

# A fast answer to 'Can We Ever Be Friends?'

Scientists use various means of indoctrinating their members.

I have long suspected that boredom and confusion are two of their tools.

That belief got a boost Tuesday night as I drove to Tampa.

As I traveled east on Ulmerton Road and across the Frankenstein Bridge, I listened to a tape cassette recently mailed to me (and several hundred other people in Upper Pinellas County) by the Scientologists.

In a Wednesday story, *Sun* staff writer Lesley Collins ably described the tape's contents. She also quoted a local Scientology spokesman, who feels that the tape may help to end the antagonism between the cult and Clearwater.

The tape is called "Can We Ever Be Friends?" It is supposed to be about estrangement. It is one of the most boring, disjointed speeches I've heard.

In that respect, it resembles most of the writings of Scientology's founder and high priest, L. Ron Hubbard.

## The Driver's Seat

By Bob Driver



The speaker on the tape is not identified by name. He has a pleasant enough voice. But as he gets going, a trace of pomposity creeps in and then grows to gargantuan proportions. After half an hour of this, I felt as if I were listening to what Charlemagne must have sounded like.

Except, I'm sure, Charlemagne would have been precise in his message. And the Scientology speaker is vague.

He rambles about, touching on human relations, psychology, dieting, college life and attitudes toward money. Each sentence seems to

make sense as it stands alone, but when you string the sentences together in the hope that they will add up to a definite, understandable conclusion, you are disappointed. Or I was.

One point was clear: the leaders of Scientology would like to blame all their past bad publicity on rookie members of the organization who allegedly were misinformed, or who spoke out of turn. This is scapegoating of a low order.

The motives of the Church of Scientology in sending this tape to Clearwater people are, like the tape itself, clouded in confusion. The stated purpose is to help change public opinion, and make local folks feel kindly toward Scientology.

But by now most observers have made up their minds about Scientology. The tape is not likely to alter the convictions of anyone who regards Scientology as a profit-making scheme for taking money from societal misfits in exchange for lessons in how to think more clearly, plus pseudo-friendship and a temporary sense of belonging.

Scientology has been in Clearwater 10 years.

During the first half of that time the cult played rough. It made many enemies in and around Clearwater. In the early 1980s the tactics changed, and the Scientologists took a lower-profile, less combative stance.

The new tape marks some sort of a re-emergence, it seems to me. The tape is intended as a bridge across troubled waters. But for many people it will simply stir up old, ugly memories.

If nothing else, thinking persons who listen closely to the tape will be struck by certain questions.

Such as, "What does all this gobbledygook mean? Why wasn't the speaker identified? Why was an attempt made to make the listener think the speaker was addressing a live group?"

But I could be wrong. Many recipients of the tape may think it is gang-busters. Maybe local radio stations will play it. Call them and find out.

Again, the tape is called "Can We Ever Be Friends?" In Clearwater, the answer is "It's doubtful."