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ST. PETERSBURG TIMES 10/20/93 IRS decision on Scientology brings comment

Re: IRS: Scientology is tax-exempt religion, Oct. 13.

The Internal Revenue Service's reversal of the income tax status of the Church of Scientology was both stunning and perplexing. What is the story behind the story? Was some kind of compromise arrived at? A deal? Unanswered questions abound.

Taxing personal income, for many Americans, has created a strong moral distaste and sense of injustice, unlike what is felt for other forms of taxation. These Americans have seen, over the years, the stand-off between the IRS and Scientology as the pot calling the kettle black. Both contestants cast unlikable images.

Ancient Plato spoke well for our modern disenchantment with the IRS: "When there is an income tax the just man will pay more and the unjust man less on the same amount of income." So where is the greater injustice here, on the side of the IRS or Scientology?

The answer to this question is presently obscure. One avoids the "plague on both your houses" response in favor of asking for an impartial investigation of the attitudes and acts of both Scientology and the IRS — and this for the good of the public, not the IRS nor Scientology.

Lyman Warren, M.D., St. Petersburg

Re: your recent articles on Scientology, there are a few facts I would like to mention. We, a group of Scientologists, are not "poor souls" who are "milked," implying we are all a bunch of idiots. That would make for a lot of idiots. The odds are against that!

The facts are we do not drink alcohol thus causing the city of Clearwater drunken driving problems. We do not take drugs, nor do we sell them. We have very high ethical conduct in our marriages and do not fill all your local nudie bars and porno shops. We are not animals. You will not find any Scientologists convicted of rape, armed robbery, child molesting or murder (that's more than can be said of anyone today). This means there are no Scientologists filling your jails. We do not administer Ritalin, Prozac or other mind-altering substances to our children. Nor do we sell these substances, in the name of "mental health."

We contribute a tremendous amount of money to the local economy.

Every great movement on earth has made certain individuals with guilty consciences nervous. It is they who are the "poor souls." What are they afraid of, one wonders?

Christine Collbran, Palm Harbor

Re: Oct. 15 editorial, *Scientology's 'charity'*, stating that all taxpayers will now, in effect, subsidize the Scientology religion due to its tax-exempt status.

In the midst of the controversy promoted by the editorial, I do hope that some of your readers recognized the principle implied: The government is entitled to a portion of everyone's income and if one individual or group of individuals doesn't satisfy the government's demand, others must take up the slack.

This entitlement to our income empowers the government to regulate, investigate and attack individuals and groups without due process, as shown by the horror stories revealed during the last congressional investigations of the IRS.

Yes, it is time for tax reform. It is time to abolish the income tax and replace it with a consumption-based tax, such as a national sales tax. A national sales tax would save us the expense of the IRS, do away with the complexity of tax forms, would be fair to all, and would get the government out of our personal lives.

The editorial actually laments the loss of the IRS' stranglehold on a group of U.S. citizens. I would rather urge Congress to remove its grip from all of our throats.

Houston E. Farrow, Clearwater

Scientology is tax-exempt. So the IRS says, at least. According to the IRS, Scientology is a religion. I would like to know what the IRS' criteria are to become a religion. If it's to make as much money as you can while preying on the needs of people, Scientology certainly qualifies. If Scientologists want to believe that they can trace their roots to some distant planet 75-million years ago, fine. But when they take advantage of others' beliefs and then are rewarded by the government by making it tax-free, something is seriously wrong.

As L. Ron Hubbard once said: "If you want to get rich, start a religion." Amen.

David Rodman, Dunedin

Rita Garvey just doesn't get it, does she?

One of the federal government's largest, most inquisitive, most feared and perhaps most powerful organizations, the IRS, investigates the Church of Scientology for 40 years, the largest audit in U.S. history. Its conclusions mirror those found previously by a number of courts in the United States, that Scientology is a religion and is tax exempt like all other churches. Yet, somehow, Mayor Garvey knows something that the IRS doesn't know because she is "disappointed" by this decision.

Hey mayor! Give it up! Wake up and smell the Constitution.

Colin Taufer, Clearwater

For the past few days, I've been reading the *Times'* stories and editorial about Scientology. You don't like Scientologists, do you?

I'm not a Scientologist; far from it, but I do try to be tolerant of others' points of view about how to live life, what to strive for, what to believe about unknowable other-worlds, etc. I think the Scientologists are being held up to ridicule and, perhaps, even persecution by such publicity as you are giving them. Remember the story of the Mormons, and before them, the Quakers, and on back to those new folks, the Christians? Seems to me the Scientologists are the latest "new kids on the block" in religion. And, I think they are a religion, and that the IRS just made a pragmatic decision in litigation.

Your newspaper's writers complain about the lost tax base for Clearwater, although they do mention the Scientologists are paying on a \$1-million property. What tax base do the other nice downtown religions provide to Clearwater? One cannot help notice the lovely properties of the next-door Presbyterians, Baptists and many others.

And, what of the method of operation of the Scientologists wherein they collect money for their materials and training? In an indirect way, don't other church givers and "tithers" do the same thing; all organizations have to pay the light bill, publishing costs, employees' salaries, etc. It seems to me Ron Hubbard's organization figured out a better way of meeting expenses, up front; and, all their efforts in spreading their gospel, worldwide, are the same as other religions.

The fact that Hubbard's son testified against him could be an act of personal grievance of an offspring; the son was, after all, offering his own opinions. But, those opinions make "grist" for news.

A sociological analysis of Scientology would be interesting; what is it Scientologists are really doing with and for people, and what will be the societal results of their efforts in years to come? Their stories of what they believe in and their methods of helping people help themselves sound a little fantastic to me, but so do those of other religions (that are not mine, of course)! I am aware that the Scientologists have a positive approach to life, and from reading some of their material, I feel they are trying to make some sense out of the disorderliness of life in our society today. Generally, I feel they are attempting, with a

Just one question: How many IRS people belong to the Scientology cult? Boy, are they brainwashed!

Ruth E. Mansfield, St. Petersburg

scientific approach, to create order out of chaos. Scientology is not for me, but if others feel it is helping them, I'm in favor of their effort.

I think the Quakers have had a good influence on society. I also think downtown Clearwater would have been boarded up long ago without the Scientologists.

Nadine Duke, Clearwater

Scientology is not a religion because it was written by a *fiction writer*. It definitely ought to be taxed heavily.

Ben Carpo, Clearwater

It is always open season in Pinellas County for the Scientologists. I make no pretense of defending them but rather wonder why they have been singled out as whipping boy when they have done nothing of which the more traditional religions are collectively innocent. Is it because of that realization and a shared desire for non-interference and non-taxation by the government that the other religious groups in the area are silent on Scientology? Surely no other religion rests on the theological foundation any more substantial or less fallacious than that of Scientology.

Is Scientology's financial success a sin? Why, all religions have profitable tax-exempt sidelines such as bingo, bazaars and real estate, to name but a few. However, the astronomical fees imputed to Scientology can come only from wealthy persons, whereas the others are not above accepting donations from the needy as well.

When we read that the Southern Baptists raised a "disappointing" \$136,539,729 last year (the figure seems to be for the national organization alone, not including the "take" of the innumerable local churches — and in the face of a major fund-diverting membership split not mentioned in the release), can we avoid the conclusion that religion news should appear in the Business section of the *Times*?

We have just learned that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has voted, though reluctantly and not until now, to apologize for certain dogma which provided Hitler's justification for the slaughter of 6-million innocent people. I am not aware that the Catholic Church has ever apologized for its Inquisition 500 years ago, wherein Jews, Moors and others had to convert or die. Thousands died.

Space precludes detailing the many other available examples. But if wholesale murder in a church membership drive can be condoned, of what could Scientology be faulted?

Seymour S. Bluestone M.D., Clearwater