



Bob McKee

Heaven (on earth) can wait

Those not-so-saintly Scientologists are in the news again.

This time, it appears, our money-making missionaries have been up to their cassocks in — of all things — spying and as a result 11 members of the pay-as-you-learn church have been indicted in Washington on charges of stealing government documents and bugging government offices.

Some of the things the reverie reverends are accused of include planting Scientology "agents" in the government to find out about its investigations into the church; and of planting a bugging device in a room where IRS officials were meeting to discuss a church application for tax-exempt status.

In an equally damning accusation the Scientologists are belloved responsible for sneaking into the apartment of a woman who had written unfavorable things about their leader, of writing a bomb threat on her typewriter and then of using the note as evidence in a plot to frame her.

It goes without saying that Scientologists care little for the standards established by less neurotic religious devotees, and while some critics may bemoan the FBI's gangbusting-type tactics when they raided the Scientologists at the ungodly hour of 6 a.m. July, 1977, there can be no disputing the argument that these irreverent revela-

tions raise questions not only about certain practices performed in the name of Scientology, but of the new religions, and their fads.

As every sinner knows there's nothing wrong with religion itself, orthodox or otherwise. If someone wants to believe in a 20th century savior, far be it from me to deny him or her that grace. But surely the tax-free buck has to stop somewhere!

Unfortunately, present-day legislation makes it easy for cranks and con-men to persuade wide-eyed followers that heaven, nirvana or whatever goal they are in search of, lies along a path neatly laid out by them. And you can bet your sweet bibles that many of our modern-day messiahs will blissfully milk their believers dry all along the path of righteousness. Tax free, of course.

Okay, so what else is new? Religion has always been a money-maker. Scientology founder, L. Ron Hubbard said as much himself when peddling science fiction novels before he found faith, and fortune.

But the shame of religion today is that far too many of these fringe churches are all too ready to elect their bishops at the drop of a cheque. Nobody can convince me that being faithful means putting money where your heart should be.

Let's face it. We've got ourselves into a

sorry state of affairs when we permit cocky the privilege of forming their own break-away faiths complete with tax-exempt status. And before someone starts attempting to ram freedom of religion down my throat, let me add that I am not against dissenters. There have been dissenters in every church that ever existed, and rightly so.

What I'm against is the ease with which many of these mind-bending cults, sects, or whatever, are allowed not only to operate but to flourish, particularly those whose business is conducted behind closed doors.

In war we demand the right to protect ourselves and our families, yet, when it comes to religion, we are told to let the young and easily-influenced follow their own paths. I'll be damned if I'll ever let an offspring of mine stand on street corners peddling trinkets in everlasting, enlightened bliss.

For heaven's sake, how can parents be expected to stand idly by, and watch their children waddle in poverty while making wealth for their gods.

Surely, it's time we examined this over-protective belief that freedom of religion is paramount to all else. It

Scientology is as profound an applied religious philosophy as its believers make it out to be, why do they launch so many law suits against its dissenters? Or, as recent revelations show, why are they so notoriously zealous in their attempts to silence their critics?

Many people believe, as it appears to some governments, that Scientologists, like the Moonies and their ilk, are involved in tax-free money-making rackets. Investigations have shown that millions of dollars are being raked in by cult groups.

The question, of course, is how can we distinguish between genuine faith, crackpot or otherwise, and the rackets? At present we can't.

God knows why anyone would want to pay the price demanded by some of the new-found faiths. The going rate for Scientology courses is now, I believe, somewhere in the region of \$130 an hour. It takes a lot of bucks to reach heaven. The moonies, Hare Krishnas and others take bodies as well as souls.

If we are to be as tolerant of their religions as they are of ours then they'll have to put up with questions and criticisms. And if that drives them to a point of paranoia then it's too bad. I'll thank the Lord for the day we stop the gullible from giving these pious pitchmen their money.