

Scientology? No way, send me \$200,000

Look, all you have to do is pull out your checkbook and write a check for \$200,000.

Oh, and make it out to me. No strings attached. That should give you the inner peace you have been searching for.

In return for your donation, you'll receive absolutely nothing, and I'll never ask you for a donation again.

True, if you do this, I will lose my job. However, if only five of you send the money, I'll be able to retire.

And you can get on with your lives without expecting false promises to come true.

It's a real bargain and quite ethical when compared with the tactics of some pray, pay and obey outfits that operate under the guise of faith-filled evangelistic movements, or self-improvement churches.

Mind you, I'm not suggesting that all evangelistic efforts are bogus. On the contrary, most evangelistic efforts, especially

those supported by mainline denominations, are honest and ethical endeavors.

They are easy to recognize; they rarely ask for donations from those they are evangelizing. Instead, members of the denominations foot the bill through monies allocated on the church's administrative level.

Evangelistic movements are usually obvious, but self-improvement churches, such as the Church of Scientology, are not always as easy to recognize.

You know Scientology, or at least you know founder L. Ron Hubbard's famous book *Dianetics*.

Do you know Sterling Management, Narconon, the Citizens Commission on Human Rights, Applied Scholastics or the Way to Happiness Foundation?

They are all Scientology, too.



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In an expose about the church, the May 6 issue of *Time* magazine reports it costs from \$200,000 to \$400,000 for the average person to go through all the stages of Scientology.

Aggressive response

Ever since that story hit newsstands, the church has been firing off press releases to religion writers around the country. The releases are not designed to discredit the magazine article as much as they are to try to promote Scientology as a community-concerned church with a philosophy that changes lives for the better.

The church has embarked on an aggressive national advertising campaign in newspapers and on television. The campaign is so aggressive that it looks like an act of desperation.

The Internal Revenue Service has been trying to take out Scientology, so far, to no avail. Scientology claims the IRS has a bias against it and is out to get the church even though its taxes are aboveboard. I'm sure the IRS does have a bias against Scientology just as it had a bias against Al Capone.

Whenever the government cannot acquire concrete criminal evidence against a suspected fraudulent organization or organized-crime boss, it does the next best thing: It follows the money trail through IRS investigations.

But the difference between Scientology and crime figures is Scientology is a church, and this entitles it to all the First Amendment protections other churches enjoy.

In search of power

An October 1990 news release from the church said Sen. John McCain and Reps. Jon Kyl, John Rhodes, Bob Stump and then-Rep. Morris Udall had written to the IRS asking it to explain why it was targeting Scientologists. I find it hard to believe that these guys didn't have a clue. Then again, God hasn't blessed us with the brightest politicians.

Scientology owns several businesses and organizations that draw people into the fold unwittingly and, according to *Time*, bilk them of their money.

Another cult church involved in this type of operation, whereby it owns multiple business operations and organizations that are not readily identified as adhering to a particular religious philosophy, is the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.

I'm sure everyone remembers Moon's much-publicized prison term in the 1980s, when he was convicted of tax evasion.

Neither Scientology's leaders nor the Moonies seem to be as interested in religion as they are in obtaining power to take over the world. You can laugh, but I'm serious.

The point is, if you want to throw your money away on these groups, you might as well cut a check to a perfect stranger.

At least that way, one person's life will improve.