perused private confessions, making them available to a psychologist “expert” without the parishioners’ permission or consent, to determine whether they were under undue influence, and went as far as posting some extracts of confessions on line. Members of religious minorities not endorsed by the Hungarian Parliament are treated as second-zone citizens whose fundamental rights can be infringed by the authorities at will.

As the administrative proceedings by the DPA were completed, rather than return the seized materials, the DPA instead filed a criminal complaint against the Church for alleged criminal abuse of personal data and turned over the seized confessional folders and other materials to the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) for it to initiate a new round of harassment through criminal proceedings (which was accompanied by a parallel action for alleged tax evasion). On the morning of 18th October 2017, 60 agents of the National Bureau of Investigation raided the Church and seized a large number of the remaining files.

But on 9 February 2018, the Central District Court of Buda found that the Investigative Authority did not even review all the religious files seized by the DPA, and ruled therefore that this search and new seizure of folders violated the “principle of necessity and proportionality.” In spite of this court decision, the NBI refused to return the illegally seized files and this denial has been appealed.

As a conclusion, the deteriorating situation of religious minorities in Hungary and in particular the continuous harassment of the Church of Scientology and its parishioners constitute a blatant violation of the right to freedom of religion or belief protected by international instruments that Hungary has signed and ratified, and which it is bound to respect.

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[Note: Copies of the relevant Hungarian decisions are in the author's files.]

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Book Reviews

Kent, Stephen A., and Susan Raine, eds. *Scientology and Popular Culture: Influences and Struggles for Legitimacy*. Santa Barbara (California): Praeger, 2017. 373 pages. Hc. \$ 58.00. ISBN: 078-1-4408-3249-9.

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The interaction with popular culture is crucial for Scientology. L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986) certainly contributed to popular culture through his fiction and music. Scientology celebrities such as Tom Cruise and John Travolta are part of popular culture. And popular culture, from comics to cartoons, include frequent references to Scientology. As both the president of something called CESPOC, the Center for Studies on Popular Culture (as well as a lifelong collector of pulps and dime novels), and a scholar of Scientology, I welcome the idea of an edited book on Scientology and popular culture. I wished I had thought of it myself. Unfortunately, despite a couple of good articles, the book edited by Stephen Kent and Susan Raine fails to deliver what the title promises. Rather than a study of Scientology and popular culture, it is largely a summary of Kent's decade-old anti-Scientology obsessions. Kent has become somewhat proverbial among scholars of new religious movements for his obsessive crusade against the Church of Scientology. While he has been able to recruit to it some younger disciples, his claims have become increasingly bizarre, as evidenced by his recent statement that Scientology “faces extinction” (McMaster 2018). This may well be Kent's dearest wish, but the claim looks quite ridiculous in view of the progress of Scientology in Italy and other countries.

Susan Raine has emerged in recent years as Kent's most loyal disciple. Not surprisingly, she parrots her mentor's theory in the introduction to the book, repeating that "the long-term future of Scientology appears to be tenuous" and that "its membership likely is floundering" (xvii: "likely" meaning that she has no real evidence of this). She also believes that Scientology may not be considered a religion because of its campaigns against psychiatry (xiv): by the same standard, one could easily argue that Catholicism is not a religion because of its campaigns against abortion. Raine's introduction is a confession of sort that the book was assembled with the aim of harming Scientology. She states that attacks against Scientology "have been the consequences of Scientology's own actions" (viii). No doubt Scientology made its own mistakes but, again, this is similar to arguing that Christianity's persecution was the Christians' fault, an egregious way of blaming the victims.

A problem with the book is that Raine's appears grossly unfamiliar with Hubbard's and Scientology's contributions to popular culture. She writes that Hubbard's pulp fiction is held "in low regard" by "contemporary critics," with a note confusing Hubbard's early short stories with his late science fiction books (xii). I do not remember having met Raine at any major pulp fiction or dime novel convention. I don't know if she reads or collects Hubbard's pulp fiction, or pulps and dime novels in general. My own collection has been called in trade publications the largest in the world, and I can assure her that the prices commanded by magazines including Hubbard's early stories are among the highest in the field—not because Scientologists collect them: in fact, I met several collectors who share Kent's opinion of Scientology, yet regard Hubbard as one of the greatest contributors to American pulps magazines.

Raine also claims that the meager chapter in the book about Scientology and the visual arts is "the first scholarly work to examine the artwork of Scientology" (xxiii). I am certainly not surprised that Kent does not recommend to his disciples to read my own work, but the claim ignores my long entry "Scientology and the Visual Arts" in David Bromley's *World Religions and Spirituality Project*, which is after all the largest international online encyclopedia of religious movements (Introvigne 2017).

Raine's chapter on the relationship between Hubbard's science fiction and the OT levels of Scientology revamps her previous articles on the subject. She adds a comment on the relationship between science fiction and colonialism, and

states that “sectarian and cultic religions” took advantage of American (neo-)colonialism to spread internationally, mentioning the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons as examples (6). The thesis is common in Russian justifications for “liquidating” religions the government does not like, but what is claimed here is unclear. In the case of both the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Scientology, declassified files now prove that the CIA and other American agencies spread *negative* information about them for years. One can equally argue that American imperialism was at work *against* new religions.

Raine also imported from Kent a serious methodological problem. Like Kent, she mentions in her texts as if they were unquestionably by Hubbard statements only attributed to him in anti-Scientology sources. For instance, Raine “proves” Hubbard’s imperialistic attitudes with this rather impressive quote:

All men shall be my slaves. All women shall succumb to my charms. All mankind shall grovel at my feet and not know why (17).

One hopes that even Kent would teach his students to always check the notes. They would discover here that the only source for this quote is Bent Corydon’s aggressive anti-Hubbard book (Corydon 1987, 58).

Sandwiched between anti-Scientology tirades in vintage Kent style are two chapters that would have deserved better company. Hugh Urban proposes an interesting comparison between Hubbard and Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900). Hubbard’s aesthetics, Urban argues, culminates in the idea of the artist’s life as the supreme work of art. This is relevant for the Scientology religion, as the *thetan* went far beyond Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, and

Hubbard articulated what is arguably the boldest and most radical formulation of the idea that we can in fact create our own realities (45).

In fact, Urban concludes,

Scientology is perhaps best understood as a religion of the *author*, a religion based on a profound faith in the ability of the individual to *write his own story*, to imagine his own universe, and to become all powerful within that universe (46).

Stefano Bigliardi examines the ten volumes of Hubbard’s science fiction “decalogy” *Battlefield Earth*, and proposes an accurate reconstruction of the architecture, development, and main characters of the work, placing it within the larger framework of both Hubbard’s fiction and Hubbard’s thought. To his credit, Bigliardi does not follow Raine’s dictum that anything by Hubbard should be bad

by definition. He quotes the more balanced comment by German scholar Mario Frenschkowski, that Hubbard as a fiction writer may be

overrated by Scientologists but [he is] also much underrated by critics who read him only with the glasses of antipathy against Scientology (66; see Frenschkowski 1999, 6).

The book collects quite a few of these bespectacled critics, as evidenced by Mark Evans' chapter on music, although he at least admits that his dislike of Scientology might have influenced his musical judgment.

Unfortunately, the relief provided by the chapters by Urban and Bigliardi proves to be short-lived. Immediately, the reader is hit by no less than three consecutive chapters by Kent, with all his usual jargon that one is surprised to find in a book published by a scholarly press in 2017, after decades of scholarly criticism. Celebrities are indoctrinated by Scientology, an organization that uses "brainwashing" (89), and become "deployable agents" (81). Scientology also fosters among celebrities "an inflated feeling of self-importance" (103), although probably Tom Cruise didn't need Scientology for this. Happily, some of the celebrities see the light, leave Scientology, and join the anti-cult bandwagon. One can smile at Kent's infatuation with Leah Remini, but taking her book and show as a serious source of information about Scientology seems excessive even for a veteran anti-Scientology activist.

A certain Tami M. Bereska examines the image of Scientology in Hollywood's and mainline TV's shows, fiction, and interviews, and concludes that it is invariably "constructed as a fraudulent, foolish, untrustworthy, and potentially dangerous Other" (207). This is only slightly exaggerated, but might have lead a more astute observer to ask what interests exactly Scientology disturbed to generate such a reaction. Instead, Bereska blames the victim, as is disturbingly usual in this book. Terra Manca (apparently, a real name, although it sounds very much like one of Hubbard's fictional characters) and Max Halupka offer more of the same on TV series and the Internet respectively.

Unlike "Terra Manca," the less poetic "George Shaw" is a pseudonym. He (or she) teams with Raine in producing the strangest chapter of the volume. Anti-cult enterprises often recruit the lunatic fringe and, no matter where they start from, frequently end up with proposing conspiracy theories. The chapter by Shaw and Raine claims to be a discussion of Hubbard's and Scientology's relations with the visual arts, but it isn't. Hubbard's rich aesthetics is liquidated in a few sentences. Instead, the chapter examines the drawings of Canadian painter and

Scientologist, Richard Borthwick Gorman (1935–2010), used for the new covers of several Hubbard's books in 1968. The authors claim that Gorman and Hubbard conspired to "generate subliminal responses trying to illicit [sic] positive representations of the group" (313), inter alia producing a confusion between Scientology and Christianity among the readers—or perhaps those of them completely unfamiliar with Scientology. Interestingly, Shaw and Raine misspell "elicit" as "illicit." It would be unfair to blame Praeger's sloppy proofreading on the authors, if it was not for the fact that they mentions elsewhere that Gorman's artwork wanted to "illicit (...) the desired emotional—and then, behavioral—response" (309) and that, as the book's editor, Raine carries some responsibility for sentences such as "adequate to illicit emotional impact" (338) and "in order to illicit emotional responses" (340) in Evans' subsequent chapter on music.

Since the authors believe in subliminal messages as a form of brainwashing through texts and images, perhaps they are trying, through what may appear to the uninitiated as simple, if persistent, typos, to reiterate subliminally the intent of their book. They want to persuade their readers that Scientology and its artistic endeavors are something "illicit," both morally and legally, and that governments that repress them should be applauded. Fighting the Church of Scientology and working with those who want to suppress it, as a court expert or a collaborator with governments that try to act against Scientology, has been for decades an important part of Kent's activities. Whether respectable scholars should want to be involved in all this by adding their names to Kent's enterprises is a different question altogether.

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Aldo Natale Terrin, *Scientology. Libertà e immortalità*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2017. 288 pages. Pb. € 22. ISBN: 8837231199.

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When dealing with new religious movements, criticism and reservations are often expressed with particular regard to the Church of Scientology. Aldo Natale Terrin, an Italian scholar of international fame, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology of Religion and of Pastoral Liturgy at Padua's College of Saint Giustina, answers this criticism seriously, and with a large documentation, in this important work. The volume summarizes the history and doctrine of Scientology. The vast bibliography demonstrates that Terrin has used a rich array of documentary evidence. A critical phenomenological method is adopted without prejudices and with a balanced perspective.

The first part of the book shows that Scientology is a religion—more precisely, Terrin argues, it is “a church”—in that it shares the key characteristics common to all religions:

1. A set of beliefs affirming the existence of a world beyond this one;
2. An organized community, which communicates these beliefs;
3. A recognized authority, which is the source of truth;
4. Ceremonial practices; and
5. An “ethical-moral” view of life.

Terrin emphasizes that the founder himself of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), in his 1954 *Phoenix Lectures*, when comparing Tao, Dharma, and Buddhism with spiritual knowledge, claimed that Scientology was the true realisation of Eastern religious philosophies, as well as a religion in line with the great leaders of Western spirituality such as Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. In the 1960s and 1970s, Hubbard insisted on the “religious” nature of Scientology. In a letter from those years, he enjoined the staff to wear ecclesiastical vestments like those of traditional churches. Places of worship, he instructed, should give prominence to the church’s *Credo* and the symbol of the cross. At the same time, he wrote a book about Sunday services and other rituals for church ministers. In 1970, the book of prayers and sermons was published, and no less important was the birth of the journal *Advance!*, whose early issues were dedicated to a comparison of Scientology with other great world religions such as Judaism, Jainism, Shintoism, and others. The conclusion was that Scientology was not only a religion, but the fulfillment of the spiritual quest implied by all these faiths.

The most significant aspects analyzed in Terrin’s study refer to how close Scientology is, on the one hand, to gnostic religions and, on the other, to Hinduism and Buddhism. Scientology does not belong to the category of “religions of salvation.” They are based on the presence of a Saviour who demands the loyalty of the faithful and on the acceptance of beliefs necessary for achieving salvation, spiritual gifts, and the solution of personal problems. Rather, Scientology is a gnostic religious form, which proposes an itinerary of consciousness through different stages. Through them, one obtains both spiritual self-awareness and awareness of the divine. Furthermore, salvation (as in all gnostic forms) comes about through liberation from an original fall. This occurred, according to Scientology, when the spirits (*thetans*) fell into a universe composed of *Matter, Energy, Space* and *Time*—whose reality is, however, only apparent and the fruit of ignorance.

Hubbard himself recognized the relations between Scientology and the Orient, to the extent that it has been defined as a kind of “technological Buddhism” (Flinn 1983, 89). Terrin also makes reference to the use of the E-meter device and to analytical techniques used by Scientology to purify the individual’s mind, making it “clear.” These features, according to Terrin, are reminiscent of concepts in the Hindu tradition, where salvation and health are acquired thanks to awareness and rebirth into a status no longer conditioned by past lives. Terrin

finds it significant that this model reminds us of the Hindu dissociation of *purusha* (the immortal spirit) and *prakṛti* (matter) and the idea that the world is not real and is believed to be real and permanent only as a result of ignorance. Suffering, both in Hinduism and in Scientology, is in turn caused by humankind's attachment to the material world.

Thus Scientology's relation with the Orient seems to be neither improvised nor instrumental: on the contrary, Terrin insists, Scientology's doctrines appear as "permeated" by the whole Eastern world. Among others, Terrin finds a genuine Oriental flavor in concepts such as "past lives," *thetans* (close to the *atman* idea), the (Buddhist) vision of spiritual freedom as the highest level humans can achieve, and the sense of unconditional liberty of the *thetan* after it has achieved salvation. "One might say that without its links to the Eastern world, Scientology would no longer be Scientology. One could even say that the call of the East is a *conditio sine qua non* of Scientology's very doctrine" (51).

Terrin sees here also the reason for Scientology's success. It offers an answer to the widespread aspiration to an *individual* truth and to a feeling of clarity and illumination that many believe is no longer found in traditional religions.

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