

MAGAZINES / BOB SIPCHEN

In Battle Against Time, Scientologists Put Money on Ads

Last June, the Los Angeles Times published a damning series on the Church of Scientology. Scientologists responded by extracting a few good things the writers had to say about their organization and putting those quotes in foot-high letters on billboards all over town.

On May 6 of this year, Time magazine published a cover story on Scientology. It had even fewer good things to say, and now the church has responded with an even more aggressive counterattack.

Scientology's campaign of daily full-page, full-color ads about Time in USA Today could, according to a story in that newspaper, cost Scientology as much as \$3 million.

Then last week, as the first Scientology ad appeared—accusing Time of being soft on Hitler—California magazine hit the stands with a cover story discussing actor Tom Cruise's involvement with Scientology. A church spokesman said no retaliation is planned.

The Time cover story, by Richard

Behar, was titled, "Scientology, the Cult of Greed." It referred to Scientology and its complex of "front groups" as a "ruthless global scam" and "Mafia-like." Behar detailed numerous specific charges against the "cult," citing government officials and former members and their families among his sources. The research, he reported, took seven months and involved 150 interviews.

One of the two sidebars with the piece begins: "Strange things seem to happen to people who write about Scientology."

It describes how the reporter allegedly was harassed by the organization's attorneys, private detectives and followers as he researched the story.

"Scientology," Behar wrote, "devotes vast resources to squelching its critics."

On May 28, the church launched its series of ads, which are scheduled to run in each issue at least until June 14, when the newspaper will include a special advertising supplement on Time paid for by the church.

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Each of the ads to date asks the question: "What magazine got it wrong in 1991?" The answer, the ads say, is Time, and they go on to list alleged errors of judgment the magazine has committed throughout its history.

ADS

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The initial ad states that in 1936, Time "characterized Hitler as the 'Messiah' of the Germans." The next day's ad said that in 1940, the magazine "heaped praise on Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini."

On Friday of last week, the church published two ads. One stated that "for decades, Time has written favorably about psychiatric drugs." The other suggested that Time has endorsed the anti-depressant drug Prozac—the use of which is strongly opposed by a Scientology-affiliated group called the Citizens Commission on Human Rights.

Monday's ad quotes such diverse Time critics as philosopher Bertrand Russell and an unnamed writer in USC's student newspaper.

In addition to the ads and the coming advertising supplement, Scientology published an 80-page booklet that purported to correct the "falsehoods" contained in the Time article.

The chief complaint in the booklet is that Time's Behar was biased against Scientology, as evidenced, the booklet contends, by a scathing Forbes article on Scientology Behar wrote in 1986 and his reported sympathy for the Cult Awareness Network, a national group that monitors the activities of what it calls "destructive cults."

In a phone interview, the Rev. Heber Jentzsch, Church of Scientology president, called Behar's article "hatchet job journalism." The anti-Time advertisements were prompted, he said, by "the absolute arrogance of the executives at Time Inc." who refused to be swayed by Scientology's argument that Behar was an inappropriate reporter for the story and who then refused to correct what Jentzsch calls a major discrepancy in the story concerning church finances.

Using Behar on the story, he said, was "like sending out Saddam Hussein to do an interview on Jews." Behar could not be reached for comment.

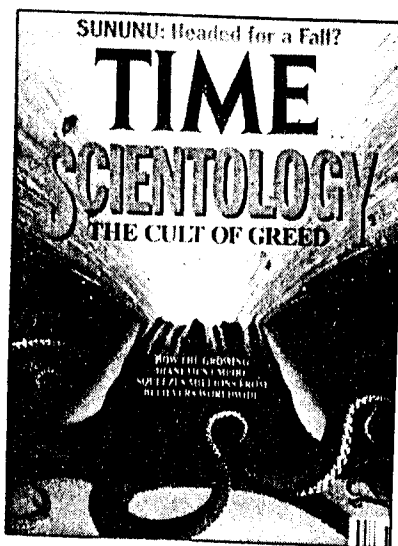
But the magazine has yet to give an inch on its story. "The article was very thoroughly reported, very thoroughly checked before publication, and nothing we've heard since makes us have any less confidence in its accuracy and balance," said Richard Duncan, an executive editor at Time.

Like others at the magazine, Duncan was reluctant to comment extensively on the campaign. He said he would prefer that readers study Time's articles and the Scientology advertisements and make their own decisions as to which is more credible.

"The story explains that the Scientologists have a long history of attacking their perceived enemies, and we're obviously now in that category," Duncan said.

Jentzsch said Time is part of a "vested-interest assault on our religion." The church's latest ads are about drug manufacturer Eli Lilly & Co., and the rebuttal hints that the church will attempt to establish some sort of conspiracy between Time and Lilly, the makers of Prozac.

"There is definitely a link between Lilly and Time magazine, and that will unfold as the ads come out," Jentzsch claims.



Time's story prompted retaliatory ad strikes from Scientologists.

"We're choosing USA Today because there's some very good integrity left in that paper," Jentzsch said. As to why he chose to expose what he calls "the story of the decade" in advertisements rather than turning the alleged evidence over to USA Today reporters, Jentzsch said any good reporter could have unearthed the story: "We did, we've done the job, and we decided this would be a good

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JAN GOLAB
Reporter, California magazine

medium to get out the story. . . ." He added that the advertising supplement on June 14 will only be a "very good way point in this campaign." More advertisements will follow, he said.

This sort of ad campaign is not new. In 1989, U.S. News and World Report published articles critical of the rising political influence in America of the Unification Church. The church responded with full-page ads.

Both the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's church and Mortimer Zuckerman's magazine survived the skirmish, and neither combatant in the Scientology-Time battle is likely to suffer fatal injury either.

But it seems that Scientology's transparent smear campaign against Time is more likely to backfire than Time's reportage on Scientology—which might be interpreted as biased or simply hard hitting, depending on one's perspective. As Jan Golab, who wrote the California magazine cover story, found, perspectives on reportage can vary greatly.

"One of the things you hear from a lot of Scientologists is that they don't want to be involved in something that has any negativity," he said in a phone interview. "It's really a very immature, untenable position. It makes them their own worst enemies, basically."

With a cover headline that

What magazine gets it wrong in 1991?



Answer:

The same one that was wrong in 1936 — TIME magazine.

Look for the special advertising supplement on TIME magazine appearing June 14 in USA Today.

reads, "Scientologist Tom Cruise and the Cult That's Taking Over Hollywood." Golab's story refers to both the Time and Los Angeles Times stories. But by focusing on the Church of Scientology's celebrity roster—and actor Tom Cruise in particular—the article makes the church appear more sappy than insidious.

"I thought California Magazine was able to look at both sides of the issue and was vastly better than Time," said Jentzsch. Golab "talked to people who had positive opinions [about Scientology] and even the reporter himself had vastly different opinions [than Behar], who was completely unmitigated in his bias."

The consensus, Golab said in a phone interview, "seems to be that some of Scientology's courses and systems work well. It's the organization that's the problem."

He said he suspected that Scientology would find his article less offensive than Time's.

"I think this story was probably bittersweet for them," he said. "While it regurgitates some of the negative things that have been said about Scientology, it also exposes Tom Cruise in a big way as a Scientologist, which I think they have to be very happy about."

Golab says he contacted 15 celebrities about their involvement with Scientology. None would talk to him. He sees this as part of a pattern he encountered while attempting to report on the church.

"They constantly complain that the press always gets it wrong about Scientology," he said, "yet they refuse to cooperate with the media. . . ."

"They war with the media, which is sort of like making war with Russia in the wintertime. No one in the course of human endeavor has ever done it without . . . bringing problems upon themselves."

Scientology's Jentzsch says he has no plans to launch a public campaign against California.

That may disappoint Neal Travis, the magazine's editor, who said he was hoping Scientology would make a high-profile response.

"I'd like to draw attention to the story," he said. "It should be of great interest to the public to learn what an influence the cult has on show business."

Besides, he said, "a bit of controversy never hurt magazine sales."