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1981

A
Reader's Digest

REPRINT

Scientology: The Sickness Spreads

Eighteen months ago, the U.S.-based Church of Scientology launched a global—and unsuccessful—campaign to prevent publication of a Reader's Digest report called "Scientology: Anatomy of a Frightening Cult." The church engaged a detective agency to investigate the author, Digest Senior Editor Eugene H. Methvin. Digest offices in a half-dozen nations were picketed or bombarded with nuisance phone calls. In Denmark, South Africa and Australia, the church sued unsuccessfully to prevent publication.

In the months since the article appeared, in May 1980, a flood of reader reaction both here and abroad has convinced us that our article only scratched the surface. Indeed, there is every indication that Scientology's international operations are at least as chilling as the U.S. operations described in the May '80 article. And they continue to grow at an alarming pace.

Here, then, is a follow-up look at Scientology worldwide.

BY EUGENE H. METHVIN

IN BRESCIA, ITALY, radio-station owner Rodolfo Zucca receives repeated personal threats. His car is vandalized. Twice, the wires from his broadcasting studio are cut, forcing him off the air.

• In Paris, university professor Yves Lecerf learns that all the neighbors in his apartment building have been telephoned by someone posing as a health-ministry official. The bogus official has told them that Professor Lecerf is a

danger to his neighbors' children.

• In St. Petersburg, Fla., Andrew Orsini, executive director of the Easter Seal Society for Crippled Children and Adults, is accused in anonymous letters to newspapers and state and city agencies of criminal misconduct in the charity's financial and administrative affairs. The letters demand Orsini's arrest and prosecution.

These diverse people share one common connection: each had at-

tracted the enmity of the "Church of Scientology"—which in 1978 claimed more than five million adherents, with thousands more joining yearly.

Scientology is far more than mere religion. An analysis of sworn testimony and the findings of official tribunals in 12 nations, plus independent investigation, reveals it to be a multinational racket masquerading as a religion.

Operating from centers in Clearwater, Fla., Los Angeles, Calif., Saint Hill Manor in Sussex, England, and Copenhagen, Denmark, an elite corps of "missionaries" shuttles between 79 Scientology churches and 172 missions and "study groups" in 34 nations—from Argentina to Zimbabwe. Operating with 19 volumes of manuals on how to bamboozle the unwary, they administer what amounts to franchises-for-fraud—schemes based on a largely secret hocus-pocus dogma.

The church in 1978 claimed 6559 full-time staffers throughout the world. They live mainly off "ministerial" counseling services for which naïve converts pay a minimum of \$175 per hour. Advanced courses of enlightenment and salvation cost as much as \$16,100. The profits? Enormous. According to U.S. government information, the church has been grossing more than \$150 million a year in the United States alone.

Slaughter in Outer Space. Just what *is* the cult called Scientology,

and how did it reach its present proportions?

In the beginning, founder L. Ron Hubbard, a science-fiction writer, touted his theories not as religion but as "the most advanced and most clearly presented method of psychotherapy and self-improvement ever discovered." In 1950, he published his theories in *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, a supposed cure-all for the ills of mankind. Two years later, he published another, *Scientology: A History of Man*. In 1954, Hubbard, then 42, established the first Church of Scientology in Washington, D.C.*

He had, he said, scientifically established that the personality is an immortal spirit, called a "Thetan," that can separate from the body without death or derangement. Using an "E-meter," Hubbard claimed he could "audit" or "process" recruits into supernatural "Operating Thetans" who can make vast space journeys and return to their bodies at will.

Hubbard's E-meter is no more than a battery-powered galvanometer. Using a needle dial wired to two tin cans, it functions as a crude "lie detector." Candidates for indoctrination grip the cans and supply the most personal details of their lives (which former Scientology officials have sworn are recorded and filed away for possible future blackmail use). Skin perspiration causes the needle to jump,

*For more details on Scientology's origins, see Reader's Digest, May '80.

and, when this occurs, the candidate is told that an "engram"—a recall of unpleasant experiences either in this life or in former incarnations—has been detected. When these experiences are confronted, he will become "totally free," restored to a superhuman state.

The true believer is told he is an elite Thetan—a hero of a long-lost intergalactic civilization slaughtered by evil forces on the planet Helatrobos some 40 trillion years ago. The defeated Thetans were then exiled to the planet Earth, where they remained, in ignorance, until Hubbard summoned them to resume their rightful place in the Galactic Confederation.

A genius at propaganda and organization, Hubbard reveals these secret doctrines only in stages. "If they were to tell you that stuff at the start, you'd just laugh and walk out," explained one "auditor" who defected after ten years in Scientology. "It seems incredible now, but I came to *believe* it."

Hubbard attracts recruits by preying on their anxieties and loneliness with an unholy brew of hypnosis, Pavlovian conditioning and twisted psychotherapy. In monthly magazines and "personal" letters, he advertises that Scientology can remedy ailments from cancer to the common cold—and even promises that his "auditing" will increase I.Q. one point per hour. Scientologists, Hubbard brags, are "the upper tenth of

the upper tenth in intelligence."

Hubbard also directs Scientology "ministers" to watch newspapers for stories of accident, illness or death. "As speedily as possible, make a personal call on the bereaved or injured person," he orders. "Unless you have bodies in the shop, you get no income. So, on any pretext, get bodies in the place."

In Vancouver, Wash., Alan Wilson, recovering from a mangled hip suffered in an auto accident, met a Scientology "field-staff member" working on a ten-percent commission. Promised a cure, he took some courses and soon found himself fleeced of his \$7000 accident-insurance settlement. Vibeke Damman, a Danish woman who spent six years in Scientology, explained: "You get this blaze of attention. You're important, but only—you discover later—because you have money."

And Hubbard's moneymaking machine succeeds phenomenally. One French Scientologist spent \$200,000 for a few weeks' "services" at the Florida center. A son of a former U.S. ambassador to London poured in \$123,000. A German couple took out a \$125,000 mortgage to pay for "advanced" enlightenment in Copenhagen.

And at the end of this galactic fantasyland of salvation? Once Hubbard is firmly in control of mind and money, he reduces converts to emotional serfs working 16 hours a day for \$10 or \$20 a

week, fervidly proselytizing and delivering more recruits and more money to "help Ron clear this planet" of insanity, crime and evil.

The result is an international trail of tragic victims. In Australia, a woman subjected to more than 60 hours of Scientology "processing" had to be committed to a mental institution. In Germany, a young man who struggled for two years to free himself from the cult's hold left his parents' home on Christmas Day and lay down in front of a train. A young man in Paris who underwent the cult's processing quit his job, closeted himself and slashed his veins. As he bled to death, he scrawled on a memo pad: "Go to Scientology and you will understand all!"

"Always Attack!" In 1966, as the uproar over Scientology grew, Hubbard created a clandestine enforcement arm called the World-Wide Guardian Office to silence it. His third wife, Mary Sue, and Jane Kember, a fanatically loyal South African, were named to head the Guardians. "Don't ever defend. Always attack," Hubbard's standing orders exhort. "*Find or manufacture* enough threat against them to cause them to sue for peace. Originate a black PR campaign to destroy the person's repute and to discredit them so thoroughly they will be ostracized. Be very alert to sue for slander at the slightest chance so as to discourage the public presses from mentioning Scientology. The purpose of the suit is to harass and

discourage rather than to win."

When Hubbard secretly moved his Scientologists into Clearwater, Fla., Mayor Gabriel Cazares denounced them for "lying" about their covert multimillion-dollar property acquisitions and for deceiving local ministers. From Saint Hill in England, Jane Kember telexed Guardian Program Order 398, a "Mayor Cazares Handling Project," to their U.S. operatives.

The Guardians sued Cazares for one million dollars for violating the Scientologists' "freedom of religion." They staged a fake hit-and-run accident in a plot to smear him, then infiltrated and disrupted his campaign organization at election time. Ultimately, a federal judge ruled the cult's suit "frivolous, unreasonable and groundless," and made the Scientologists pay Cazares's legal costs of \$36,022.

The St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* and Los Angeles *Times* were compelled to spend thousands of dollars to defend investigative reports into Scientology activities. The newspapers were ultimately upheld by the courts. According to former Guardians, their agents burglarized law firms representing the St. Petersburg *Times* and penetrated and stole papers from another firm representing the Boston *Globe* to obtain information about the newspapers' actions on Scientology.

"Suits filed by the church were for the sole purpose of financially bankrupting its critics and to create an atmosphere of fear so that they

would shy away from exercising their fundamental rights of free speech," declared Assistant U.S. Attorney Ray Banoun in court. Banoun has prosecuted to conviction Hubbard's top 11 Guardian aides on charges of conspiracy, burglary or theft of secret documents from U.S. government offices. (The cases are on appeal.)

But Guardians do not deal solely with Scientology detractors. In 1975, Hubbard ordered his troops to cash in on government grants for mental health, education and other social causes by setting up a series of front groups that would qualify for taxpayer support. To this end, a "Social Coordination Bureau" was added at Saint Hill and in Guardian offices throughout Europe and America.

In Copenhagen, the church operates two schools to exploit the Danish government's subsidy of up to 85 percent of the cost of private schooling. In America, 22 so-called Apple Schools operated under concealed Scientology management, subjecting children to Hubbard's intergalactic processing.

But Scientology's biggest social-reform gimmick to date has been the "Narconons," fronts that allegedly rehabilitate drug addicts. Guardian legal experts at Saint Hill designed a whole package of "correspondence" and phony minutes of directors' meetings to make the Narconons appear independent and justify government cash payments for "consultation" fees. Ignor-

rant of the Scientology connection, at least one political figure and several Hollywood stars were persuaded to lend their names as endorsers; last September the celebrities were touted in a Congressional hearing in Washington. Narconon charges \$530 for its basic two-week detoxification program, and more for advanced courses. And they claim an 86-percent "cure" rate.

Impressed, two Idaho school systems hired Narconon "experts" to lecture their schoolchildren on drugs. Michigan's Department of Corrections paid Narconon more than \$100,000 to rehabilitate its prisoners. (Only later did its study of 29 Narconon subjects show that they did *worse* than other prison parolees after six months in the community.) And in West Berlin, city authorities wasted an estimated \$700,000 before press and television exposed the Narconon operation. A West Berlin senate investigation found only about ten percent of those treated really cured.

Counsel and Assistance. Hubbard reportedly lives in seclusion on a Southern California resort ranch. According to a former member of his retinue of "communicators," he has bought and sold gold, silver and other precious commodities with the millions of dollars harvested by his worldwide missions. Meanwhile, he directs an army of lawyers in appeals designed to keep his 11 convicted aides out of jail while holding other law-enforcement

agencies and civil suits at bay. Last December, in his traditional Christmas Day "Executive Directive," he declared: "I am as well as can be expected for anyone several trillion years old. . . . The future is ours."

But the future may instead belong to cult victims and their families. In Europe and America, they have joined to provide legal and psychological help for those still entrapped, and to take their fight to courts and legislatures. In Paris, the Association for Defense of the Family and Individuals helped a victim bring criminal fraud charges that resulted in the conviction (in absentia) of Hubbard, a top French executive and a former French executive. If he ever shows up in France, Hubbard faces four years in prison and a \$7000 fine.*

Lorna Levett of Calgary, Alber-

ta, founded a Scientology mission and headed it for six years until she came to realize "we are involved in an international conspiracy." In 1974, she led a mass defection of 43 fellow members. Despite smears, harassment and a \$100,000 lawsuit, they have successfully resisted every Scientology effort to silence them. Speaking for disillusioned cult members and their families everywhere, Ms. Levett declares:

"Psychological coercion by dangerous mind-bending cults under cover of religion can only occur, like disease, when there is no immunization against it. In this case, the immunization is freedom of speech. The cults, using tax-free dollars, can violate human rights only when the truth is allowed to go unpublished."

THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS will assist and counsel cult victims and their families: The American Family Foundation Center on Destructive Cultism, Suite 300, 89 State Street, Boston, Mass. 02109, telephone 617-742-9728; Citizens Freedom Foundation, P.O. Box 7000-89, Redondo Beach, Calif. 90277, telephone 213-540-2642; Spiritual Counterfeits Project, Box 2418, Berkeley, Calif. 94702, telephone 415-527-9212.

*A fourth defendant was convicted but the conviction was reversed by the appeals court on grounds of his youthfulness, sincere beliefs and peripheral involvement.

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