



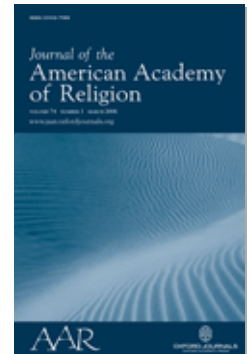
PROJECT MUSE®

Fair Game: Secrecy, Security, and the Church of Scientology in Cold War America

Urban, Hugh B.

Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Volume 74, Number 2, June 2006, pp. 356-389 (Article)

Published by Oxford University Press



➔ For additional information about this article

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/aar/summary/v074/74.2urban.html>

Fair Game: Secrecy, Security, and the Church of Scientology in Cold War America

Hugh B. Urban

From Tom Cruise's wedding to South Park's scathing cartoon parody, the Church of Scientology has emerged as one of the wealthiest, most powerful but also most controversial new religious movements of the last fifty years. Remarkably, however, it has rarely been subjected to serious, critical study by historians of religions, in large part because of the intense secrecy that has surrounded the movement from its origins. This paper examines the role of secrecy in the early Church of Scientology, placing it in the historical and cultural context in which it emerged: Cold War America of the 1950s and 60s. Far from a strange aberration, Scientology in fact embodies many of the obsessive concerns with secrecy, information-control, and surveillance that ran throughout Cold War America. Indeed, with its policies of "security checks" and "fair game," Scientology developed an apparatus of secrecy and surveillance that rivaled and in fact mirrored that of the FBI. As such, Scientology raises profound questions for the study of religion today, particularly in a post-9/11 context, where the questions of religious privacy and government surveillance have re-emerged in ways that eerily echo the height of the Cold War.

Dianetics is important politically. It indicates ways of controlling [*sic*] people or de-controlling [*sic*] them and of handling groups which is good technology . . . Dianetics could become an ideology if anyone let it.

Hugh B. Urban is an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at the Department of Comparative Studies, Ohio State University, 431 Hagerty Hall, Columbus, OH 43210.

Journal of the American Academy of Religion June 2006, Vol. 74, No. 2, pp. 356–389

doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfj084

© The Author 2006. Published by Oxford University Press, on behalf of the American Academy of Religion. All rights reserved. For permissions, please e-mail: journals.permissions@oxfordjournals.org
Advance Access publication April 26, 2006

Who controls dianetics, its techniques and researches can be a menace to the security of this country.

—L. Ron Hubbard (1951a)

Secrecy lies at the very core of power.

—Elias Canetti (1962: 290)

SURELY FEW NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS HAVE GENERATED MORE SCANDAL, controversy, or media interest than the Church of Scientology. Well known for its high-profile celebrity patrons like John Travolta, Kirsty Allie, and Tom Cruise, while boasting over 700 centers in sixty-five countries, Scientology has also been venomously attacked by the government, anticult groups, and the press as a swindling business and a brainwashing cult. Since the early 1970s, Scientology has come into a series of conflicts with various branches of the US government, particularly the FBI, Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and IRS, regarding its status as a religious organization and its involvement in an array of alleged criminal activities. Its founder, L. Ron Hubbard, has been described variously as the man who “solved the riddle of the human mind” (by the Church of Scientology), as “a mental case” (by the FBI), and as “hopelessly insane” (by his former wife) (Jones 1957). Dubbed the “Cult of Greed” by *Time* magazine (1991), Scientology has long been singled out by the media and anticult groups as the most rapacious and dangerous new religious movement today. As Cynthia Kissler, former executive director of the Cult Awareness Network (CAN), puts it, “Scientology is quite likely the most ruthless, the most classically terroristic, the most litigious and the most lucrative cult the country has ever seen. No cult extracts more money from its members (1997).”

Yet remarkably, despite the tantalizing scandal that surrounds it in American popular culture, Scientology has received little serious attention by scholars of religions. Apart from Roy Wallis’ early study of 1976 and a handful of more recent articles, Scientology has never really been submitted to a careful, critical study by historians of religions.¹ The reasons for this neglect, however, are not far to seek. First,

¹ The few critical scholarly works on Scientology include Bainbridge (1987), Bainbridge and Stark (1980), Kent (1999a; 1999b), Melton (2000), Wallis (1976), and Whitehead (1987). There are many nonscholarly popular exposes of Scientology, such as those of Burroughs (1991), Kaufman (1972), Lamont (1986), and Miller (1987). There are also several works defending Scientology against government suppression, such as those of Garrison (1980).

from its origins, the Church of Scientology and its founder have been shrouded in complex layers of secrecy. With its tight system of security and its esoteric hierarchy of teachings, Scientology has become one of the most impenetrable and least understood new religious movements. And the more scrutiny the movement has faced from the government, anticult groups, and the media, the more intense its strategies of self-concealment have become. Second, the Church of Scientology also developed an aggressive strategy of counter-espionage of its own, designed to investigate, undermine, and in some cases destroy those who criticize it. According to Hubbard's principle of "Fair Game," the Church was allowed to use any means at its disposal to counterattack and defeat its enemies. All of this has made it not only extremely difficult but potentially dangerous to undertake a critical study of Scientology (Behar 1991).

In this article, I will by no means attempt to write a new exposé of Scientology, nor do I claim to have infiltrated its inner secrets (something I consider both fundamentally unethical and deeply problematic from an epistemological point of view; see Urban 1998; 2001a). I approach this phenomenon not as a knowing insider but as an outsider working with published materials and legally available sources, such as court cases and FBI files made available by the Freedom of Information Act.² My aim here is to explore the complex dialectic of secrecy and espionage at work between Scientology and the US government. As I hope to show, the origin and growth of Scientology needs to be understood in the context of Cold War America and larger concerns with secrecy during this complex period. Scientology, I will suggest, was by no means opposed to the mainstream values of Cold War America; on the contrary, in its basic ideals and corporate structure, Scientology is better seen as one of the clearest expressions of many basic American concerns from the 1940s to the 1980s. And in its tactics of secrecy and concealment, it is a strange mirror image of the FBI during these years. Indeed, as more than one author has observed, "the FBI was quite as paranoid about Hubbard as Hubbard was about the FBI" (Miller 1987: 198). Thus Scientology and the FBI are perhaps two sides of the same coin in Cold

² Much of the material used in this article has been made available through the Freedom of Information Act, which has opened an enormous vault of FBI files on Scientology. The most important court case which has made available Scientology materials is that of Steven Fishman (US District Court, Central District of California, Fishman Case No 91-6426 HLH [Tx]). A former Scientologist, Fishman was brought to court because he committed several crimes to pay for Scientology courses. During his trial, he brought as evidence numerous confidential documents revealing the higher levels of Scientology.

War America, both expressing an extreme concern with secrecy, espionage, and information control, at times bordering on paranoia.

This analysis builds on insights from Georg Simmel, Stanton Tefft, and others who have examined the role of secrecy as a social and political phenomenon. As Simmel argued in his classic study, secrecy often acts as a source of social power and prestige—a kind of “adornment”—which enhances the mystery and status of an individual by virtue of what he conceals from others. At the same time secrecy can also allow deviant or subversive groups to preserve themselves in the face of an oppressive political regime (1950: 337–339). Yet as Tefft observes, secrecy is by no means a simple or static force in society; on the contrary, it is a far more *dialectical social process*. As I will argue, secrecy is often a dynamic process that involves a spiraling feedback loop of concealment, espionage, and counter-espionage, as esoteric groups strive to conceal themselves, government forces attempt to penetrate them by clandestine means, and persecuted groups in turn develop ever more elaborate tactics of dissimulation (Tefft 1980: 319–341; 1992; Urban 2001a). Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in the interactions between Scientology and the US government, as they engaged in a fantastically elaborate game of secrecy, spying, and espionage throughout the decades of the Cold War.

After a brief discussion of the role of secrecy and religion during the early Cold War period, I will examine Hubbard’s life and the origins of Scientology, as well as the role of secrecy in the Church’s elaborate corporate structure. Lastly, I will examine the role of secrecy, espionage, and counter-espionage within the Church and in its interactions with the government, as it came into increasing conflict with the FBI, FDA, and IRS. I conclude by discussing the issues of secrecy and religious freedom as they are being played out today. The case of Scientology, I believe, offers a number of insights into many larger questions for the study of religions amidst a new age of secrecy, terrorism, and government surveillance: What rights to privacy do religious groups have in the face of government scrutiny? And what is the role of the scholar in relation to groups that wish to remain secret?

THE CULTURE OF SECRECY: SECRECY, SECURITY, AND RELIGION IN COLD WAR AMERICA

[T]he feeling of power which accompanies the possession of money becomes concentrated for the dissipater . . . in the very instant in which he lets this power out of his hands. The secret, too, is full of the consciousness

that it *can* be betrayed; that one holds the power of surprises. . . The secret is surrounded by the possibility and temptation of betrayal.

—Georg Simmel (1950: 333–334)

Fame and secrecy are the high and low ends of the same fascination, the static crackle of some libidinous thing in the world.

—Don DeLillo (1997: 17)

Modern scholars of comparative religion have long been fascinated by the role of secrecy and esotericism in religion. Indeed, as Steven Wasserstrom observes, the history of religions in the twentieth century has been characterized in many ways by a kind of “esocentrism”—that is, a privileging of the mystical, secret, elitist aspects of religion, often to the neglect of their more mundane “exoteric” aspects (1999). Nonetheless, despite this general interest in the subject, the problem of religious secrecy remains strangely under-theorized. Apart from recent works like that of Paul Johnson (2002) and Hans Kippenberg (1995), much of the literature on secrecy remains disappointingly vague, universalistic, and divorced from social and political context. As Kees Bolle (1987) puts it, secrecy is simply “the mystery at the heart of all religions,” whether it is the “Way of the Tao that is unnamed” or the “secret rebirth of Christian mystics” (2–3, 22); yet he generally fails to examine secrecy critically in relation to its social and historical contexts. Even Antoine Faivre’s (1992; 1994) extensive work on western esotericism takes virtually no account of the larger cultural or political implications of secrecy. The example of Scientology during the Cold War, I believe, offers some more useful ways of thinking about the larger problem of secrecy in religion, as well as the ethical role of the scholar in relation to groups that wish to remain secret.

Secrecy and the careful control of information as a basic form of power/knowledge are key parts of more or less all social structures, from Australian Aboriginal communities to postindustrial states (Keen 1994; Tefft, 1980; Urban 2001b). Yet the concern with secrecy, censorship, and control of information became particularly intense—indeed, often obsessive—during the decades of Cold War. Particularly after 1949, when the Soviet Union detonated its own atomic bomb, the threat of Communism suddenly seemed not far off in some distant land but an insidious presence that could strike on American soil itself. As Stephen Whitfield observes, “The specter that, a century earlier Marx and Engels had described as stalking the continent of Europe was extending itself to the United States” (1996: 1).

Of course, the Soviet Union was every bit as worried about the United States’ own military power, and the result of their mutual paranoia was the growth of the most elaborate networks of secrecy, espionage, and

counter-espionage the world had ever seen. As Angus MacKenzie observes in his study of secrecy and the CIA during the Cold War,

The US government has always danced with the devil of secrecy during wartime. By attaching the word 'war' to the economic and ideological race for world supremacy between the Soviet Union and the United States, a string of administrations continued this dance uninterrupted for fifty years. The cold war provided the foreign threat to justify the pervasive Washington belief that secrecy should have the greatest possible latitude and openness should be restricted as much as possible – constitutional liberties be damned. (Curry 1988: 8; MacKenzie 1997: 201)

In the United States the fear of Communist infiltration was soon extended not just to undercover agents but to ordinary citizens. Thus the FBI began to compile dossiers on novelists who seemed “unduly critical of their native land” and even filmed patrons of left-wing bookstores (Whitfield 1996: 10). Under both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, extensive security programs were put into place throughout the civil service. Political testing was not uncommon, as both government agencies and private employers sought to distinguish between those who were truly patriotic and those who might harbor un-American tendencies. Even ordinary citizens were enlisted in the Cold War, called upon to identify those who displayed a lack of patriotic spirit or suspicious degrees of “neutrality” (ibid.: 11).

Religion also played a crucial role in Cold War American culture and in the struggle over the boundaries between the public and the private. Indeed, more than any other western country, the United States saw a remarkable increase in religious affiliation after World War II. Church membership rose from roughly 43 percent in 1920 to 82 percent by 1950 and 69 percent by the end of the 1950s, the highest it would ever be in the twentieth century (ibid.: 83). One of the most threatening features of the rise of Communism, for many clergymen and politicians alike, was its “godless and atheistic” nature. This made commitment to Christian faith even more needed for true patriotism and the struggle against the Soviet menace: “Even as some clergymen were advocating ferocious military measures to defeat an enemy that was constantly described as ‘atheistic,’ government officials were asserting that the fundamental problem presented by Communism was not political but spiritual” (ibid.: 10). Few preachers of the 1950s were more outspoken in their patriotism and anti-Communism than Rev. Billy Graham. “If you would be a true patriot, then become a Christian,” Graham exhorted his audience; and so, “If you would be a loyal American, then become a loyal Christian.” In short, in the mid-1950s, an “old-fashioned Americanism” was equated with “the way of the Cross,” as the most effective shield against “Satan’s version of religion,” which was Communism (ibid.: 81).

Not only was strong Christian faith considered the most powerful means of countering the Communist menace, but it was also, for many, the surest means to sound mental health in an era of increasing anxiety. As concerns about mental illness and the use of psychiatric drugs skyrocketed during the 1950s, the most popular means to combat these psychological ills was a form of Christian faith, this time from popular authors like Norman Vincent Peale: "In an era in when admissions to mental hospitals were nearly doubling, when by 1956 mental patients were occupying more hospital beds than all other patients combined, and when over a billion tranquilizer pills were annually consumed, the most popular therapist in the age of anxiety was a man of the cloth: Norman Vincent Peale." In best-selling works like *Guide to Confident Living* and *The Power of Positive Thinking*, Peale assured his readers that a Higher Power can do everything for the modern individual, "driving out fear, hate, sickness, weakness and moral defects and reviving the soul with health, happiness and goodness" (Peale 1952; Whitfield 1996: 84). As we will see below, Hubbard's own self-help manual, *Dianetics*, made very similar claims, though jettisoning the Christian trappings and promising even more impressive spiritual benefits for his readers.

Of course, this emphasis on solid Christian and American values meant that other religious and cultural groups might well be considered suspect. Between 1956 and 1971, the FBI-operated group COINTELPRO covertly spied on and interfered with various religious and political groups such as the Nation of Islam and the Civil Rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King. As we will see, Scientology and other emergent religions would also become the object of intense FBI scrutiny.

Finally, the escalation secrecy also brought with it various negative repercussions throughout the Cold War. First, there was the growing distrust of government agencies like the CIA and FBI. As Jack Blum suggests, the various abuses by the CIA—such as resettling Nazis in the United States, testing LSD on unsuspecting subjects, and funding right wing exiles in the United States—would lead not only American citizens but even presidents like Kennedy and Johnson to wonder what was going on during the Cold War (2000: 78). Finally, there is the problem of "blow-back"—that is, the possibility that covert operations will ultimately lead to future repercussions that may turn out to be far worse than the original problems they were meant to solve. Perhaps the most striking example in recent history is the CIA's support of Afghanistan against the Soviet Union—a kind of "Cold War by proxy"—that led not only to the withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan but to the creation of one of the most repressive religious regimes ever known—the Taliban—and one of the most destructive terrorist networks ever

known—al Qaeda: “A review of the sorry history of blow-back suggests that at least one of the laws of physics applies in covert operations. For each operation there is an equal and opposite reaction” (ibid.: 89).

In sum, the role of secrecy and religion during the early Cold War era is far more complicated than a matter of the “mystery at the heart of all religions.” Rather, it was intimately bound up with complex social, political, and historical processes at work between both religious organizations and political institutions. As I will argue in the case of Scientology, secrecy is a fundamentally ambivalent and double-edged social strategy; it is at once a source of profound *power* and a potential *liability* for those who wield it. Here I would like to expand upon an insight of Georg Simmel, who observed that secrecy often functions in a way somewhat analogous to money and economic capital (1950: 333–337). Among other things, secrecy works by transforming ordinary knowledge into a scarce resource—something that is rare, precious, and highly sought. The possession of this scarce resource in turn bestows the mark of distinction, prestige, and honor—or, to use Pierre Bourdieu’s phrase, “symbolic capital”—upon its owner (Bourdieu 1984; 1986; Urban 1998; 2001a). Like economic capital, moreover, secret knowledge is a self-reproducing form of wealth, a form of capital that grows in value the further one ascends in the esoteric hierarchy. In sum, as Canetti observes, “*secrecy lies at the very core of power*” (1962: 290).

But at the same time, with both money and secrecy, increased value brings with it increased risks. By its very exclusivist nature, the practice of secrecy tends to arouse suspicion among the dominant social and political powers, giving rise to all manner of fears: “Freemasons are running the country,” the Mau Mau are ready to revolt, brainwashing cults are stealing America’s youth, etc. And this in turn may bring new forms of governmental surveillance of groups who would remain hidden. In the case of money, the more one’s capital grows, the more elaborate become the mechanisms needed to protect or conceal it, and in turn, the more elaborate become the tactics used by others to find it, steal it, regulate it, or tax it. So too, in the case of secrecy, the more powerful one’s claim to esoteric knowledge, the more elaborate become the strategies needed to conceal it, the more intense become the suspicions of outsiders, and the more aggressive become the efforts of those in power to penetrate it or suppress it.

In sum, religious secrecy is generally bound up in a complex dialectic that involves both power and liability, both symbolic capital and fears of social subversion. As Stanton Tefft suggests, secrecy is less a thing than a total social “process”—that is, a complex social dynamic that involves a circular play of “security (including surveillance, deception, and counterespionage); entrusted disclosure; . . . espionage; evaluation; and post-hoc security”

(1980: 322). As we will see in the case of Scientology, however, this secrecy process could be taken much further than Tefft suggests. Indeed, the dynamic interplay between the Church and the government was more like a vicious feedback loop or escalating spiral of secrecy and counter-secrecy, which quickly grew into a state of more or less mutual paranoia.

SCIENTOLOGY, SECRECY, AND THE COLD WAR: HUBBARD AND THE BIRTH OF SCIENTOLOGY

[W]e have our hands on an appalling piece of technology where the world is concerned. With rapidity and a Meter it can be shown that Heaven is a false dream and that the old religion [Christianity] was based on a very painful lie, a cynical betrayal.

What does this do to any religious nature of Scientology? It strengthens it. New religions always overthrow the false gods of the old . . . We can improve man. We can show the old gods false.

—Hubbard, Hubbard Communications Office (HCO) Bulletin,
11 May 1963

At the heart of the mystery and scandal that surrounds Scientology is its founder, L. Ron Hubbard (1911–86). Portrayed in his own writings as a rugged explorer, world traveler, and nuclear physicist, equally accomplished as a philosopher, artist, poet, and photographer, Hubbard has also been described by his critics as a liar, a charlatan, and a madman. Although most of his own autobiographical statements have since proven to be fictitious (Miller 1987: 1; Wallis 1976: 21), Hubbard claimed to have traveled the world as a young man, visiting a wide array of gurus and spiritual leaders in the Orient and then to have enjoyed a heroic naval career in World War II.³ After the war, Hubbard became a remarkably prolific author of science fiction, fantasy, and adventure stories, most of which centered around rugged, red-blooded heroes—such as gunslingers, flying aces, and soldiers of fortune—who thrashed through jungles pursued by slavering headhunters and wrestled giant octopi twenty fathoms beneath storm-tossed seas.

³ One of the more bizarre incidents in Hubbard's early life was his involvement in the highly esoteric magical group known as the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO). Headed by the infamous "great Beast, 666," Aleister Crowley, the OTO has long been notorious as one of the most secretive orders, perhaps best known for its use of sexual rituals and the darker side of magic. It appears that Hubbard was involved with an OTO member named Jack Parsons, who was engaged in magical rites designed to bring about the incarnation of the Anti-Christ. Hubbard, however, later claimed that he was only involved with Parsons as an undercover agent for the government to infiltrate this dangerous cult. See Carter (1999: 99–148).

By 1948, however, Hubbard's fertile imagination had turned from the realm of science fiction to the science of the human mind—a new science that he dubbed “Dianetics,” meaning “through” (*dia*) the “mind” (*nous*). Originally published in the popular magazine *Amazing Science Fiction*, Dianetics was advertised as a radical breakthrough for mankind, comparable to “the discovery of fire, and superior to the wheel and arch” (Whitehead 1987: 52).

According to Hubbard's new science, the human mind is comprised of two fundamental parts: the analytical mind and the reactive mind. While the analytical mind is accurate, rational, and logical—a “flawless computer”—the reactive mind is the repository of a variety of memory traces or what Hubbard calls engrams. Consisting primarily of moments of pain, unconsciousness or emotional loss, these engrams are burned into the reactive mind and cause us a variety of problems in the present, ranging from neurosis to physical illness and insanity. However, through the Dianetic process the individual can erase these painful engrams, by regressing to the original painful event and reliving it, thereby clearing it from his/her reactive mind. This is the process that Hubbard calls—aptly enough—“auditing,” or the systematic method by which the patient—called the pre-clear—is questioned by the auditor to remove the troubling engrams from his mind. Ultimately, once all the engrams have been removed, the patient achieves the state called “Clear.” As Hubbard claims, the Clear individual experiences himself/herself and the world in a radically new way, achieving a variety of intellectual and physical benefits, ranging from increased IQ to optimum health and vitality: “His physical vitality and health are markedly improved and all psychosomatic illnesses have vanished . . . His ability to seek and experience pleasure is great. His personality is heightened and he is creative and constructive. His vigor, persistence and tenacity are much higher than anyone has thought possible” (Hubbard 1968a: 170–171). Eventually, Hubbard and his students would make even more remarkable claims for the Clear state, going far beyond mere psychological or physical health; they would claim a variety of superhuman achievements such as the ability to communicate telepathically, to see through walls, even to re-arrange molecules to fix appliances like broken coffee makers and air-conditioners. “I love it,” wrote one enthusiastic member, “like Superman!” (Wallis 1976: 121).

To aid in the auditing process, Hubbard also began to employ a device known as the “E-meter” or “electro-psychometer.” Essentially a kind of skin galvanometer, the E-meter is comprised of a small box with a meter connected to two metal cylinders (originally ordinary soup cans) that measure the responses of the patient to various questions during the auditing session. The movements of the needle on the meter register

unusual reactions to specific questions and thereby reveal where particular engrams lie. The ultimate goal is to achieve a state of “floating,” when the needle rests freely in the middle of the meter, indicating that the patient has cleared his/her engrams and is now unaffected by any questions (Hubbard 1967: 18; Whitehead 1987: 62).

Hubbard’s new science appears to have struck a powerful chord in the American psyche of the 1950s, attracting a large new following and expanding even more rapidly than its creator was able to contain it. Indeed, by the mid-1950s, Hubbard had founded a new and even more ambitious movement than Dianetics, and in fact a whole new religion and Church called Scientology. Although the earlier system of Dianetics had focused primarily on the goal of achieving the state of Clear and optimal mental health in this lifetime, Scientology had more ambitious spiritual aims. In Scientology, the primary emphasis is on what Hubbard calls the Thetan—the immortal soul or spiritual dimension of the individual—and on the liberation of the Thetan from its bondage to the world of matter, space, energy, and time. At the same time Scientology is concerned not only with the events of his lifetime but also with past life experiences in previous incarnations. For example in his book *Have you Lived Before this Life?* Hubbard records individuals who had remembered lives from 55,000,000,000 years ago, recounting such remarkable experiences as seeing a giant manta ray underwater while repairing atomic engines of a space ship (1968b: 53–54). The auditing process thus involves the clearing of engrams not just from this life but from many, many past lifetimes as well. As we will see, Hubbard would eventually develop a complex hierarchy of auditing levels [called “Operating Thetan” (OT)] and, along with it, a complex legal and financial organization to direct his rapidly growing Church (Wallis 1976: 129).

A COLD WAR RELIGION: SCIENTOLOGY AND THE CLIMATE OF COLD WAR AMERICA

With man now equipped with weapons sufficient to destroy all mankind on Earth, the emergence of a new science capable of handling man is vital. Scientology is such a science. It was born in the same crucible as the atomic bomb . . . The only race that matters at this moment is the one being run between Scientology and the atomic bomb. The history of man . . . may well depend on which one wins.

—Hubbard (1997: 163)

It is no coincidence that the Church of Scientology emerged and achieved its height of popularity in the years between 1950 and 1990—

roughly the period of the Cold War. Hubbard himself states emphatically that Scientology was born as a response to the new weapons of mass destruction and the possibility that the human race might destroy itself in the near future: "Man is now faced . . . with weapons so powerful that man himself may vanish from the earth. There is no problem in the control of these weapons . . . The problem is in the control of man" (1986: 538). Thus Dianetics offers a new hope amidst a society struggling in the aftermath of World War II and its devastation, a hope that human beings could turn their powers to self-betterment rather than self-annihilation.

The early fifties was the right moment to launch Dianetics. The Atomic bomb had been dropped . . . There was a sense of hopelessness around and there was a great deal of fear about a nuclear war . . . McCarthyism was rife . . . Then along comes Hubbard with the idea that if we would increase the overall sanity of man . . . it would be a solution to the threat of nuclear war. It was no wonder that people wanted to listen to him. (Miller 1987: 160)

Hubbard himself was more than a little concerned about the possible impact of a nuclear war on human society and the individual. He was particularly interested in the effects of nuclear radiation following an atomic explosion and how survivors might counter radiation sickness. Hiring the Royal Empire Society Hall in London to preside over the "London Congress on Nuclear Radiation and Health," he delivered a series of lectures on radiation. Eventually, he also began to promote the use of a drug called "Dianezene," which was alleged to provide protection against radiation sickness as well as a means of counteracting cancer (Miller 1987: 227). In the 1950s, Hubbard also planned to form a variety of survivalist groups called the United Survival Action Clubs, which were designed to live through a nuclear attack. As Hubbard warned, nuclear holocaust is an immanent threat, and we need practical means to prepare for it: "The United States is the only country in the world which is organized to be destroyed by an atomic bombing . . . There are no defenses against atomic weapons except the defenses which will be erected by the Survival Clubs" (1958: 7).

However, the clearest example of Hubbard's Cold War mentality lies in his attitudes toward the Soviet Union and the "specter of Communism," which seems to have preoccupied him for much of his life. From an early date, Hubbard was in regular correspondence with the FBI, sending many letters to J. Edgar Hoover regarding the Red Threat and the presence of subversive Communist elements in the United States. As he wrote in a letter to the FBI in 1951, "The Foundation has assumed a highly punitive stand on Communism. I shall shortly be in Washington to go over this matter with the government" (Hubbard 1951b). He

identified numerous members of Scientology—including his own ex-wife and her lover—as Communists and made Communist sympathy one of the greatest offenses for a Scientologist. In 1951 an FBI agent was dispatched to interview him and reported as follows:

Hubbard stated that he strongly feels that Dianetics can be used to combat Communism . . . He stated that the Soviets realized the value of Dianetics because as early as 1938 an official from Amtorg . . . contacted him to suggest that he go to Russia and develop Dianetics there. (U.S. Government Memo 1952)

Eventually, Hubbard claimed to have somehow come into the possession of a secret brainwashing manual used in the Soviet Union, which he generously offered to forward to the FBI (Miller 1987: 222).

In sum, Hubbard and Scientology need to be understood not only as by-products of Cold War America but perhaps as the epitome of many central anxieties in American culture. This was the same era when the US government was actively engaged in research into the use of brainwashing as an ideological tool. As John Marks (1979) observes in his study of brainwashing and the CIA in the 1950s, the concept of mind control was an area of serious interest—both as a Communist threat and as a possible weapon against Communist influence in this country. As we will now see, however, this parallel between US Cold War attitudes and the Church of Scientology was perhaps nowhere more apparent than in their preoccupation with secrecy and information control.

CORPORATE SECRETS: BUREAUCRACY, HIERARCHY, AND SECRECY

I control the operation as a general manager would control any operation of a company.

—Interview with Hubbard for *The Saturday Evening Post* (Phelan 1964)

In my opinion the church has one of the most effective intelligence operations in the U.S., rivaling even that of the FBI.

—Ted Gunderson, former head of the FBI's Los Angeles office
(Behar 1991)

By the 1960s, Scientology had grown into an enormously varied business organization—or rather, an intricate network of businesses—in a complex hierarchical system. Originally proliferating in a chaotic array of ad hoc organizations under Hubbard's leadership, the various Dianetics and

Scientology groups would gradually come under the centralized umbrella of the Church of Scientology. Quickly growing into a vast bureaucratic hierarchy, Scientology became a powerful corporate enterprise in addition to a popular new religious movement. As Wallis observes, the organization of Scientology resembles less a traditional Church than it does “multi-national enterprises such as the Ford Motor Company, Coca Cola or International Telephone and Telegraph” (Wallis 1976: 124).

From the outset, the Scientology organization was governed to a large degree by the logic of secrecy and hierarchy—that is, by controlled access to information, which can be disclosed only to individuals who have attained a particular grade of knowledge and experience (Kent 1999b: 124). In this sense, Scientology resembles the classic structure of the secret society, as Simmel defined it: the secret society is typically structured by the principle of hierarchy, or the “graduated differentiation of the elements in a society. Secret societies, above all others, carry through the division of labor and gradation of their members with great finesse and thoroughness” (1950: 356–357). However, as Tefft observes, the principles of hierarchy and concealment pertain not only to secret societies; rather, particularly under modern capitalism, they also characterize much of the corporate world. Not only do corporations keep secrets from other competitors, but they also typically create complex internal hierarchies of knowledge and access to valued information (Tefft 1980: 326–327). In Scientology, we find elements of the secret society and the financial corporation combined very successfully into one powerful organization.

From the beginning Hubbard promoted Scientology as a way to achieve a more successful life in all domains—not just psychological well-being, personal relations, and physical health but also success in business. As Hubbard puts it, “The end object of Scientology is making the individual capable of living a better life in his own estimation . . . and the playing of a better game” (1997: 125). Scientology was thus presented as a means of winning in the game of life, a way of “improving the individual’s chances of status mobility, of achieving normatively established levels of aspiration” (Wallis 1976: 65).

Eventually, the Church would extend its operations beyond strictly religious activities and more explicitly into the corporate world. It would spawn a variety of related organizations designed to help businesses improve efficiency and profits (Heelas 1992: 62).

THE BRIDGE TO TOTAL FREEDOM: A SPIRITUAL HIERARCHY AND FINANCIAL PYRAMID

This is the road to returned personal power in the Physical Universe.

—Hubbard Communications Office Bulletin, 1 October 1969

Hubbard's works contain many words, the meaning of which are not made clear for lay comprehension and perhaps purposely so.

—CIA agent assigned to reading all of Hubbard's published works, 1957 (Miller 1987: 229).

Not only did Hubbard gear his method to a business clientele, but he also used extensive language drawn from the world of business to describe the Scientology process. Not only was the core of his method dubbed (appropriately) "auditing," but the human mind itself is described as a kind of computer, with its own memory "bank," "files," and even "file clerk" (Hubbard 1986: 263).

The "auditing" process is not, however, without a price. Indeed, perhaps the most common criticism aimed at Scientology is the high cost of the movement, which some critics have dubbed "the most expensive 'religion' on earth" (the E-meter alone currently costs over \$4000) (Behar 1991: 56). Eventually, Hubbard would develop a hierarchy of increasingly complex grades of achievement—what he called the "bridge to total freedom"—consisting of fifteen higher levels of OT. "The belief system of the movement," Wallis observes, "became increasingly esoteric, and a 'hierarchy of sanctification' emerged. Members could locate themselves on levels of initiation into the movement's mysteries" (1976: 125). Each of these, in turn, requires additional auditing, classes and texts, and increasing amounts of money. "Knowledge only comes a little at a time," one former Scientologist explains, "you cannot leap from the Bridge . . . You must go a step at a time. Each step costs a great deal of money" (Lamont 1986: 35). While grades 0 through 4 leading up to the state of Clear appear to be rather "exoteric," the higher levels beyond Clear are quite esoteric and of highly restricted access:

After the Grades . . . matters become more complicated because the pre-clear proceeds to the Confidential levels of auditing . . . Hubbard decided to cordon off all processes and techniques beyond Grade IV, so that the uninitiated would have no prior knowledge . . . of the special theories explaining the significance of each level. (Whitehead 1987: 130)⁴

⁴ As Burroughs (1991: 83) recounts his encounter with the Church, "The upper levels of Scientology processing are classified as 'confidential' which means that only those who have completed the lower grades, passed security checks, and paid the large fees in advance are allowed to see and run this material . . . Obviously it is very much to [Hubbard's] financial advantage to keep this material secret."

The fifteen higher grades of OT thus become increasingly esoteric, as the individual is prepared to receive more elaborate teachings and techniques. Little of this information is known with any certainty by non-Scientists, and most of what has been divulged has been denied by the Church. However, there are numerous reports by disaffected Scientists, as well as several court testimonies, which claim to reveal quite a lot of this esoteric information. For example, at the grade of OT III, one discovers that the goal of auditing is not simply to free one's individual Thetan from its bondage in the material world; rather, there are also a variety of other entities or "body Thetans," who, like spiritual barnacles, have "battered on to the bodies of their healthier fellows and who must be audited by the latter to the point where they can disengage" (Whitehead 1987: 185).

One of the most controversial of these confidential teachings is said to be revealed at this level, where one encounters an extremely complex cosmological narrative centering around a figure called "Xenu." According to several ex-Scientists' reports, handwritten copies of Hubbard's own notes, and court testimonies,⁵ the narrative goes something like this: 75 million years ago, there was a Galactic Federation led by a figure named Xenu. The 76 planets within his Federation were faced with the problem of severe overpopulation, which he solved by bringing people en masse back to planet earth and then planting H-bombs in the principal volcanoes around the globe. The loyal officers within the Federation fought against Xenu, finally capturing and imprisoning him in an electronic mountain trap where he still dwells today. Unfortunately, Xenu had also placed "implants" within all human beings, which are designed to kill anyone who tries to unravel this cosmic secret. Luckily, however, these implants can be disabled by Scientology auditing.⁶

Even more surprising ideas are revealed at the level of OT VIII, the last grade about which anyone seems to have much information.

⁵ This information was first made public in the course of a lawsuit against the Church by ex-Scientologist Lawrence A. Wollersheim and was published in a *Los Angeles Times* report (Sappell and Welkos 1985). Similar materials were made public during the case of Steven Fishman; see note 2 above.

⁶ The handwritten text alleged to be Hubbard's reads as follows: "The head of the Galactic Federation (76 planets around larger stars visible from here) (founded 5,000,000 years ago, very space opera) solved overpopulation (250 billion or so per planet, 178 billion on average) by mass implanting. He caused people to be brought to Teegeeack (Earth) and put an H-Bomb on the principal volcanoes . . . His name was Xenu. He used renegades. Various misleading data by means of circuits etc. was placed in the implants. When through with his crime loyal officers (to the people) captured him after six years of battle and put him in an electronic mountain trap where he still is" (reprinted on-line at <http://www.xenu.net>).

According to evidence provided in the court case of Steven Fishman, Hubbard made a series of rather shocking claims: among others, the document states that Hubbard was the incarnation of the Buddha Metteya (Maitreya), the final Buddha for the end of this cosmic age; it also implies that Hubbard's birth is tied to the rise of Lucifer as the Light-bearer and Anti-Christ who has an opportunity to prevent the second coming of Christ;⁷ and finally, it claims that Jesus Christ was a homosexual and pedophile whose message was more one of hate than of love (*HCO Bulletin*, 5 May 1980). The Church today dismisses most of the above as slanderous forgeries. Yet in any case, it does seem clear that the higher grades of OT are shrouded in extreme secrecy and tantalizing mystery.

Each of these grades also becomes increasingly expensive. Achieving the level of "Clear" alone amounts to (at least) \$128,560. Beyond the state of Clear there follows a new series of stages, sessions, and training. The total cost from entry into Scientology up to the level of OT VIII has been estimated at a *minimum* of \$277,000—but more likely, given the various additional sessions and services that are recommended, closer to \$365,000–380,000 (Behar 1991: 50–57).

In this sense, Scientology exemplifies the role of secrecy as a source of status, power, and authority. As a "device to maintain an exclusive monopoly on knowledge," secrecy often serves to enhance the prestige and status of privileged individuals within a particular social or religious hierarchy (Simmel 1950: 332–333; Tefft 1980: 324). In the case of Scientology, secrecy and access to valued information are also clearly tied to a powerful economic hierarchy, as well.

Not surprisingly, Hubbard's Church became arguably the wealthiest of the many new religious movements emerging in the second half of the twentieth century. Already by the late 1950s Hubbard was earning an estimated \$250,000 a year, "a great deal more than the President of the United States" (Miller 1987: 227); and the wealth of the Church has grown exponentially over the last several decades. For the year 1987 alone, just one of Scientology's many entities, the Church of Spiritual

⁷ "No doubt you are familiar with the Revelations section of the Bible where various events are predicted. Also mentioned is a brief period of time in which an arch-enemy of Christ, referred to as the anti-Christ, will reign and his opinions will have sway . . . This anti-Christ represents the forces of Lucifer (literally, the "light bearers" or "light bringer"), Lucifer being a mythical representation of the forces of enlightenment, the Galactic Confederacy. My mission could be said to fulfill the Biblical promise represented by this brief anti-Christ period . . ."

"Siddhartha Gautama never claimed to be anything more than a man. Having caught on to this operation, he postulated his own return as Metteya, part of which prophecy will have been fulfilled upon the passing of L. Ron Hubbard" (*HCO Bulletin*, 5 May 1980).

Technology, listed \$503 million in income. High-level defectors from the organization have reported that the Church has squirreled away roughly \$400 million in bank accounts in Liechtenstein, Switzerland, and Cyprus (Behar 1991: 51).

Scientology, it seems, was remarkably well adapted to the particular socioeconomic context in which it emerged: twentieth-century American capitalism. Hubbard offered a new spiritual product that was enormously successful both as a religious institution and as a business enterprise. In this sense, Scientology is an especially clear example of the situation that Peter Berger calls the “market” conditions of contemporary religious life (1966: 73–74). Promising success in all aspects of personal and financial life, “Scientology emerged as a religious commodity eminently suited to the contemporary market . . . It developed to a level far in apace of most other religious movements . . . the techniques of salesmanship and public relations” (Wallis 1976: 247–248). With its centralized bureaucracy and hierarchical structure, Scientology might be said to be an ideal embodiment of the modern “Fordist” style of capitalism that predominated in the United States until the 1970s (Harvey 1989: 128–179).⁸

SECRECY, SECURITY CHECKS, AND SUPPRESSIVE PERSONS

Are you guilty of anything?

Do you have a secret you're afraid I might find out?

—Hubbard (1961a)

Just as the widespread diffusion of secret societies is usually a proof of public un-freedom, of a tendency toward police regimentation and of political oppression . . . so conversely the internal ritual regimentation of secret societies reflects a measure of freedom and severance from society at large.

—Simmel (1950: 361)

Once established, the elaborate bureaucracy of the Church rapidly developed powerful forms of internal surveillance of its own members; indeed, more than one observer has compared Scientology's methods of surveillance to those of the FBI and CIA (Burroughs 1991: 87). As I would suggest, Scientology emerged out of the same Cold War context that fueled the CIA and

⁸ Early or “Fordist” capitalism is characterized by: (1) centralization of industrial banking and commercial capital in regulated national markets; (2) emergence of complex managerial hierarchies; (3) growth of new sectors of managerial, scientific, technological intelligentsia, and of middle-class bureaucracy; and (4) expansion of overseas production and markets (Harvey 1989: 175–176).

FBI in the years from 1945 to 1989—a context of fear, suspicion, and secrecy that gave birth to incredibly elaborate new systems of security.

Particularly in the late 1960s, Hubbard grew increasingly worried about the possibility of subversion from both within and without his organization and began to create more elaborate techniques to monitor his followers. As we saw above, he was particularly concerned about Communist infiltration and even claimed to have uncovered a secret Communist brainwashing manual. In turn Hubbard developed an elaborate code of Scientology “Ethics” designed to weed out individuals dubbed “suppressive persons” (SPs). The SPs were identified as any person who might be a threat to the functioning of the Church: those who question Hubbard’s authority, those who reveal classified information to unqualified recipients, and those who sell Scientology materials at a cut-rate price (1959: 37, 49–50). Much of this was conducted through the “Ethics” branch of the Church. Using the E-meter and a series of interrogations called “Security Checks” (“Sec Checks”), the Ethics officers could identify any potential threats to the Church.

As we read in the Church’s own letters and bulletins from the early 1960s onward, the Security Checks were designed as a powerful means to critically examine Scientology members and seek out any subversive or disloyal tendencies. According to an *HCO Bulletin* on “Security Checks,” “Remember as a security checker you are not merely an observer, or an auditor, you are a detective” (Hubbard 1960b). Most of the questions in the Sec Checks centered around matters of secrecy, disloyalty to the Church, ties with Communism, and, interestingly enough, sexual aberrations. For example:

Are you a pervert?

Are you guilty of any major crimes in this lifetime?

Are you or have you ever been a Communist? (Hubbard 1961b)

Do you have a secret you are afraid I’ll find out?

Do you collect sexual objects? . . .

Have you ever had any unkind thoughts about L. Ron Hubbard or Scientology? . . .

Are you upset by this security check? (Hubbard 1961a)

Do you hope you won’t be found out?

Do you think there is anything wrong with having your own privacy invaded? (Hubbard 1961c)

Following severe criticism and legal assaults on the Church, the process of Security Checking would be officially canceled in 1968; however, the Church’s concern with secrecy and surveillance does not appear to have ended but rather to have grown even more intense in the last three decades.

FAIR GAME: SECRECY, ESPIONAGE, AND COUNTER-ESPIONAGE

The law can be used very easily to harass. And enough harassment on somebody who is simply on the thin edge anyway, well knowing that he is not authorized will generally be sufficient to cause his professional decease. If possible, of course, ruin him utterly.

—Hubbard (1954/1955: 7)

Surely the most remarkable aspect of Scientology's history is its labyrinthine game of espionage and counter-espionage with a variety of enemies. Not only did it enter into complex disputes with various governments, from the United States to Germany, England, and Australia, but it also undertook a series of legal battles with various media and anticult groups. In short, the case of Scientology is one of the most extreme examples of the complex "secrecy process," or the elaborate feedback loop between esoteric groups and political authorities who oppose them. Although secrecy is often a powerful means of enhancing the status and prestige of those who hold esoteric knowledge, it often becomes a serious liability when political authorities begin to suspect subversive activities. And in turn, groups who face political persecution often adopt even more complex strategies of concealment as a basic means of survival. Scientology, however, would go further still, using the cloak of secrecy not only to protect itself but also to carry out aggressive acts against its enemies.

During the 1960s, in the face of increasing criticism from both within and without the Scientology organization, Hubbard adopted a principle known as "fair game." Someone who is declared "fair game" is an individual who has been identified as a major threat to the organization and therefore can be harassed, threatened, or punished using any and all means possible. In his *Introduction to Scientology Ethics*, Hubbard defines "fair game" as follows:

By FAIR GAME is meant, without right for self possessions or position and no Scientologist may be brought before a Committee of Evidence or punished for any action taken against a Suppressive Person or Group during the period that person or group is 'fair game' (1968c: 49).

Elsewhere, Hubbard comments that "fair game" may be "deprived of property or injured by any means by any Scientologist without any discipline of Scientologists. May be tricked, sued or lied to or destroyed" (*HCO Policy Letter*, 18 October 1966).

Like the practice of "Sec Check," the Fair Game principle was officially canceled during the reforms of 1968. Yet it is clear that the Church has by no means ceased its aggressive response to any groups or

individuals—including the media, anticult groups, and the US government—perceived to be a threat to the prosperity of the movement.

DIRTY BUSINESS? ESPIONAGE, COUNTER-ESPIONAGE, AND COLD WAR PARANOIA

Man in his anxieties is prone to witch hunts.

—L. Ron Hubbard, *Introduction to Scientology Ethics* (1968c: 16)

The evidentiary record of the US Government's conspiracy against the Church of Scientology . . . has no parallel in American legal history . . . [N]ever before have so many agencies . . . joined forces in a dedicated – yes, a fanatical – scheme to destroy a legally constituted religious community.

—Omar Garrison (1980: 10)

From an early date, as we saw above, Hubbard was in regular contact with the FBI, sending frequent letters to J. Edgar Hoover to identify Communist threats to US security. Initially, the FBI ignored Hubbard and dismissed him as a crackpot or a “mental case” (Jones 1957). Ironically, however, Hubbard himself would become an object of scrutiny by a wide array of government agencies, which grew concerned about his possible status as a subversive threat. Thus, Hubbard's own paranoia about infiltration actually turned out to be at least partly justified.

Like many alternative religious groups of the Cold War era, Scientology was targeted as a potential threat to American values, family structure, and even public health. Already in 1963, the FDA began to investigate the Church and finally raided its center in Washington DC on the grounds that Scientology was making false claims about the benefits of its E-meters. Moving in with two unmarked vans, a squad of FDA agents and US marshals began a raid that some critics have called “a farce better suited to the Keystone Cops than a federal agency” (Miller 1987: 247). All in all, the agents confiscated three tons of materials, including piles of books, papers, and E-meters. Hubbard in turn decried the raid as the work of armed thugs desecrating the sanctity of a church and an attack upon our Constitutional rights.

However, perhaps the real reason for the government's intense interest in Scientology was that it was an extremely high-income business. By 1967 the IRS, increasingly alert to the Church's growing wealth, passed a ruling that stripped it of tax-exempt status. In the early 1970s the IRS began to scrutinize the Church—conducting a few “auditing” sessions of its own—and claimed that it owed several million dollars in unpaid taxes. In response, Scientology began to clothe itself in more recognizably “religious”

garb, veiling itself in Christian imagery, to win First Amendment protection: “counselors started sporting clerical collars. Chapels were built, franchises became ‘missions,’ fees became ‘fixed donations,’ and Hubbard’s . . . cosmology became ‘sacred scriptures’ ” (Behar 1991: 51).

In addition to the IRS, the FBI also began to take an active interest in Scientology. Already by the early 1970s, the FBI had sent secret operatives to virtually every branch of the Church, while at the same time pressuring members into supplying the agency with confidential information. In 1974, for example, an FBI agent tried over a period of several months to recruit a young Scientology student named James Robert Welder to become an undercover operative in the church, offering to pay for his Scientology courses, along with \$4800 monthly stipend (Garrison 1980: 65–66).

It is perhaps not surprising that the Church felt justified to respond in turn to its aggressors according to the principles of “fair game.” Increasingly attacked on all sides from the media, the IRS and the FBI, the Church turned to elaborate tactics of counter-espionage of its own, undertaking covert operations that almost rivaled those of the FBI. Ironically, the same Hubbard who had once written letters to J. Edgar Hoover to unmask Communists began to target many government officials as “suppressive persons:” “politicians, journalists, medical and psychiatric professionals, judges . . . and agencies (. . . the AMA, the FDA, the NIMH, the NAMH, the British and Australian Parliaments) that have attempted to discredit Hubbard . . . or to erect legal or financial barriers to the spread of the Church have been, at various points, declared suppressive” (Whitehead 1987: 221).

From an early date, Hubbard had made plans to infiltrate key government branches with Scientology members, advancing the interests of the Church at the highest levels of power. According to his “Special Zone Plan” of 1960,

[A] nation or state runs on the ability of its department heads, its governors or any other leaders. It is easy to get posts in such areas . . . Don’t bother to get elected. Get a job on the secretarial staff or the bodyguard, use any talent one has to get a place close in . . . Doing a good job . . . will result in promotion, better contacts – a widening zone. (Hubbard 1960a)

However, it was not until it was faced with increasing harassment from the IRS, FBI, and FDA that the Church undertook serious attempts to infiltrate specific government agencies to engage in covert and illegal operations. The most remarkable of these operations was begun in 1975, when Jane Kember, the Church’s Guardian Worldwide, issued an order

calling for decisive action against the IRS Service. In “a turnabout caper in which the spied upon would themselves become spies,” the Church undertook an elaborate operation that included intensive litigation in courts, a public relations campaign, and, finally, penetration of the IRS intelligence division and chief counsel’s office (Garrison 1980: 100). In addition to planting hidden microphones, the undercover agents were to obtain and make photocopies of all the files pertaining to Scientology. In the first five months of 1975 alone, they had photocopied a pile of documents that stood over ten feet high.

In the end, however, the spying Scientologists were caught. On 4 July 1977, the FBI began intensive searches at Scientology centers in Washington, Los Angeles, and Hollywood. In LA, this culminated in twenty-one-hour raid, during which a sixteen-ton truck backed up and was loaded to capacity with files, documents, correspondence, and miscellaneous items:

They came at dawn, in a long procession of shiny big cars filled with grim-faced men neatly dressed in jackets and ties. In all there were 156 of them – the largest number of FBI agents ever mustered for a single raid in the history of the Bureau . . . They would use huge battering rams, sledge hammers, and buzz saws to smash and cut their way into church buildings, where they would conduct a massive search and seize, unprecedented in American legal history. (ibid.: 129)

In 1979 eleven Scientologists, including Hubbard’s own wife, Mary Sue, were convicted of conspiracy and sentenced to lengthy jail sentences. Hubbard himself was cited as an “unindicted co-conspirator” and went into hiding, from which he did not emerge until his death in 1986.

OPERATION FREAK-OUT: SCIENTOLOGY AND THE MEDIA IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

Strange things seem to happen to people who write about Scientology.

—Richard Behar (1991: 57)

People attack Scientology; I never forget it, always even the score.
People attack auditors, or staff, or organisations, or me. I never forget
until the slate is clear.

—Hubbard (1959: 1)

Perhaps fittingly, Hubbard’s death corresponded roughly with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet his death

did not bring any end to the dialectic of secrecy and surveillance between the Church and the government, any more than the end of the Cold War brought an end to secrecy in the US government; if anything, in both cases, the obsession with secrecy, surveillance, and counter-espionage would only intensify in the post-Cold War era.

If the Church of Scientology undertook extreme measures in its war of “fair game” against the US government, they were even more aggressive in their war against the media. Since at least the 1960s, Scientology has been subject to a barrage of journalistic exposes, culminating in *Time*’s cover story on the “Cult of Greed.” But the Church was not passive to these media attacks. On the contrary, it has responded forcefully, using both the overt legal apparatus of the court system and the covert tactics of private investigation and character defamation. Hubbard himself warned his followers to “beware of attorneys who tell you not to sue . . . [T]he purpose of the suit is to harass and discourage rather than to win;” the Church would eventually bring hundreds of suits against its enemies and now pays an estimated \$20 million annually to more than 100 lawyers (Behar 1991: 57).⁹

Perhaps the best-documented case of Scientology’s war with the media, however, is that of Richard Behar, who wrote the 1991 article for *Time* entitled the “Cult of Greed.” As Behar recounts his experience with Scientology during his research on the article, he was assaulted with a frightening array of legal and illegal persecution, including a swarm of lawyers and private detectives:

[A]t least 10 attorneys and six private detectives were unleashed by Scientology and its followers in an effort to threaten, harass and discredit me . . . A copy of my personal credit report – with detailed information about my bank accounts, home mortgage, credit-card payments, home address and Social Security number – had been illegally retrieved from a national credit bureau . . . [P]rivate investigators have been contacting acquaintances of mine . . . to inquire about subjects such as my health . . . and whether I’ve ever had trouble with the IRS. (ibid.)

If Scientology played hardball in its war with the media, it could be quite ruthless when it came to dealing with the various anticult groups that hounded it for decades. The CAN, for example, targeted Scientology

⁹ As Hubbard (1959: 5) writes in his *Manual of Justice*, “In the case of a bad magazine article which is signed, use the following procedure: 1. Tell them by letter to retract at once in the next issue. 2. Hire a private detective of a national-type firm to investigate the writer . . . and get any criminal or Communist background . . . 3. Have your lawyers or solicitors write the magazine threatening suit.”

as the most rapacious of all “deviant cults” in the United States. Like many anticult groups, CAN severely criticized the Church because of its alleged brainwashing techniques and greed-driven corporate organization. However, Scientology was by no means a passive victim of CAN’s attacks. On the contrary, beginning in 1991, the Church bombarded CAN with a massive legal assault, filing at least fifty lawsuits against CAN in state and federal courts across the country. Eventually, CAN was driven deep into debt and finally to bankruptcy, in large part because of its court battles with Scientology; and the last assets of the “hopelessly bankrupt CAN . . . its trade name, post office box, help line number, and service mark” (Russell 1999), were bought at auction by a lawyer from Los Angeles, who also happened to be a member of the Church of Scientology (Hansen 1997: 62). Today, when one calls the Cult Awareness Network (now renamed “New CAN”), one is in fact greeted by a member of the Church of Scientology.

Finally, with the rise of new information technologies in the post-Cold War era, Scientology’s war of secrecy and control has only grown more intense. Above all, with the rapid proliferation of the Internet, Scientology faces a new series of threats to its exclusive claim to possession of secret knowledge. For the last decade, a wide array of confidential Scientology materials have been popping up all over the World Wide Web, so that now anyone with a fast modem can unlock the inner secrets of OT at the click of a mouse. In turn the Church has adopted a fiercely aggressive stance to censor and silence any individual who publishes its materials on-line.

The backbone of the Church’s war against the Internet is a special branch called the “Religious Technology Center” (RTC). As the RTC defines its mission, it is “a legal mechanism for ensuring that the Scientology religious technologies were orthodox” designed “to prevent anyone from . . . engaging in some distorted misuse of Hubbard’s writings” (Religious Technology Center 2004). Above all, the RTC has waged a full-scale war in cyberspace against the many Internet users distributing confidential Scientology materials throughout the globe using the power of digital communications:

The Church of Scientology has a massive multimedia Internet presence with the launch in 1996 one of the largest and most technically advanced web sites on the Internet . . . The Church uses the Internet in its dissemination of the Scientology religion and feels that this is one of the most – if not the most – important technological advances in the field of communication. However, with the popularization of the Internet . . . a certain percentage of Internet users decided that no rules should apply in this

new medium . . . [T]hey decided that their own “free speech” was paramount to any other rights. (Church of Scientology International 2000)

The RTC has been particularly aggressive in its pursuit of Internet sites claiming to reveal Hubbard’s confidential writings and the higher levels of the Church. This began in 1993, when an anti-Scientology news-group called “alt.religion.scientology” was founded, using the name of the Church’s head, David Miscavage. However, the first major court case began in 1994, when a former Scientologist minister posted confidential Advanced Technology works on the Internet through a bulletin board on the NETCOM service. Since then, the Church has engaged in a series of court battles: in 1998, the Church was awarded three million dollars as a result of a lawsuit filed against Grady Ward for posting confidential materials on the Web; and in 1999, a lawsuit involving 1900 copyright infringements was settled between the Church and FACT.NET—though not until both sides had accumulated seven million dollars in legal fees. According to the RTC accounts, it has engaged in at least seven major lawsuits and a variety of smaller cases over the issue of copyright infringement on the Internet (*ibid.*).

Yet despite these aggressive attempts to squelch its enemies in cyberspace, the Church appears to be fighting a losing battle. The speed, relative anonymity, and fluidity of the Internet make it virtually impossible to stop the spread of information to every corner of the globe, as ten mirror sites pop up for every one Web page that is taken down and the “secrets” of Scientology proliferate in a bewildering flurry of digital debris. As William S. Burroughs observed based on his own interactions with the Church, “If the Scientologists persist in a self-imposed isolation and in withholding their materials from those best qualified to evaluate . . . them, they may well find themselves bypassed” (1991: 87).

CONCLUSIONS AND COMPARATIVE COMMENTS: THE PRICE OF SECRECY

Falsehood must become exposed by truth – and truth, though fought, always in the end prevails.

—L. Ron Hubbard (1965)

As Bachelard neatly put it, ‘there is no science but that of the hidden.’ The sociologist is better or worse equipped to discover what is hidden depending on . . . the degree of interest he has in uncovering what is censored or repressed in the social world.

—Pierre Bourdieu (1986: 10)

Despite the intense scrutiny of the Church by the government, media, and anticult groups, and despite the “revelation” of its secrets all over the Internet, Scientology does not appear to have lost much of its power or wealth. On the contrary, it remains perhaps the most affluent new religious movement in the United States. It now claims over eight million members, with 3000 churches spread throughout the world, and continues to capture media attention through its high-profile celebrity members like Tom Cruise. The crowning moment of victory for the Church came in 1993, when it was finally awarded legal status as a religious movement by the US government, as the IRS declared that “Church of Scientology International and its related churches and charitable and educational entities [are] exempt from United States federal income tax as exclusively religious or charitable organizations under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code.” Shortly thereafter, on 8 October 1993, tens of thousands of Scientologists gathered in Los Angeles to celebrate this “historic victory for religious freedom” (Church of Scientology International 1998: 236–237). But this victory has by no means ended the controversy surrounding the Church or its ongoing battles to secure control over its religious documents. On the contrary, it raises a whole new series of questions about religious privacy in an age of information and in a post-Cold War context.

I have in this article just scratched the surface of the Church of Scientology and its complex role in American culture. However, my aim here has simply been to make two basic points: First, Scientology is best understood not as a counter-cultural rejection of mainstream America, but rather as the fulfillment (if perhaps exaggeration) of many American *concerns* particularly during the decades of the Cold War. In this sense, Scientology is similar to many of the new religious movements that Paul Heelas has examined. According to Heelas, these movements are not so much a revolt against modernity; on the contrary, they are better seen as the fulfillment of many central ideals of the modern West. They provide a “sacralized rendering of widely held values,” such as “freedom, authenticity, self-responsibility, self-reliance, self determination . . . and above all the self as a value in and of itself” (Heelas 1996: 169). Many of these movements, moreover, are compatible and even complicit with the values of modern capitalism. Rather than a reaction against western materialism, many new religions are in fact directed toward the material world, including the world of business and finance (Heelas 1992). Nowhere is this more true than in the case of Scientology, which developed an elaborate corporate hierarchy that is perhaps the epitome of the centralized capitalist bureaucracy imagined by Henry Ford himself.

Second, and more important, however, Scientology also reflected and perhaps epitomized the concern with secrecy that characterized much of

Cold War America. Not only was secrecy and the claim to valuable information a key part of Scientology's tremendous symbolic (and economic) power, but its very tactics of secrecy and its growing wealth in turn aroused the interest of the government's own security agencies and covert operations. In sum, the practice of secrecy was in this case an elaborate dialectical interaction between the government and the Church. A spiraling, self-destructive, yet somehow self-nourishing feedback loop, it circled endlessly in a cycle of concealment, espionage, and counter-espionage that left both the Church and its critics drowning in a mire of lawsuits. To return to Simmel's analogy between secrecy and money, the practice of secrecy can generate both symbolic and economic forms of capital; but it also brings with it a host of both symbolic and real political risks.

The example of Scientology has a number of profound implications for the study of religions today—particularly in our own new age of religious secrecy, terrorism, and government surveillance. The case of Scientology during the Cold War was at once a kind of prefiguration and a strange mirror of our own generation in the wake of 9/11 and the new war on terror. Indeed, the tactics employed by the FBI against Scientology appear rather timid compared to the new measures allowed by the USA PATRIOT Act—measures that, according to many critics, reflect a new version of “McCarthy-era philosophy” (Cole and Dempsey 2002: 153). Perhaps most important, it raises the question of what rights to privacy religious movements deserve and how far either government officials or scholars in the academy should go to penetrate their inner secrets. Do governments, in fact, have some obligation to infiltrate and expose movements that could be dangerous or harmful to their citizens? And what is the role of the scholar of religion in all of this? Do we have some obligation either to expose and unmask such groups or, conversely, to argue for tolerance and respect?

If the case of Scientology has anything to teach us, I think, it is that attempts to infiltrate or expose an esoteric movement often lead to further, ever more intense tactics of concealment and counter-espionage. Attempting to infiltrate such movements, in other words, is not a useful approach; on the contrary, as we have also seen in the case of the Branch Davidians and the disaster at Waco, such aggressive attacks often push these groups into more extreme, even paranoid positions vis-à-vis the outside world (Tabor and Gallagher 1995: 183–184). Acts aimed at penetrating such groups only appear to create an equal and probably more intense reaction of secrecy and concealment.

As scholars of religions, perhaps the only viable stance we can take toward such groups is to respect their rights to privacy and those areas in which they wish to remain closed to outsiders, while at the same time

critically exercising our own “hermeneutics of suspicion.” We can and should remain critical of those aspects of religious movements—and secular ideologies, as well—that appear exploitative or oppressive; and we should continue to spread as much information as possible to inform the public at large and to train our students in the skills of critical thinking about all forms of ideology, religious and nonreligious alike. For, as Pierre Bourdieu (1988: 99–110) reminds us, this is precisely how scholarly research exerts its political influence: by critically examining and demystifying asymmetrical relations of power wherever they exist in the social field. Yet we cannot, I think, overstep the bounds of religious freedom and basic rights to privacy—as the FDA and FBI did in the case Scientology, and as the US government is currently doing under the USA PATRIOT Act and other measures in its war on terror—nor can we expect such covert strategies to lead to anything other than an escalating cycle of secrecy, mistrust, obfuscation, and paranoia. In sum, the historian of religion needs to remain at once respectful and critical of *both* religious movements *and* the governmental powers that would monitor and control them.

To close, I would like to cite one last passage from one of Hubbard’s bulletins, in which he describes his own future re-incarnation on this earth. The secrets of his teaching have been entrusted to his loyal students, who are commissioned with preserving them until Hubbard’s eventual return to this world, at a time when he will assume a more explicitly political role than he has in this life:

I will return not as a religious leader but a political one. That happens to be the requisite beingness for the task at hand . . . So there you have it. The secret that I have kept close to my chest all these years. Now you too are part of this secret and I no longer have to shoulder the burden alone . . . With this briefing I entrust to each of you the responsibility for this material until such time as I am able to return. (*HCO Bulletin*, 5 May 1980)

In the midst of a new American war on terror, with the rapid proliferation of offices of homeland security and Total Information Awareness networks, Hubbard may well find that he has ample opportunities to return in a more explicitly political role in his next incarnation.

REFERENCES

- Bainbridge, William Sims 1987 “Science and Religion: The Case of Scientology.” In *The Future of New Religious Movements*, 59–70. Ed. by David G. Bromley and Phillip E. Hammond. Macon: Mercer University Press.

-
- Bainbridge, William Sims, and Rodney Stark
1980 "Scientology: To Be Perfectly Clear." *Sociological Analysis* 41/2: 128–136.
- Behar, Richard
1991 "The Thriving Cult of Greed and Power," *Time*, 6 May.
- Berger, Peter
1966 "Secularisation and Pluralism." *International Yearbook for the Sociology of Religions* 2: 73–84.
- Blum, Jack A.
2000 "Covert Operations: The Blowback Problem." In *National Insecurity: U.S. Intelligence After the Cold War*. Ed. by Craig Eisendrath. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Bolle, Kees, ed.
1987 *Secrecy in Religions*. New York: E.J. Brill.
- Bourdieu, Pierre
1984 *Distinction*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- 1986 "The Forms of Capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, 241–258. Ed. by John G. Richardson. New York: Greenwood Press.
- 1988 "The Corporatism of the Universal: The Role of Intellectuals in the Modern World." *Telos* 81: 99–110.
- Burroughs, William S.
1991 *Ali's Smile: Naked Scientology*. Bonn: Expanded Mind Editions.
- Canetti, Elias
1962 *Crowds and Power*. New York: Viking Press.
- Carter, John
1999 *Sex and Rockets: The Occult World of Jack Parsons*. Los Angeles: Feral House.
- Church of Scientology International
1998 *Scientology: Theology & Practice of a Contemporary Religion*. Los Angeles: Bridge Publications.
- 2000 "Briefing Re: The Church of Scientology and the Internet." Provided for the University of Virginia Religious Movements Page (http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/scientology_briefing.html).

- Cole, David, and James X. Dempsey
2002 *Terrorism and the Constitution: Sacrificing Civil Liberties in the Name of National Security*. New York: The New Press.
- Curry, Richard
1988 *Freedom at Risk: Secrecy, Censorship and Repression in the 1980s*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- DeLillo, Don
1997 *Underworld*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Faivre, Antoine, ed.
1992 *Modern Western Esoteric Spirituality*. New York: Crossroad.
- Faivre, Antoine
1994 *Access to Western Esotericism*. Albany: SUNY.
- Garrison, Omar
1980 *Playing Dirty: The Secret War Against Beliefs*. Los Angeles: Ralston-Pilot, Inc.
- Hansen, Susan
1997 "Did Scientology Strike Back?" *The American Lawyer* (June).
- Harvey, David
1989 *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Heelas, Paul
1992 "The Sacralization of the Self and New Age Capitalism. In *Social Change in Contemporary Britain*, 139–166. Ed. by Nicholas Abercrombie and Lana Warde. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- 1996 *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Henriksen, Margot A.
1997 *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hubbard, L. Ron
1950 "Dianetics: The Evolution of a Science." *Astounding Science Fiction* 45/3: 43–87.
- 1951a Letter from The Hubbard Dianetic Foundation, Inc. to the Attorney General, 14 May. The Files of the FBI on L. Ron Hubbard, Dianetics and Scientology.
- 1951b Letter from the Hubbard Dianetic Research Foundation. to the FBI, 3 March 1951. The Files of the FBI on L. Ron Hubbard, Dianetics and Scientology.
- 1954/1955 "Dissemination of Material." *Ability Major*, 1 (n.d.).

-
- 1958 "Survival Clubs." *Certainty* 5/3: 7.
- 1959 *Manual of Justice*. Sussex: Hubbard Communications Office.
- 1960a "Special Zone Plan." *Comm Mag* 2/6 (June).
- 1960b "Security Checks." *HCO Bulletin*, 26 May.
- 1961a "The Only Valid Security Check." *HCO Policy Letter*, 22 May.
- 1961b "HGC Pre-processing Security Check." *HCO Policy Letter*, 23 October.
- 1961c "Auditor's Sec Check," *HCO Policy Letter*, 7 July.
- 1965 "Amprinistics." *HCO Executive Letter*, 27 September.
- 1967 *The E-meter Essentials*. Phoenix: Hubbard College of Scientology.
- 1968a *Dianetics; The Modern Science of Mental Health*. East Grinstead: Hubbard College of Scientology.
- 1968b *Have you Lived Before this Life? A Scientific Survey*. East Grinstead: Church of Scientology.
- 1968c *Introduction to Scientology Ethics*. Edinburgh: Publications Organisation World Wide.
- 1986 *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*. Los Angeles: Bridge Publications.
- 1997 *Scientology: The Fundamentals of Thought*. Los Angeles: Bridge Publications.
- HCO (Hubbard Communications Office)
1951–80 *Hubbard Communications Office Bulletins*. Saint Hill Manor, East Grinstead, Sussex.
- Johnson, Paul C.
2002 *Secrets, Gossip and Gods: The Transformation of Brazilian Candomblé*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jones, M.A.
1957 Office Memorandum to Mr. Nichols. From the Files of the FBI on L. Ron Hubbard, Dianetics and Scientology, 27 February.
- Kaufman, Robert
1972 *Inside Scientology: How I Joined Scientology and Became Superhuman*. London: Olympia Press.

- Keen, Ian
1994 *Knowledge and Secrecy in an Aboriginal Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kent, Stephen A.
1999a "The Creation of 'Religious' Scientology." *Religious Studies and Theology* 18/2: 97–126.
1999b "The Globalization of Scientology: Influence, Control and Opposition in Transnational Markets." *Religion* 29: 147–169.
- Kippenberg, Hans G., and
Guy G. Stroumsa, eds.
1995 *Secrecy and Concealment: Studies in the History of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Religions*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Kisser, Cynthia
1997 Interview with 60 Minutes, "The Cult Awareness Network," 28 December.
- Lamont, Stewart
1986 *Religion Inc: The Church of Scientology*. London: Harrap.
- MacKenzie, Angus
1997 *Secrets: The CIA's War at Home*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Marks, John
1979 *Search for the Manchurian Candidate; The CIA and Mind Control*. New York: New York Times Books.
- Melton, J. Gordon
2000 *The Church of Scientology*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books.
- Miller, Russell
1987 *Bare-Faced Messiah: The True Story of L. Ron Hubbard*. New York: Henry Holt and Co.
- Peale, Norman Vincent
1952 *The Power of Positive Thinking*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Phelan, James
1963 "Have You Ever Been a Boo-Hoo?" *Saturday Evening Post*, 21 March.
- Religious Technology
Center
2004 "Religious Technology Center: Holder of the Dianetics and Scientology Trademarks." Church of Scientology web-site. Available at <http://www.scientology.org/WORLD/WORLDENG/corp/rtc.htm>.
- Russell, Ron
1999 "Scientology's Revenge." *The New York Times*, 9 September.
- Sappell, Joel, and Robert
Welkos
1985 "Scientologists Block Access to Secret Documents." *Los Angeles Times*, 5 November.

-
- Simmel, Georg
1950 "The Secret and the Secret Society." In *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, 307–376. Ed. by Kurt H. Wolff. New York: The Free Press.
- Tabor, James D., and
Eugene V. Gallagher
1995 *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Tefft, Stanton
1980 "Secrecy as a Social and Political Process." In *Secrecy: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, 319–341. Ed. by Stanton Tefft. New York: Human Sciences Press.
- 1992 *The Dialectics of Secret Society Power in States*. New Jersey: Humanities Press.
- Urban, Hugh B.
1998 "The Torment of Secrecy: Ethical and Epistemological Problems in the Study of Esoteric Traditions." *History of Religions* 37/3: 209–248.
- 2001a *The Economics of Ecstasy: Tantra, Secrecy and Power in Colonial Bengal*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 2001b "The Adornment of Silence: Secrecy and Symbolic Power in American Freemasonry." *The Journal of Religion and Society* 3: 1–27.
- U.S. Government Memo
1952 US Government Memo 62-116151-70 (7 March).
- Wallis, Roy
1976 *The Road to Total Freedom: A Sociological Analysis of Scientology*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wasserstrom, Steven M.
1999 *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Whitehead, Harriet
1987 *Renunciation and Reformulation: A Study of Conversion in an American Sect*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Whitfield, Stephen J.
1996 *The Culture of the Cold War*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.