

Disaffected Scientologists strike out on own

By GEORGE-WAYNE SHELOR
Sun staff writer

The Church of Scientology has lost thousands of adherents in recent years due to an internal revolt by members who embrace the teachings of founder L. Ron Hubbard but question many policies of the mother organization.

Disillusioned Scientologists—still practicing the tenets of Dianetics and Scientology—have splintered from the Church of Scientology to form their own organizations such as the Clear Center, the Council for Spiritual Integrity, Advanced Abilities Center and the Revitalization Center.

Such assemblages offer Scientology- and Dianetics-related courses to those who wish to study Hubbard's teachings and technology "without having to deal with the hassles" of conforming to the sect's dictates, explained Jon Zegel, of the Clear Center in California.

Zegel said he believes the Church of Scientology has strayed from the path of the basic principles, philosophy, responsibility and integrity outlined by Hubbard 34 years ago.

"A church is nothing more than a group of people with the same philosophy, and we no longer shared a common philosophy with

the Church of Scientology," the 35-year-old man said during a recent interview. "Simply enough, that is how we came to be."

A Scientologist for 15 years prior to leaving the worldwide sect, Zegel said he formed the Clear Center "because we had a number of unpleasant scenes with the church and decided we could no longer support it."

Zegel echoed complaints made by other former Scientologists: the continually escalating course prices; the sect practice of using purportedly confidential information against members who challenge the organization; numerous "unethical" sect policies and ille-

gal actions by sect members in the past.

Activities such as breaking and entering and the infiltration of government agencies have resulted in imprisonment for a number of high-ranking sect officials in recent years.

And contrary to Church of Scientology claims, some of those who have left the sect to form their own organizations believe many of the controversial actions continue today.

Indeed, some former Scientologists who have formed their own groups say the Church of Scientology has not allowed them to leave in peace.

"We've been accosted by senior management (of the Church of Scientology)," Zegel said, citing several instances of confrontation between Scientology officials and members of his 4,000-member organization. "We still get hassled, there's no question about that. It never ceases to amaze me how much nonsense goes on (within the sect)."

Zegel said his group studies the science of the mind created in the 1950s by Hubbard, but refuses to abide by some of the reclusive author's "organizational" policies.

Disgruntled staff members and lower-echelon staff members are

not the only ones who have broken from the sect to form alternative groups. David Mayo, a former high-ranking Scientologist who had been touted as Hubbard's heir apparent, left the sect to form the Advanced Abilities Center, an 8,000-member California organization believed to be the largest of the splinter groups.

Other groups, such as the recently formed Council for Spiritual Integrity, spell out other problems perceived by disillusioned former members. Complaints cited in the May issue of *The Free Spirit*, the magazine of the Council for Spiritual Integrity, include: (Please see * SPLIT, page 3B)

□ "One of the most commonly voiced objections from parishioners is that they are unable to give or receive communication from those occupying leadership posts." The magazine noted that many Scientologists have no knowledge of who actually runs the sect due to its complicated corporate and organizational structure.

□ "PC (confessional) folders are confidential and no one except the auditor and C/S (case supervisor) are privy to see their contents. However, there is considerable documented evidence to indicate that for years PC folders have been culled to get evidence which could be used against the PC."

□ "The practice of the church which has been most destructive of goodwill has been that of 'disconnection.'" (To "disconnect" in Scientology means to have nothing to do with anyone who questions Scientology.)

The results of a recent Council of Spiritual Integrity survey indicate that the respondents would like to see the mother organization:

- Reduce prices for services and books to a "realistic" level.
- Run the organization "by democratic principles."
- Throw back the cloak of secrecy.
- Be more receptive to the public.
- Do away with military uniforms such as those worn by the sect's elite Sea Org, which are so familiar to Clearwater residents.

Dr. Frank Gerbode, a full-time, professional Scientologist since 1972 and a Palo Alto, Calif., Scientology mission holder, left the organization earlier this year after problems with communication, money and policy disagreements.

In a letter of resignation to Heber Jentsch, international president of the Church of Scientology, Gerbode said he was withdrawing

his mission from sect management lines because "force, threats and authoritarianism have become more and more prevalent, always justified by the notion that there is a war going on with inimical outside forces ...

"Such reasons are those that, throughout history, have always been given for denying the basic civil rights of the individual—i.e. that there is a present danger that makes it OK to abrogate these rights."

Gerbode also wrote that he believes current sect management is "unknown, capricious and uncorrectable."

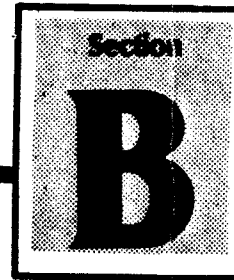
"I have left the church, but I continue to ascribe to Hubbard's teachings," Dr. Gerbode said Tuesday. He said he left the sect "because I felt certain people in church management—a fairly small number high in the organization—started acting on principals completely opposite to the original basic philosophy.

"Basically I feel like I have not actually left the church ... my feeling is that they have left and I have stayed. I'm going to continue doing what I have always done."

Gerbode said some former Scientologists hope they can promote organizational change within the mother organization, "but I don't think the senior officers of the church want that and I don't think it will happen."

He said he believes there are virtues in the independent centers springing up, "and I don't feel it's necessary to have a huge central organization to preserve (Hubbard's technology)."

Sect officials in Clearwater were unavailable for comment Wednesday and a woman who answered the phone at the office of Scientology's international president told a *Clearwater Sun* reporter that Heber Jentsch "doesn't have time to talk with you. That's his message."



Clearwater Sun

THURSDAY, July 5, 1984