
Scientology Scandals

**Is there trouble brewing
for this cult?**

*Make money. make more money. make
other people produce so as to make
more money*

L. Ron Hubbard

Scientology claims to improve conditions in life, and provide real spiritual answers. Within the group, founder L Ron Hubbard is touted as a remarkable and celebrated humanitarian, educator, artist, novelist and explorer — a personality that evokes images of a courageous Doc Savage mixed with a contemporary Buddha. His passionate followers poignantly proclaim “mankind has no greater friend.”

Celebrity Scientologists Tom Cruise, John Travolta and Kirstie Alley routinely raise the Church's profile, giving it a slick image and claiming Scientology can handle any problems in life. Are you having difficulties with stress, anxiety, depression, learning, dealing with children, your marriage or financial success? Scientology professes to deal with any issue facing an individual.

If what the Church and its parishioners say is true, why do people call Hubbard a slimy charlatan? Why do critics claim that the Church of Scientology is involved in fraud, extortion and maliciously destroying families, amongst other dubious activities?

Let's take a moment to reflect on a very tumultuous past year for the Church of Scientology — it seems they had little to toast about.

Trouble in Europe

In September 2007, Belgian prosecutor Jean-Claude Van Espen branded the Church a criminal organization and recommended it stand trial for extortion and fraud. After a 10-year investigation he concluded that the Church's Europe office, based in Brussels, and its Belgian missions, conducted unlawful practices in medicine, violated privacy laws and used illegal business contracts¹. Watch this space.

Elsewhere in Europe, news relating to the Church wasn't any better.

Last year Ursula Caberta, German Scientology expert with the Hamburg interior ministry, asserted that “Scientology is a dangerous, extremist organization which has declared war on Europe”, and demanded a ban on the organization. Udo Nagel, the interior minister of the northern German state of Hamburg, also sees Scientology as a threat to his State's security, calling it an extremist organization².

The German domestic intelligence service continues to monitor activities of the Church of Scientology, but no charges have yet been brought against the Church as a result of government surveillance.

In May 2007 renowned BBC reporter John Sweeney did an investigation into the Church. Sweeney claimed that Scientologists followed his every move, once even waiting for him at his hotel at



Michael Wolloghan lives in Sydney and is a reporter for the TANK Vodcast. www.tankvodcast.wordpress.com m_wolloghan@hotmail.com

midnight. Sweeney lost his temper during the filming and engaged in a heated screaming match with Scientology representative Tommy Davis, son of Hollywood actress and church member Anne Archer.

Sweeney later apologized for his outburst but still stood by his report. "I had been followed by creepy strangers, followed by cars, shouted at, and called a bigot countless times," recounted Sweeney. The *Panorama* program had almost 4.5 million viewers, and the Church of Scientology was back in the UK headlines.

Problems elsewhere

In Australia, the press for Scientology hasn't been flattering either.

In July 2007 a woman was charged with murdering her father and sister in their Revesby home. Allegedly, this occurred after Scientology family members forced her to stop taking psychiatric drugs for a mental condition.

The dawn of a new year simultaneously brought controversy with Will Smith becoming an active recruiter for Scientology after being introduced to the group by Tom Cruise.

Then an explosive unauthorized biography of Cruise was released in January by British author Andrew Morton. Morton maintains that the actor is now the second most powerful figure in the Church of Scientology. The book reveals a rumour within the Church, claiming that Suri, Cruise's infant, was conceived like Rosemary's Baby, with Katie Holmes being impregnated with Hubbard's frozen sperm. Cruise is reportedly considering a \$100 million lawsuit over the publication.

However, these stories aren't so strange in comparison to the belief that 75 million years ago there was an evil galactic overlord named Xenu who was in charge of 76 planets in our galaxy, including planet Earth.

Back on Earth, the Church has made numerous fraudulent medical claims. In his book, *Dianetics*,

Hubbard proclaimed that with auditing "arthritis vanishes, myopia gets better, heart illness decreases, asthma disappears, stomachs function properly and the whole catalogue of illnesses goes away and stays away"³.

In the book *A History of Man*, Hubbard even boasts "cancer has been eradicated by auditing"⁴. In 1963 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration sued the Church of Scientology for fraudulent medical claims, and in 1971 a US federal court ruled that Hubbard's claims were completely bogus and that auditing could no longer be called a scientific treatment.

Kenneth Robinson, British Minister of Health in the sixties, once commented on the Church - "...its methods can be a serious danger to the health of those who submit to them"⁵. Nevertheless, Scientologists continue to tout the brilliance of auditing.

Soon after the Morton biography hit the best seller lists, an interview with Tom Cruise surfaced*. The four-year-old footage was leaked onto the internet, showing Cruise championing his Scientology beliefs, and occasionally bursting into eerie laughter. Cruise pompously touts himself and fellow Scientologists as "authorities on the mind", and, "If you're a Scientologist you see things the way they are," enthuses Cruise, over the very repetitive guitar-riff soundtrack. (This video can be viewed online at: <http://gawker.com/5002269/the-cruise-indoctrination-video-scientology-tried-to-suppress>).

It's not the first time the pint-sized star has shown his proselytizing zeal. When Cruise appeared on NBC's *Today* show, he called psychiatry a "pseudoscience" and aggressively told interviewer Matt Lauer, "You don't know the history of psychiatry. I do." Scientologists

believe psychiatry was a tool of oppression used by evil alien civilisations. Most people would not be aware of the science fiction "history" to which Cruise refers.

A new foe

Shortly after the appearance of the bizarre video, Scientology lawyers pressured websites to remove the video, citing copyright law.

Then a new foe emerged against the Church. A shadowy, covert internet based group calling itself "Anonymous" declared war on the Church of Scientology, in the form of an ominous posting on the YouTube video website. The Anonymous collective set up a movement called "Project Chanology" to coordinate their efforts, and took down several Scientology websites through denial-of-service attacks.

On February 10, 2008 the group had a worldwide day of protest against the Church. I was in attendance at the Sydney protest to film the event and interview members of Anonymous**. The activists wore costume masks, wigs, sunglasses, and bandanas, refusing to give their names, citing fear of retribution by the church. Protesters carried banners and placards denouncing the church and diligently distributed leaflets to the general public. (The footage can be viewed online at: www.tankvodcast.wordpress.com, episode February 15th, 2008).

Anonymous spokespeople said they selected that specific date because it coincides with the birthday of Lisa McPherson, a woman who died 13 years ago while in the care of Scientology members.

The Church may have a new thorn in its side, but it is difficult to say if the loose-knit consortium of net activists will continue to maintain its course, or slowly simmer down.

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these people. More souls for Jesus — hallelujah! This train is bound for glory!

It must be said that not all religious people and organisations are making the same mistake. There are some in the area that do a lot of good without trying to convert and I applaud their efforts. They are in the minority however. In the wake of the “Stolen Generation”, Australians should find the activities of the missionaries poignant. Personally, I find it incredible that this can be happening today, after all we have learned from past experiences where cultures have been destroyed and the remnants of the people are a defeated, rudderless shadow of their former selves. When I travel around the villages and see the crosses and churches my feelings are a mixture of anger and pity.


The help the villages do get may not be quite up to their expectations

either. Many villages now boast fine churches while most of the people still live in bamboo huts with no sanitation. One village I know of has two churches.

There is another issue that should cause some disquiet. In these troubled times when wars are in progress between peoples of different religions, we should be concerned that a substantial block of Christians is being formed inside a Buddhist country. Sam Harris in his book *Letter to a Christian Nation* lists twelve main theatres of war in the World between different religious denominations, so is it too fanciful to suggest that here we have the developing situation for another religious war?

Just to compound the situation, Muslims are moving in as well, although their presence is minor compared to the Christians.

This is the problem, this is the dilemma, this is the issue that we skeptics, humanists, and atheists should be concerned about, and perhaps this is our challenge to do something about. I share the concern and goals expressed by Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion* and Sam Harris, that religiosity today is a problem of immense proportions and we must fight it where we can. Here in Northern Thailand the missionaries, the evangelists, are winning the battle.

Perhaps it is time we organise charities with the specific goal of helping peoples that are vulnerable to attack by the missionaries and so thwart their efforts. Would this be a theme that skeptics, humanists, and atheists would warm to? Maybe a slogan like, “Help the Needy before the God Botherers get them” would be apt, but maybe this is too flippant for such a serious issue. 

...Scientology from p

During the protest I reflected on the time when I visited the Church of Scientology. I met some earnest, if obsessive and stilted members, and had my own private screening of their Orientation film. I was unnerved by the end of the film when the pretentious, zealous narrator said, “You can walk out that door and never mention Scientology again...but you might as well take a gun and blow your brains out.”

This is a startling snapshot of the true nature of the organization.

Scientology claims it is a way of improving people's lives by making the able more able. It claims to provide true wisdom and real answers. However, Justice Anderson from the Supreme Court of Victoria tends to sum up the feelings of the general public⁶:

Scientology is evil, its techniques are evil, its practice is a serious threat to the community, medically, morally, and socially.

Is this the beginning of the end for the Church? As Anonymous plan future protests and ex-members and others speak out against Scientology, we wait to see what the future holds for this cult.

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