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MEDIA WATCH

# The Church and The Magazines

By JANE GALBRAITH

No one would ever accuse the Church of Scientology of not being vigilant about its press coverage, especially when it comes to its famous Hollywood members.

One of the latest cases in point was the 2,000-word response in *Premiere* magazine after a recent story about Scientology's ties to the entertainment industry. This was followed by the publication of a 16-page booklet dubbed "Premiere Propaganda."

"Premiere's reporter was not interested in writing a fair story on the church. Instead he went out of his way to seek individuals who he could use as a vehicle for his animus against Scientology," said Leisa Goodman, a spokeswoman for the church. "Confronted with their appalling use of journalistic ethics, *Premiere* magazine was forced to realize that the church was due a far fuller response than a mere letter to the editor."

# Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES TIMES / CALENDAR SUNDAY, OCTOBER 17, 1993

## M OVIES

Anyone who's familiar with Scientology, founded by sci-fi author L. Ron Hubbard, knows the church is very protective of its image. Meetings are often held with reporters and editors in advance of an article's publication to stem any negative publicity that might result from a story. (Scientology's latest focus: Los Angeles magazine, whose editors have met with church representatives regarding its current cover story on Scientology follower Tom Cruise.)

Such was the case with *Premiere*, which in its September issue ran an 8,700-word piece by writer John Richardson that examined the growing influence of Scientology in the entertainment industry. The piece zeroed in on the activities at the church's Celebrity Centre, outlining some of the members who've come and gone, others who've stayed—and why.

The oft-cited star member names are there—Cruise, Anne Archer, Kirstie Alley, John Travolta—as well as some less well-known figures tied to the industry who are critical of the religion

and who voice those criticisms to Richardson. They include TV actors Diana Canova and Mike Farrell.

The article also goes into Scientology's history of threatening to sue people and businesses it views as adversaries. There are positive statements from believers too, though they figure less frequently.

*Premiere* editor Susan Lyne said the story was held for about six months for fact-checking, while the magazine met with Scientology officials to go over details that the church believed reflected what it called Richardson's incomplete reporting. Prior to publication, it was reviewed "easily five times" by the magazine's attorney, Lyne recalled.

Sources said even before the first copies landed at *Premiere*'s New York offices, the church already had obtained the issue

and delivered an eight-page letter voicing its objections to the piece.

Under threat of a libel suit, *Premiere* decided it would be prudent to allow Scientology to respond to Richardson's article, resulting in a 2,000-word essay about Scientology by David Miscavige, chairman of the board of the Religious Technology Center. Miscavige wanted *Premiere* to run a three-page article which he provided already laid out in *Premiere*'s typeface—complete with quotes, pictures and headlines—which the editors cut down to two pages and put in its letters section.

Though sources said the magazine agreed to run it to avoid a lawsuit, Lyne said *Premiere* gave Scientology the editorial space in the interest of fairness. "If you're taking off on somebody or some organization and you do a highly

critical piece . . . I think it's right to give someone a chance to respond to it."

Then came a publication titled "Premiere's Propaganda" (subtitle: "Correction of False Reports in an Article Published in *Premiere* Magazine, September 1993"). That, in effect, is the Scientology rebuttal the magazine would not print. In it are quotes from two mainstream publications criticizing *Premiere*'s (and Richardson's) tone, a two-page refutation of certain facts and excerpts of taped interviews with Richardson and several Scientology officials done when Richardson was doing his reporting.

In part, the publication said, "The accusations and antagonistic tone" in Richardson's piece "create a portrait so foreign" to believers "that is unrecognizable to them as Scientologists."

Richardson said the excerpts are grossly distorted by being "taken out of context."

Scientology spokeswoman Goodman said the booklet was not the first time the organization has printed responses to press reports about itself. Others include answers to stories in *Time*, *Reader's Digest* and, in the case of the *Los Angeles Times*, a billboard campaign that made *The Times* appear to support the church, following the newspaper's lengthy, critical investigative series in 1990.

"[Scientology] does what I think they often do, which is to try and take bits and pieces of truth and elaborate on them," Lyne said, referring to the church's attempt to create the image they want. "They had every opportunity to show us material that would contradict

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# Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES TIMES / CALENDAR

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 17, 1993

## MOVIES

### Scientology

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what we were writing and they didn't."

Richardson responds, "I said in my story that Scientology has a 'mean streak that is deeply rooted in church doctrine.' As one of many examples, the story quotes Hubbard instructing his followers to 'fight on the basis of total attrition of the enemy.' Now I know what it's like when Scientology considers you an enemy."

Scientology, meanwhile, has since moved on.

Last week, representatives from the church met with L.A. magazine executive editor Rodger Claire to discuss their reaction to the periodical's October cover story, "Tom Cruise. No More Mr. Nice Guy" by Rod Lurie, which also was vetted by lawyers.

The thrust of Lurie's critical piece, in fact, has less to do with Cruise's beliefs than it does with the actor's overall professional behavior as a box-office heavyweight and media magnet. Lurie states that Cruise prefers to hire people who share his faith and, on the flip side, refuses to work with those who publicly denounce Scientology, mentioning producer Don Simpson by name. Lurie writes that ex-member Simpson threw Miscavige off the set of "Days of Thunder," starring Cruise, because he didn't want to be badgered into using a more expensive Scientology-patented sound recording device, Clearsound, on the movie.

L.A. magazine's response to Scientology, agreed to after several discussions, is to run a series of "testimonials" from committed if less well-known Scientologists, like opera singer Julia Migenes and movie composer Mark Isham as a sidebar under "Backchat"—its letters pages—in the November issue. Again, Scientology pre-produced a layout it asked the editors to use. The magazine refused.

"To have other Scientologists speak out would make an interesting addendum to Rod's story in itself and therefore, it was a mutually beneficial suggestion," Claire said.

As for Cruise, his exasperated publicist Pat Kingsley said: "Yes, there's freedom of the press, but there's also supposed to be freedom of religion." □