

Scientology—what readers think



John Ablett

THE recent news reports concerning the Church of Scientology have been so damning, and the defence by members of the Church has been so unconvincing, that readers may be left wondering how some one could be so gullible as to ever become involved with such an apparently unsavory organisation in the first place. Or, once involved, how could they be deceived for so long?

But the truth is not so simple and the process is more elaborate than it seems. Some clarification is needed.

We live at a time when more people than ever before are pursuing their own spiritual exploration and development. They do this through yoga, meditation, encounter groups or workshops and seminars on applied psychology. There are a

host of organisations offering such training. Most of them are benevolent. In spite of this, the majority of the population are probably content to accept the tenets of a traditional religion, or, more likely, the values of a materialistic society. They are unlikely to be drawn to any of these groups, let alone the Church of Scientology. A person who sees no need to own a car at all is not liable to be misled by a dishonest car salesman. Thus, only a certain minority will be suitable candidates.

For those who are interested in such matters, Scientology initially appears quite attractive. It seems to consist mainly of a form of psycho-analytic counselling set against a background of oriental philosophy, although the ideas and techniques may be drawn from a variety of sources.

Some years ago I attended courses for the public at the Church's East Grinstead headquarters and undertook a great deal of private study of Scientology. Although never a member of the Church staff, I was able to observe those who were more deeply involved and gradually became aware of the way in which the whole system was designed to change a well-intentioned seeker after knowledge into an unquestioning and fanatical servant of the Church.

On trying Scientology counselling for the first time, you may well experience a feeling of insight, mild euphoria and the apparent resolution of some personal problem. If you were unaware that other techniques also offered similar experiences, you might believe the Church's claim that it alone had access to

such methods. The supporting theories, as found in the writings of L. Ron Hubbard, contain a profound mystical element and are couched in matter-of-fact technical jargon which makes them sound all the more plausible. And, after all, Hubbard himself was a nuclear physicist (wasn't he?).

After your counselling session, you will be sent to an "Examiner" who will confirm your new state of mind. At the end of a number of such sessions, a major insight may signal that you have achieved a particular "grade" of existence. You will then declare this to the Examiner and be required to write a "success story". Afterwards you will receive a certificate along with the fulsome congratulations of other Scientologists.

Still in your euphoric mood, you will be whisked away to the "Registrar" who has instructions not to let you go until you have signed up for the next period of counselling or for a training course. It doesn't matter about the money. You will find it somehow. If you really can't find it, you can always sign a contract to join the Church staff. You will then live on a pittance and work every hour that God sends. But what is more important than your spiritual freedom? It is not only this lifetime but your infinite future which is at stake. And only the Church holds the key.

Furthermore, it is not only your own freedom which is at stake but also the future of every human being on the planet for eons to come. You are part of a great crusade to liberate mankind and transform the world into a society run along Scientol-

ogy lines.

You are further encouraged by the presence of Scientologists who have taken "advanced" course and who are, therefore, much further along the "Bridge to Total Freedom". The texts you have read suggest that these people have certain superhuman powers. Their knowing smiles confirm this, but they are sworn to secrecy. Premature exposure to the "advanced materials" may lead to insanity. Besides, if you already knew, you wouldn't need to pay the money.

But what if you don't feel like signing up for the next course?

Regrettably, this would be an indication that you have not really made the current grade. You may be sent for corrective "review" counselling and all the extra expense which that involves. This would also happen if you made it known that you were not deriving any benefit from your counselling.

If you still weren't making it, you would eventually be sent to the "Ethics" department.

"Ethics" is a concept unique to Scientology. As Ron Hubbard said, "We are probably the most ethical group on the planet". The "Ethics" department exists to defend Scientology. Surprisingly, not everyone is interested in joining the Church. Indeed, there are some who are positively opposed to it. These people are designated "Suppressive Persons" or "SPs". SPs are anti-social personalities and are enemies of Scientology. Any former Scientologist is considered to be an SP. As it is necessary to become a "member" of the Church in order to

take a course, this includes quite a number of people.

After a while in Scientology, especially if you are in the socially isolated position of being a member of staff, you may gather the impression that the whole of society is composed of SP's who are out to destroy Scientology. Certainly, the organisation strives to make this situation a reality. Action committed against an "enemy", whether overt or covert, is permissible. There are no moral restrictions, because there is no morality outside the preservation and advancement of the cause of Scientology.

If you are not making personal gain from your counselling, the Ethics department may decide that you are connected to a Suppressive Person and order you to "disconnect". Such a person may be a member of your family, a friend or a business associate.

Finally, you may yourself come under suspicion. There is always the danger that you may be declared an SP and expelled from the Church. This is the ultimate sanction, for then you are deprived of your only possible route to spiritual freedom. In any case, you could be assigned an "Ethics condition" which requires that you make some kind of "amends" before you are rehabilitated and allowed to resume your progress along the Bridge. You will have to admit your guilt and perhaps perform some useful task such as to "deliver an effective blow against the enemies (of Scientology)".

The confessional is an important part of Scientology

"processing". This is the procedure whereby you disclose any minor or major transgression you have ever committed. Even if you believe that you have done nothing, or that you have disclosed everything already, you may have to keep looking until you find something. You once had a slightly negative thought about Ron Hubbard? That will do. Anything is grist for the mill. And every single one of your crimes will be carefully recorded and kept in your file. Of course, all the time you will be paying for the privilege of confessing. But you will pay willingly, and you will confess willingly. The alternative is unthinkable.

Throughout all this you will be sustained by the memory of your more successful counselling sessions and by the inspiring vision of the future. For this, you will do anything, because nothing else matters.

But none of this is new. One is reminded of the medieval Moslem sect of the Assassins whose members, having once been given a taste of paradise, were willing to undertake any action and follow any orders so that they might one day be elevated to a state of permanent bliss. The religious history of our own Western culture has its own parallels. It is a cleverly updated version of an old, old story. Dazzled by the prospect of salvation, a man can become blind to any amount of evil.

JOHN ABLETT
Hurst In Clays

Next week the Church of Scientology replies