

Scientology's Relationship with Eastern Religious Traditions

STEPHEN A. KENT

ABSTRACT Scientology's founder, L. Ron Hubbard, frequently made claims that Scientology was related to or shared significant similarities with Hinduism, Theravada Buddhism and Taoism. However, careful examination of Hubbard's claims indicates that he had only a superficial acquaintance with Eastern religions, and most of his attempts to associate Scientology with these faiths are unwarranted. Moreover, social and political pressures against his organisation's alleged healing practices probably provided the catalyst for Hubbard's attempt to portray his creation as a religion with Eastern overtones.

Introduction

Scholars of religion are always interested in questions pertaining to the transmission of ideas from one faith to another. Transmission helps to explain similarities among basic doctrines of different belief systems and often researchers can learn about cultural contact between distant peoples. Much research focuses on key figures in traditions, since these figures formulate the doctrines and beliefs that become the inspirational sources for followers. Researchers on ancient faiths and their founders are often hindered in their efforts to identify sources of influence, since much has been lost over the expanses of time, space and cultures. In contrast, researchers on modern or "new" religions are sometimes burdened by the amount of information to which contemporary religious founders have access and that might have influenced their doctrinal formulations. Audio and visual media, along with the increasing availability of travel, provide religious founders with ample opportunities to gather sources of inspiration from far and wide, so the task of identifying the precise origins of particular tenets can be exceedingly difficult.

The founder of Dianetics and Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), presents numerous problems for researchers who attempt to identify the sources upon which he drew to devise Dianetics (in 1950) and the Church of Scientology (from late 1953). Most writers would agree that he drew upon ideas from science fiction, the occult, physics and engineering, psychoanalysis, philosophy and an eclectic series of major and minor thinkers (see, for example, Whitehead, 1987: 54). In contrast, no serious researchers would ever suggest that Hubbard's thought was influenced by Christianity,¹ since he published his scornful views about that faith as early as 1954 (Hubbard, 1954a). Most researchers, however, would probably follow Hubbard's own lead, and suggest that he was inspired and influenced by various aspects of Eastern thought.

Of all possible influences upon him, Eastern religions (broadly defined) are among the few that Hubbard himself mentioned frequently. He was never clear about the nature or extent of the alleged influence, using such vague terms as “ancestor”, “first cousin” and “spiritual ties” to describe the alleged connections between them and (especially) Scientology. Nevertheless, Scientologists take seriously his claim that their faith shares perspectives with the wisdom of the East, if only because (they believe) Hubbard discovered them anew for himself.

This article also takes seriously Hubbard’s vague but frequent allusions to similarities between Scientology and Eastern religions. It carefully considers Hubbard’s own writings in conjunction with standard translations of key Eastern texts and concludes that no Eastern influence on either Dianetics or Scientology is likely to have occurred. Nor are apparent similarities between either Dianetics or Scientology and major Eastern traditions anything but superficial. Having established these conclusions, the study then examines why Hubbard made claims about Eastern religions that appear not to be accurate. It proposes that he did so because, at crucial moments in Scientology’s history, he attempted to shield his organisation’s self-asserted healing efforts behind religious claims. During the first quarter century of Dianetics and Scientology’s existence, Hubbard used religious claims to protect his organisation from governmental and medical scrutiny over practising medicine without a license and related fraudulent healing claims.

Hinduism

Hubbard exhibited several patterns when discussing Scientology in relation to various Eastern faiths. First, he made grand claims about Scientology embodying, if not extending, key concepts from Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism. Secondly, he never demonstrated that he had more than superficial knowledge of either the Eastern concepts that he mentioned or the translations of terms that he provided. Thirdly, and finally, he spent no time or effort expounding upon his grand, syncretistic statements.

For example, in July, 1954, Hubbard made the impressive statement that “[W]e find Scientology’s earliest known ancestor in the Veda” (Hubbard, 1969b: 10).² Typically, however, he gave almost no evidence to substantiate the claim. Indeed, his knowledge of the *Vedas* was, at best, cursory, and it appears that he was merely trying to legitimise Scientology concepts when he claimed that the term, *Vedas*, meant “Lookingness [sic] or Knowingness [i.e. ‘self-determined knowledge’]” [Hubbard, 1969b: 10; see Hubbard, 1975: 223 (citing a definition from May 20, 1954)].³ In fact, it means “knowledge, true or sacred knowledge or lore, knowledge of ritual...” (Monier-Williams, 1899: 1015). Likewise, his statement that the *Vedas* was comprised of “the Dhyantic and Buddhistic written tradition of ten thousand years” (Hubbard, 1969b: 12) grossly overestimates the dates of the *Vedas* [the earliest parts of which may go back to about 1500 B.C.E. (Basham, 1954: 232; cf. Hume, 1931: viii)] as well as inappropriately blending Buddhist texts with the Hindu texts.

Moreover, if by “dhyantic” Hubbard meant the Indian tradition of “meditation” (*dhyāna*) developed through yoga, then the classic text in this field, the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali, was not part of the *Vedas* [even though meditational concepts appear in some of the later hymns (see Bose, 1966: 55–83, on *īñāna*-

yoga, the path of knowledge)]. When the Church of Scientology World Wide (under Hubbard's control) claimed that the Vedic Hymns "are our earliest debt in Scientology" (Church of Scientology World Wide, 1970: 8), it only reproduced one Vedic hymn [which the source failed to identify as the comparatively late poem, *Rig Veda* X.129 (see Bose, 1966: 302–305)]. The remaining two passages from Indian scriptures that it excerpted were not Vedic hymns, but two sections from the *Katha Upanishad* (see Hume, 1931: 341–361) of a later period (Church of Scientology World Wide, 1970: 8–10). Nor did the Church describe the reputed link between Indian philosophy and Scientology in any precise or direct manner. One wonders, for example, why Hubbard did not draw parallels between "past lives" in Scientology (Hubbard, 1969a) and transmigration in post-Vedic schools of Hinduism (Zimmer, 1951: 252).

Furthermore, Hubbard was philosophically and linguistically incorrect to say that "we have the word Dharma almost interchangeable with the word Dhyana. But whatever you use there, you're using a word which means Knowingness [sic]" (Hubbard, 1969b: 17; see Hubbard, 1975: 112). *Dharma* has many meanings in Sanskrit, ranging in Hinduism from "law" to "duty; right, justice (often as a synonym of punishment)" to "the law of doctrine of Buddhism ... [or] the ethical precepts of Buddhism" (Monier-Williams, 1899: 510). It can never mean the same as *dhyāna*—"meditation, thought, reflection, (esp.) profound and abstract religious meditation" (Monier-Williams, 1899: 521). *Dhyāna* cannot be translated as "Knowingness and Lookingness [sic]" (Hubbard, 1969b: 17) in a way that is equivalent to its Indian meaning, since Scientology does not demand the rigorous physical and mental exercises that yogis and other seekers undergo. These Sanskrit terms reflect basic concepts in both Hinduism and Buddhism, and Hubbard's cavalier translation of them fails to sustain his claim that Scientology marches in the footsteps of these traditions.

Worth pointing out, however, is that not all researchers have shared my skepticism concerning comparisons between Scientology and meditational Hinduism. Roy Wallis suggested that

[i]n Yoga a number of parallels with Scientology are evident. Yoga offers a system of metaphysical knowledge leading to 'rebirth to a non-conditioned mode of being.' The aim of the earliest philosophy of Yoga, *sāmkhya*, was to dissociate the spirit from matter. In Yoga the world is real not illusory, but its endurance is the result of the ignorance of spirit.... The source of the soul's suffering is held to be man's solidarity with the cosmos, his participation in nature (the enturbulation of theta and MEST) [i.e., what Scientology calls the physical universe of matter, energy, space, and time (Hubbard, 1975: 248)] (Wallis, 1976: 112, quoting from Eliade, 1969: 4).

After summarising Mircea Eliade's description of yoga, Wallis concluded that "impressive similarities are to be found with the theory and practice of Scientology and Dianetics" (Wallis, 1976: 113). He also indicated that both the Buddha and Hubbard advised their respective followers against involving themselves with any occult powers that might arise while progressing along their paths (Wallis, 1976: 112–133 & n. 1). Even Jon Atack, who is among Scientology's most thoughtful critics, proposed that the TRs (Training Routines) in Scientology's Communication Course "are similar to meditation" (Atack, 1990: 14).

The classical Sāmkhya philosophy that Wallis mentioned receives its clearest exposition in the *Sāmkhyakārikā* (henceforth S.K.) by Ishvarakrishna [which dates before 557 to 569 (Larson, 1969: 4–5)], although earlier versions of Sāmkhya were behind the ascetical yoga practices of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* (see for example, Kent, 1982: 264), which "were written at some time in the fourth or fifth century of our era" (Woods, 1914: xix; see Larson, 1969: 162). Basic to the classical Sāmkhya system is the assertion that two eternal principles exist called *prakṛti* (matter) and *puruṣa* (spirit), and that creation occurs when the inherent, creative properties of matter activate because of the proximity of a spirit [much like a dancer who performs when she has an audience (S.K. LIX, in Larson, 1969: 278)].

While Wallis was correct in indicating that Sāmkhya-yoga holds a view about salvation that involves the disentanglement of the spirit from matter, he could have mentioned additional concepts that bore similarities to aspects of Scientology's religious thought. For example, both systems emphasise that life involves suffering from which their ideologies reputedly offer salvation (S.K. I, in Larson, 1969: 257). In the Indian philosophical system, *puruṣa* is plural (S.K. XVIII, in Larson, 1969: 264; see Kent, 1980: 243), as are *thetans*. Likewise, Scientology and sāmkhya-yoga postulate forms of rebirth (S.K. XXXIX, and XL in Larson, 1969: 272, see 218) prior to which the transmigrating entities forget about their previous lives.⁴

Irreconcilable differences, however, exist between the two systems. Sāmkhya rests upon the premise that spirit and matter are separate entities, while Hubbard stated that his spiritual entities (*thetans*) created their own ideal universes (that he called "home universes") which, in turn, were taken over by a MEST universe. "The spirit, then, is not a *thing*. It is the *creator* of things") as Hubbard tersely stated in 1956 (Hubbard, 1956: 54). The *Sāmkhya Kārikā* is definite in its claim that "*puruṣa* is neither created nor creative" (S.K. III, in Larson, 1969: 258). Moreover, yoga's insistence that it "is the restriction of the fluctuations of mind-stuff" (Y.S. i.2, in Woods, 1914: xxxx) has no equivalent in Scientology, whose analytic mind does not receive any attention regarding the restrictions of its perceptual activities. Hubbard's knowledge, therefore, of Hinduism appears to have been superficial.

Taoism

A similar superficiality appears in Hubbard's insistence that Taoism's central term, *tao*, "means Knowingness. That is again a literal translation" (Hubbard, 1969b: 16), when in fact a literal translation of it is "path, road, way, extended to mean principle, system, truth, Reality, etc." (Chan, 1963: 136 n. 1). Finally, it is difficult to see how Hubbard saw "self-determinism" as equivalent to the Taoist principal *wu-wei*, which translates as "non-action" in the sense of "taking no action that is contrary to Nature"—in other words, letting Nature take its own course" (Chan, 1963: 136). No obvious similarities exist between the basic Taoist terms that Hubbard identified and his discussion in Scientology of what he called the MEST universe. Consequently, one of Hubbard's organisations, the Church of Scientology of California, was inaccurate when it proffered that "[a] Scientologist is a first cousin to the Buddhist [and] a distant relative of the Taoist..." (Church of Scientology of California, 1978: 7).

Hinayana Buddhism

As this statement suggests, of considerable importance to Hubbard's efforts to establish religious aspects of Scientology were his attempts to connect his ideology with Buddhism. He attempted to establish these connections on conceptual and personal grounds. Conceptually, he tried to analogise a *bodhi* [*sattva*] and a Dianetic Release. With a somewhat simplistic knowledge of Buddhism, Hubbard suggested that:

We first find this Buddha called actually *Bohdi* [*sic: bodhi*], and a Bohdi is one *who has attained intellectual and ethical perfection by human means*. This probably would be a Dianetic Release (*Dianetic Release: One who in Dianetic auditing has attained good case gains, stability and can enjoy life more. Such a person is 'Keyed out' or in other words released from the stimulus-response mechanisms of the reactive mind) or something of this level. Another level has been mentioned to me—Arhat, with which I am not particularly familiar, said to be more comparable to our idea of Theta Clear* [Hubbard, 1969b: 18 (emphasis in original)].

Indeed, Scientologists take these claims seriously. As early as 1958, the "editor" of Scientology's *Ability* magazine, whose writing style suggests that it was Hubbard himself, reflected that:

Just now it is enough to say that the State of Clear was envisioned 2,500 years ago by Gautama Sidhartha and was attained by a very few and then was seen no more. The state then was known as 'Bhodi' since it was attained under a bhodi [*sic*] tree. Since then the tradition has grown dim. Man has sought to clear Man, first of demons, then of subconscious traumas.

Ron, with a whole new look at this, has brought about a state in Clear higher than that regarded by Gautama Sidhartha since it is achieved in not only one lifetime but *in a few weeks* and is available to *all* men, not just a few. ...Operating Thetan has not before been known as a state of being on Earth. Neither Lord Buddha nor Jesus Christ were O.T.'s according to the evidence. They were just a shade above Clear (Hubbard[?], 1958: 6.)

Apparently, "the editor" saw Scientology as a system that actually surpassed, rather than merely extended, the achievements of the Buddhist tradition.

At least one researcher has accepted Scientology's self-proclaimed analogies to Buddhism. Frank Flinn argued that "[t]he central Scientological term 'clear' is roughly equivalent to the Buddhist concept of *bodhi* which describes 'the one awake' or 'enlightened one' who has gained releasement [*sic*] (*moksa*) from the entangling threads of existence and illusion" (Flinn, 1983: 93). Indeed, he went so far as to suggest that "the many levels and grades of the auditing process can be seen as refinement and resignification of the Buddhist Eightfold Path in a space-age context" (Flinn, 1983: 93).

These similarities are superficial, however, and even Flinn realised that Scientology lacks "any emphasis on meditation and contemplation" (Flinn, 1983: 94) as is central to Buddhist practice and spiritual achievement. Scientology's system claims to work by eliminating the effects of traumatic events (or

engrams), while traditional Buddhism asserts that practitioners can achieve its spiritual goal by combining moral discipline with methods of concentration.

Moral discipline involves a practitioner impressing knowledge or insight upon (as Edward Conze says) one's "reluctant body" (Conze, 1951: 96), which involves freeing him or her "from the illusions of individuality" (Conze, 1951: 97). In essence, Buddhist monks (whom the tradition considers to be farthest along the path to Enlightenment) live ascetic lives involving deprivations of sleep, comfort, diet and possessions. Despite the fact that some punishments that Hubbard imposed upon his followers were exceedingly demanding (Atack, 1990: 175–176, 180–181) and some of the living conditions starkly harsh (Atack, 1990: 275–277), Scientology has no formalised or systematised ascetic tradition.

Most dramatically, Scientology's design to punish nonconformity appears to contrast with Buddhist monastic punishments that Hubbard himself tried to offer as "the direct forerunner of our own Ethics system" (Hubbard, 1966: 459). Offences that led to punishments were ones that Buddhists deemed to be "not only repugnant to the moral well-being of the community of monks but also retard the spiritual progress of the monk who succumbs to moral turpitude" (Perera, 1965: 460). The early Buddhist punishments were limited to immediate dismissal, suspension and probation, censure, removal to another location, recanting and begging pardon from the aggrieved party, total segregation and placement under surveillance.

Many of these practices resemble Scientology punishments, which can probably be explained in terms of common responses of ideological groups to doctrinal deviance. Nowhere, however, in these Buddhist codes is there anything like the Scientology requirement for a person trying to get out of the "condition of liability" in the group's ethics by having to "[d]eliver an effective blow to the enemies of the group one has been pretending to be part of despite personal danger" (Hubbard, 1967a: 237). Nor do these codes have anything like Scientology's infamous "Fair Game Law" that was in effect formally for a year beginning in mid-October, 1967, which said that an enemy "[m]ay be deprived of property or injured by any means by any Scientologist without discipline of the Scientologist. May be tricked, sued or lied to or destroyed" (Hubbard, 1967b).⁵

Buddhist morality provided the groundwork for Buddhist concentration exercises—exercises that occasionally have superficial equivalents in Scientology. Concentration specifically involved three types of practices—*dhyānas* [i.e. progression through various mental states (see Ling, 1981: 115)], *apramāna* [i.e. "methods of cultivating the emotions", (Conze, 1951: 102)], and the cultivation of occult powers (Conze, 1951: 100–105). While contemplative practices of these kinds play no part in Scientology, one may be tempted to see cursory similarities between the first of at least four *dhyānas* and the first three TRs [Training Routines] in Scientology's Communications Course. The initial *dhyāna* involved temporarily suppressing "one's unwholesome tendencies—i.e. sense-desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, excitedness and perplexity" [Conze, 1951: 100; see Conze (trans.), 1959: 184]. Two TRs involve sitting or sitting and staring for hours upon end without moving, while the TR about 'bullbaiting' involved remaining composed amidst insults, jokes, or other provocations (see Atack, 1990: 14). Arguably these exercises teach rudimentary control over aspects of one's mind and body, but they are not designed, nor are they used, as "means for

transcending the impact of sensory stimuli and our normal reactions to it" (Conze, 1951: 100). Instead, the TRs (and probably 'bullbaiting' intend to "train students to confront preclears [without] social tricks of conversation and to overcome obsessive compulsions to be 'interesting'" (Church of Scientology, 1961, also quoted in Lamont, 1986: 40). In other words, they aspire to eliminate personality factors that would ordinarily express individuality in social exchanges. They become the first step in molding conformity among converts.

A few words should be said about the concentrations in the Hinayana tradition involving occult powers (*iddhis*), such as "clairvoyance, clairaudience, recollection of former births and knowledge of the thoughts of others" (Conze, 1951: 104). Additional occult powers allegedly involved the ability to "pass at will through wall or fence or hill as if through air, pass in and out of the solid earth, walk on the water's surface or glide through the air" (quoted in Conze, 1951: 104). These alleged powers are similar to the claims that Hubbard made about the powers of a "clear" who was "a person who can have or not have at will anything in the universe" (Hubbard, 1975: 75, referring to a 1954 lecture). The Buddha, however, feared that these psychic powers would cause disciples to lose sight of their highest goal (*nirvana*), and reportedly he announced that "because I perceive danger in the practice of mystic wonders [i.e. 'psychic powers'] that I loathe, abhor, and am ashamed thereof" (*Dīghanikāya* i, 213, quoted in Ling, 1981: 111).

Hubbard's boldest attempt to legitimise Scientology by associating himself with Buddhism appears in his 1974 publication, *The Hymn of Asia* (1974a), which he wrote a number of years earlier in 1956.⁶ He strongly implies that he is Maitreya or Metteya, the Future Buddha, whom the Buddha himself purportedly discoursed upon. The "editors" to the volume, who may have been Hubbard himself, made five claims about the "Metteya Legend" which were that:

1. He shall appear in the West.
2. He shall appear at a time when religion shall be waning, when the world is imperiled [*sic*] and convulsed in turmoil.
3. He will have golden hair or red hair.
4. He will complete the work of Gautama Buddha and bring in a new golden age of man by making possible the attainment of spiritual freedom by all beings.
5. Although the date of his advent is variously forecast, the nearest date places it 2,500 years after Gautama Buddha—or roughly 1950.... (Editors in Hubbard, 1974a: [n.p.]).

Hubbard's text explored several of these themes.

The first line of Hubbard's extended poetic hymn asks, "Am I Metteyya? [*sic*]" Quickly he followed with the statement that "I come to bring you all that Lord Buddha would have you know of life, Earth, and Man".⁷ He made a fundamental error in Buddhist soteriology when he proclaimed that "What I say has to do With Self". In line with the editors' initial comments, he asked the rhetorical question, "Do I have Golden Hair?", which called attention to the fact that his hair was red. Drawing on standard Scientology themes along with the editors' comments, he announced that "We can make lawful the criminal[.] We can make sane the insane[.] We can ourselves be free". He pronounced that we "are the

New Men[,] the new spiritual Leaders of Earth" and that they should build "places for the use Of men, Demanding only That they bow To Buddha". Finally, he claimed that he had to appear in the "western World...Because of the Disorders in the East since *Vaishakha* 2453 (Buddhist date for February 1910)". If any doubt remained that Hubbard was proclaiming himself Maitreya, then he removed it when he stated that "Even your own prophesies Centuries Old Said I would appear In the Western World. I appeared" [Hubbard, 1974a: (n. pp., with original capitalisation)].⁸

Fortunately, the Buddha's supposed discourse on Maitreya is available in English translation, as it was during the time that Hubbard was suggesting his identity with the Buddhist religious legend. Almost none of the attributions that he (or his "editors") make to the figure are accurate. The translated passages do not mention anything about Maitreya appearing in the west, nor do they indicate that the Buddha-of-the-Future will appear in a time of world peril. To the contrary, the texts state that Maitreya (like the Buddha himself) will be born to royalty who preside over a city that is "mighty and prosperous, full of people, crowded and well fed" (*Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Suttanta* 75.25–26; trans. in Rhys-Davids, 1921: 73). Nothing is said about him having golden or red hair, nor is a date given for his return (Rhys-Davids, 1921: 73–74).

Likewise, the *Maitreyavyakarana* fails to mention the attributes of Maitreya that either Hubbard or the editors had indicated, and one scriptural passage specifically contradicts their claims. Both Hubbard and the editors emphasised the prophecy about Maitreya having golden or red hair, whereas the scripture itself makes no direct mention of hair color at all. It does say that Maitreya's "skin will have a golden hue" (Conze, 1959: 239), and that he will have "the thirty-two Marks of a superman" (Conze, 1959: 239). These marks supposedly "characterise a great man; or more properly, a 'superman'" (Ling, 1981: 136). The original Buddhist text states that one mark (that I already have mentioned) was skin or complexion "like bronze, the color of gold" (*Lakkhana Suttanta* 143, trans. in Rhys-Davids, 1921: 138). Clearly, this passage did not refer to hair, since another characteristic was "down [i.e. very soft hair] on [a superman's] body [that] turns upward, every hair of it *blue black in colour like eye-paint*, in little curling rings, curling to the right" [*Lakkhana Suttanta* 144, trans. in Rhys-Davids, 1921: 138 (my emphasis)]. Maitreya's hair thus would be curly black, not red.

Based upon an interview that I conducted with a former Scientologist who worked with Hubbard during the time that he wrote *The Hymn of Asia*, Hubbard's motive was purely opportunistic. My informant indicated that two older women who read widely in spiritual literature wrote to Hubbard and asked him whether he saw similarities between himself and Maitreya Buddha. Inspired by the question, he penned the *Hymn* in a spiral-ringed dictation notebook. Initially, the poem's first line said, "I am Maitreya", but Hubbard changed it to a question "Am I Maitreya?", before sending it to the publisher (Kent Interview with Durston, 1992: 5–9). Beyond the admirers' letter, no indication existed that he had done any research into Buddhism or the Maitreya accounts before he wrote the self-serving poem.

Finally, comments must be made on a significant theological difference between Scientology and Buddhism—a difference that Hubbard apparently did not realise when he stated in *Hymn of Asia* that "What I say has to do With Self" (Hubbard, 1974a). Unmistakably, this is an allusion to the *thetan*, which Scientol-

ogy sees as an immortal soul or spirit [see Hubbard, 1975: 432 (referring to a 1956 source); Church of Scientology of California, 1978: 4, 6]. Fundamental, however, to Buddhist philosophy is the doctrine of no-soul (*anatta* [Pali]; *anātma* [Sanskrit])—a doctrine that distinguishes Buddhism “from all other religions] and philosoph[ical] schools of anc[ient] India. Without proper appreciation of [the] meaning of *anatta*, it is imposs[ible] to understand Buddh[ist] thought” (Ling, 1981: 17; see Atack, 1990: 374). The Buddha himself reportedly chided one of his followers for wanting to engage in the debate about the existence of a soul, and encouraged him instead to remain mindful of emotional fluctuations along with the processes of feeling, thinking and conceptualising. Doctrines of the soul did not further one’s efforts of reaching *nirvana*, so the Buddha testily asked the disciple, “I have revealed to you what should be revealed; shall I then reveal to you what should not be revealed?” [*Pāsādika Suttanta* 39 (140–141) in Rhys Davids, 1921: 130]. In essence, “[e]verything resembling a doctrine of a soul has to be abandoned before there will be assurance that liberation from matter will be permanent” (Kent, 1982: 271).⁹

Perhaps Hubbard’s truest attitude about Buddhism appeared in a *Communications Bulletin* that he wrote in April 6, 1963. Intended for circulation to higher ranking members of Scientology franchises and central organisations, it was not a document intended for public consumption. In it he spoke disparagingly of Buddhism’s salvation by equating Nirvana with what Hubbard called “goals-problem-mass” (GPM)—the heaviness caused by conflicting goals. He contrasted the failure of Nirvana with the glorious nature of Scientology’s state of clear:

The Buddhists spoke of Nirvana. Without knowing it, they spoke of vanishing forever into the GPM (Nirvana). They had become completely overwhelmed, lacking any [e-]meters and a map.

We are Scientologists. We won’t fall into the abyss. And we won’t join Nirvana. We have meters and a map. We know the rules and the way.

This is the greatest adventure of all time. Clearing. The way is strewn with the skeletons and skulls of those who have tried over the past trillenia [sic]. The bottom of the Abyss is glutted with failures. Nirvana is choked with the overwhelmed.... Only the faint hearted will add any bones to the Abyss or apathy to Nirvana.

We are Scientologists. We have won (Hubbard, 1963: 3).

Hubbard appears to have meant that Buddhists’ quest for nirvana simply overwhelmed them and they fell into emptiness (“the Abyss”) or apathy. Scientology clearing, however, was humanity’s greatest goal, and people could achieve it by following the organisation’s techniques (the “map”) while working on the *e-meter*. The Buddhist quest for nirvana merely was a path to failure.

We must conclude, therefore, that Hubbard had only a rudimentary, and largely inaccurate, understanding of major Eastern religious traditions—traditions about which he claimed similarities to the faith that he had constructed. His self-proclaimed association, for example, with Buddhism’s Maitreya seems to have been an effort on his part to enhance his image with his followers, as well as add respectability to his organisation’s beliefs by associating them with a major religious tradition. Aside from superficial similarities between Scientology and Hinayana Buddhism that might have motivated him to draw spurious

associations between the two belief systems, Hubbard may have written about Eastern faiths because his Western members were unlikely to have sufficient background in them to make informed assessments about his claims.

Allegations Concerning Practicing Medicine Without a License

Hubbard made most of his claims about Eastern similarities to Scientology during periods when he was attempting to reduce the likelihood of governmental interventions against it for allegedly practicing medicine without a license. This pattern fits for the first two decades of Dianetics and Scientology operating, during which Hubbard claimed similarities between Scientology and Eastern religions—1954, 1960 and 1962. The interesting exception to this pattern (1968) occurred in relation to a battle with the American Internal Revenue Service (IRS) over the tax status of the Founding Church of Scientology in Washington, D.C.

While researchers must not minimise financial motives for Hubbard's decision to present Scientology as a religion in the early 1950s (see Miller, 1987: 220), they must also not neglect the fact that occasionally Hubbard's followers across the United States were being arrested for practicing medicine without licenses. In the book that remains the cornerstone of both Dianetics and Scientology, Hubbard proclaimed in 1950 that, with the proper application of the techniques he outlined, "arthritis vanishes, myopia gets better, heart illness decreases, asthma disappears, stomachs function properly, and the whole catalogue of ills goes away and stays away" (Hubbard, 1950: 59). Because of claims such as these (to which Scientology still adheres), the New Jersey State Board of Medical Examiners accused the Hubbard Dianetic Research Foundation, Inc. of "operating a school for the treatment of disease without a license" in January, 1951 (*Elizabeth Daily Journal*, 1951a), which contributed to the organisation's departure from Elizabeth, New Jersey, in April—prior to its pending trial in May (*Elizabeth Daily Journal*, 1951b). In late March, 1953, two Dianetics and Scientology practitioners were arrested, along with the confiscation of an *e-meter*, as part of an investigation into "running an unlicensed school and practicing medicine without licenses" (*Detroit News*, 1953a,b; see Pickering, 1953). Likewise, in late 1953 or early 1954, a Glendale, California, Dianeticist or Scientologist apparently spent ten days in jail for "practising medicine without a license" (quoted in *Aberree*, 1954a: 4).

Reacting to an emerging pattern of arrests, Hubbard (in December, 1953) incorporated three religious organisations in New Jersey: the Church of American Science, The Church of Scientology, and The Church of Spiritual Engineering (*Aberree*, 1954a: 1). A publication by an independent Scientologist at the time reported that officials of the Hubbard Association of Scientologists "stated that there is little doubt but [sic] what this stroke will remove Scientology from the target area of overt and covert attacks by the medical profession, who see their pills, scalpels, and appendix-studded incomes threatened" (*Aberree*, 1954a: 4).

In June 1954, Hubbard announced the formation of a new organisation, the Hubbard Association of Scientologists, International (HASI), that replaced the existing Hubbard Association of Scientologists. Ordinary Scientologists did not expect the organisational change to affect them significantly,

except to give auditors and schools complete security from legal interference. The new organization, the HASI, is a non-profit religious fellowship, and as such, Ron said, is entitled to the constitutional guarantees of a Supreme Court ruling that no state shall take action to prevent operation of any organization concerned with the study of the human soul....

This religious fellowship, Ron said, should prevent a repetition of such fiascoes as that in Detroit of more than a year ago in which two Scientologists were arrested and tried only in the news headlines. (*Aberree*, 1954b: 1, 3.)

In the summer (July, 1954), Hubbard attempted to associate Scientology with Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism in what came to be known years later as *The Phoenix Lectures*. Later that year (September, 1955), at least one other follower was jailed (in Phoenix, Arizona) for practicing medicine without a license (Karie, 1955).

Looking back upon this period, Hubbard himself obliquely referred to the issue of prosecution when explaining to his followers "[w]hy Dianetics fell out of use". He alluded to the prosecution problems that Dianetics encountered by saying that, "[i]n some areas, mainly the US, it was illegal to heal or cure anything", then soon added that "[t]he ability of Scientology to bring about spiritual freedom therefore received the concentration of efforts by organizations" (Hubbard, 1969c: 347).

Hubbard's first attempt at promoting the religious angle of Scientology as a church was short-lived. Late in the summer of 1954, Hubbard mailed an advertisement newsletter called *The Golden Dawn* (most likely named after England's famous occult group of which Aleister Crowley had been a member) to about 5000 Phoenix, Arizona, homes, and initiated a door-to-door recruitment drive in the city (*Aberree*, 1954c). By November Hubbard abandoned the mailing effort (Churchill, 1954b: 9), having attracted only a few interested people (Churchill, 1954a).

His religious claims lay largely dormant until six years later, by which time he was living at his estate in East Grinstead, Sussex, England. In a short bulletin, Hubbard wrote that Scientology was both a "Religious philosophy" and "a Religious practice" that "conducts basic services such as Sermons at Church meetings, Christenings, Weddings and Funerals". As he had suggested years before, Hubbard insisted that "Scientology's closest spiritual ties with any other religion are with Orthodox (Hinayana) Buddhism, with which it shares an historical lineage" (Hubbard, 1960).

The date of this bulletin—June 21, 1960—may provide the clue needed to understand why Hubbard returned to emphasising the allegedly religious aspects of Scientology when he did. In late March and early April *The Times* in London carried three articles about efforts of the National Federation of Spiritual Healers to be granted visitation privileges in hospitals "similar to those accorded ministers of religion" (*Times*, 1960a; see 1960b,c). On June 21, *The Times* carried an exchange between an MP and the Minister of Health in which the Minister indicated that visitation by the spiritual healers was a matter between the hospital authorities, the doctors in charge of particular patients and the patients themselves (*Times*, 1960d). Early in the debate, visitations of this nature had

received opposition from some members of the British Medical Association (*Times*, 1960b; *British Medical Journal*, 1960a,b); and then, in late June, the Medical Association voted to ban all spiritual healers from visiting National Health Service hospitals (*Times*, 1960e). It may not be coincidental, therefore, that Hubbard launched a blistering attack against the British Medical Association in July, one month after the bulletin about religion (see Malko, 1970: 86)¹⁰ and a few weeks after the Association's decision.

Hubbard returned once again to religious claims in late October, 1962, apparently after he learned that the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had become 'interested' in his organisation's *e-meters*. Fearing the worst, Hubbard issued a policy letter entitled "Religion", in which he specifically justified the devices by insisting that Scientologists used them "to disclose truth to the individual who is being processed and thus free him spiritually". Regarding the future direction of his organisation, Hubbard announced that "Scientology 1970 is being planned on a religious organization basis throughout the world". He reassured his members, however, by adding that "[t]his will not upset in any way the usual activities of any organization. It is entirely a matter for accountants and solicitors" (Hubbard, 1962: 282).

Some two months later, on January 4, 1963, US Marshalls (acting on authority of an FDA warrant) raided The Founding Church of Scientology in Washington, D.C. and took away "more than three tons of literature and equipment" (Miller, 1987: 247; see Atack, 1990: 154). The battle over *e-meter* labelling would drag on for the next decade, but eventually the government returned the material after the court ordered that a printed disclaimer would be placed on all meters about their sole function as a tool for religious counselling (Atack, 1990: 154, 193, 204; Church of Scientology of California, 1978: 154-155).

Still another period when Hubbard emphasized religious aspects of his organisation was 1968. In May of that year, he launched a publication called *Advance!*, which devoted itself to comparing Scientology and various 'other' religions, and it is also the year in which he published *The Phoenix Lectures* (based on talks given fourteen years earlier). Cultivating a religious image was particularly important at this time, since his Washington, D.C. church lost its petition to regain its tax-exempt status, while governments in Australia, Great Britain, New Zealand, and Rhodesia were either restricting, if not banning, its practices or initiating official investigations about it (Church of Scientology of California, 1978: 154, 156, 157).

Events in Britain during the late 1960s may cast additional light on the timing of Scientology's religious claims. In January, 1967, the acting chaplain at Scientology's Saint Hill Manor in East Grinstead, Sussex, began efforts to gain registration of the estate's chapel as "a place of meeting for religious worship..." (*Weekly Law Reports*, 1970a: 141). The correspondence between Scientology, its legal advisors, and the Registrar General continued throughout 1968, with the Registrar General denying the validity of the claim. In response, on May 9, 1969, Scientology "obtained leave to move for an order of mandamus" in support of the religious registry application. The application, however, failed in both its original judgement and appeal (*Weekly Law Reports*, 1970a; 1970b). The appeals judge stated that

it seems to me to be more a *philosophy* of the existence of man or of life, rather than a *religion*. Religious worship means reverence or veneration of God or of a supreme being.

I do not find any such reverence or veneration in the creed of this church, or, indeed, in the affidavit of Mr. Segerdal [the acting chaplain]. (*Weekly Law Reports*, 1970b: 485.)

Hubbard's attempts to define Scientology as a religion with similarities to Eastern faiths failed to convince the British courts that its religious claims were appropriate from a legal standpoint.

Summarising events at least through the late 1960s, Hubbard emphasised the supposedly spiritual aspects of Scientology during periods in which either the purported 'healing' aspects of his organisation were under direct or indirect attack, or when he attempted to gain official recognition of his organisation as a place of meeting for religious worship. Of special concern for him was the protection of *e-meters*, since he considered that these devices were crucial for the auditing process through which alleged healings took place.

A previous researcher on Scientology interviewed an informant who told him that Hubbard "only started to incorporate what he believed to be Buddhist ideas in the early 1950s, after he had been given an extensive library of mystical and religious books. One of his staff read and summarised the contents" (Atack, 1990: 374). While this information may be true, a significant question still remains about why Hubbard wrote particular items concerning Eastern religion when he did. In this article I have proposed an answer to this question by arguing that the timing of Hubbard's writing or publishing about Eastern religions usually coincided with social, legal and governmental threats to its purported healing activities that besieged Scientology periodically in the 1950s and 1960s. Believing that the religious cloak would remove his group and its practices from external regulation throughout much of the Western world, Hubbard glanced eastward. In the long run, this strategy seems to have succeeded, since the organisation still uses its *e-meters* for 'spiritual' counselling. Moreover, it continues to make claims about the power of this device to facilitate healing when it is used in conjunction with auditing. Finally, many Scientologists continue to believe that their organisation's theology has significant similarities with various Eastern faiths.

Dr Stephen A. Kent is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology, University of Alberta, Canada. He has published articles in Philosophy East and West, Journal of Religious History, British Journal of Sociology, Sociological Inquiry, Sociological Analysis, Canadian Journal of Sociology, Quaker History, Comparative Social Research, Journal of Religion and Health, Cultic Studies Journal and Religion. His current research concentrates on non-traditional and alternative religions. Correspondence: Department of Sociology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6C 2H4.

NOTES

1. It is possible that Christian Science influenced Hubbard to a small degree, since former members tell me that he mentioned the religion in at least one of his lectures. Moreover, the Church of Scientology Information Service (1974: 43) said that "Scientology today leads the vanguard of modern religious thought (including, notably, the late Mary Baker Eddy, who promulgated her

- 'Key to the Scriptures' as Christian SCIENCE) which seeks to extend reason, consistency, and reliability of result into the realm of religious experience". Any influence, however, of the earlier tradition on Hubbard was minor, apart from the belief that mental states cause physical illnesses.
2. Although *The Phoenix Lectures* were not published until 1969, Hubbard first delivered them in July, 1954 (see the title page of Hubbard, 1969).
 3. Definitions appearing in the *Dianetics and Scientology Technical Dictionary* refer to the sources for terms, and explanations to specific tape dates appear in Church of Scientology of California, 1978: 287.
 4. A strained comparison of the concept of "the mind" in both systems indicates that it is a threefold entity—Scientology's analytic, reactive, and somatic minds superficially paralleling Sāmkhya's three qualities that constitute cognition, perception, and all creation [*sattva* (purity or goodness), *rajas* (shining or passion), and *tamas* (darkness or delusion)]. Attempting, however, to draw such a parallel between the two concepts of mind stretches both Hubbard's and Samkhya's systems far beyond what the respective texts actually intended.
 5. Hubbard's wording of the "Cancellation of Fair Game" strongly suggests that he wanted hostile acts against enemies to continue. The four sentence cancellation read, "The practice of declaring people FAIR GAME will cease. FAIR GAME may not appear on any Ethics Order. It causes bad public relations. This P/L [Policy Letter] does not cancel any policy on the treatment or handling of an SP [Suppressive Person—one who seeks to damage Scientology]" (Hubbard, 1968; see 1975: 415). Certainly, the organisation's critics believe that the retaliation practices advocated in the initial policy remain in effect (see Atack, 1990: 331, 341–342, 356–357).
 6. The introduction to *The Hymn of Asia* (1974a: n.p.) states that "[t]his moving hymn was written for a Buddhist Convention in about 1955 or '56, coincident with the celebrations of the Buddhist world of the 2,500th year of the Buddhist era." On May 24, 1956, Buddhists celebrated the "2,500th anniversary of the death of Gautama Buddha" (*The Times* [London], 1956), signifying his escape from the wheel of suffering and rebirth. On November 6th of that same year, international scholars held a conference and art exhibition in Delhi [*The Times* (London), 1956]. presumably, Hubbard wrote *The Hymn of Asia* during this auspicious year.
 7. The original text contains very short lines of verse, and in this quote and others I have compressed them into prose and bracketed appropriate punctuation. I left alone, however, Hubbard's capitalization, which may appear serendipitous.
 8. While I cannot translate this year into a Western equivalent, it appears that Hubbard's month is incorrect. *Vaishākha* is the name of a lunar month that coincides with April and May. *Māgha* is the lunar month that coincides with January and February (Basham, 1954: 492).
 9. One of Scientology's supporters showed a dramatic misunderstanding of Buddhism when he wrote that "Buddhist thinking, which is accepted by millions in the West, prevails in the statement that "the *thetan* is the person. You are *in* a body". (Oosthuizen, 1976: 4).
 10. Malko cites the attack against the British Medical Association as being an HCO Bulletin dated July 24, 1960, but I am unable to locate this publication and wonder whether he cited the source correctly.

REFERENCES

- Aberree. "Scientology Acts to Legalize As Religion. Three Churches Given Charters by New Jersey", 1(1), 1954a: 1, 4.
- Aberree. "H.A.S. 'Dead'; New Unit Set Up. Successor Organization Is Religious Fellowship", 1(4), 1954b: 1, 3–4.
- Aberree. "Out of the West Came the Dawn", 1(5), September 1954c: 1, 13.
- Atack, J. *A Piece of Blue Sky. Scientology Dianetics and L. Ron Hubbard Exposed*. New York: Lyle Stuart, 1990.
- Banner, E. R., Frost, I., MacSorley, D., Moss, M. C., Middlefell, R., Parker, T. G., et al. "Correspondence", *British Medical Journal*, March 26, 1960: 962.
- Basham, A. L. *The Wonder That Was India*. New York: Grove Press, 1954.
- Bose, A. C. *Hymns from the Vedas*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1966.
- British Medical Journal*. "Spiritual Healers", May 7, 1960a: 1417–1418.
- British Medical Journal*. "Medical Notes in Parliament: Minister on Spiritual Healers", June 25, 1960b: 1964.

- Chan, W.-T. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- [Church of Scientology]. "TR 0 Confronting Revised 1961", in *The Communications Course*, 1961.
- Church of Scientology Information Service, Department of Archives. *Scientology: A World Religion Emerges in the Space Age*. [Los Angeles: Church of Scientology], 1974.
- Church of Scientology of California. *What is Scientology? Based on the Works of L. Ron Hubbard*. Los Angeles: Publications Organization United States, 1978.
- Church of Scientology World Wide. *The Background and Ceremonies of the Church of Scientology of California, World Wide*. Sussex, England: The Church of Scientology World Wide, 1970.
- Churchill, T. "Blooms & Barbs", *Aberree* 1(6) October, 1954a: 13.
- Churchill, T. "Blooms & Barbs", *Aberree* 1(7) November, 1954b: 8-9.
- Conze, E. *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*. New York: Harper and Row, 1951.
- Conze, E. (Translator and Selector). *Buddhist Scriptures*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1959.
- Detroit News*. "Police Hold 2 in Raid on 'Dianetics School.' ", March 26, 1953a: 1.
- Detroit News*. "Dianetics Pair Pleads Innocent", April 10, 1953b: 10.
- Eliade, Mircea. *Yoga. Immortality and Freedom*. 1958, Second Edition Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
- Elizabeth Daily Journal*. "N.J. Starts Action Against Dianetics", January 15, 1951a.
- Elizabeth Daily Journal*. "Dianetics Group to Quit City Because 'We're Not Wanted' ", April 3, 1951b.
- Flinn, F. K. "Scientology as Technological Buddhism", in Fichter, J. H. *Alternatives to American Mainline Churches*. New York: Rose of Sharon Press, 1983: 89-110.
- Hubbard, L. R. *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, 23rd Paperback Edition Printing, July, 1979. Los Angeles: The Church of Scientology of California, 1950.
- Hubbard, L. R. "Duplication", *Professional Auditor's Bulletin*, No. 31, July 23, 1954a: 23-26.
- Hubbard, L. R. *Scientology: The Fundamentals of Thought*. Los Angeles: Publications Organization United States, 1956.
- Hubbard, L. R. "Religious Philosophy and Religious Practice", *Hubbard Communications Office Bulletin*. June 21, 1960.
- Hubbard, L. R. "Religion", *Hubbard Communication Office Policy Letter*, October 29, 1962.
- Hubbard, L. R. "R-3M2[.] What You Are Trying to do in Clearing", *Hubbard Communication Office Bulletin*, April 6, 1963.
- Hubbard, L. R. "Historical Precedence of Ethics", *Hubbard Communications Office Policy Letter*, December, 29, 1966.
- Hubbard, L. R. "Condition of Liability", *Hubbard Communications Office Policy Letter*, October 6, 1967a.
- Hubbard, L. R. "Penalties for Lower Conditions", *Hubbard Communications Office Policy Letter*, October, 18, 1967b.
- Hubbard, L. R. "Cancellation of Fair Game", *Hubbard Communication Office Policy Letter*, October 21, 1968.
- Hubbard, L. R. "Past Lives", *Hubbard Communication Office Bulletin*, April 23, 1969a.
- Hubbard, L. R. *The Phoenix Lectures*, 1968, revised edn, given as a Lecture in July, 1954. Los Angeles: American Saint Hill Organization, 1969b.
- Hubbard, L. R. "Dianetic Use", *Hubbard Communication Office Bulletin*, April 24, 1969c.
- Hubbard, L. R. *The Hymn of Asia* (composed 1956); Los Angeles: Church of Scientology of California, 1974a.
- Hubbard, L. R. *The Organization Executive Course. An Encyclopedia of Scientology Policy*, Basic Staff Volume 1. Los Angeles: Church of Scientology of California, 1974b.
- Hubbard, L. R. *Dianetics and Scientology Technical Dictionary*. Los Angeles: Publications Organization, 1975.
- Hubbard, L. R. "Clearing: Some Facts", *Ability*, 81, 1958: 1, 3, 5-6.
- Hume, R. E. *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931.
- Karie, J. "Phoenix Man Jailed On Medicine Charge", *Republic* [Phoenix, Arizona], September 4, 1955.
- Kent, S. A. "Valentinian Gnosticism and Classical Samkhya: A Thematic and Structural Comparison", *Philosophy East and West* 30 (2), July, 1980: 241-259.
- Kent, S. A. "Early Samkhya in the Buddhacarita", *Philosophy East and West*, 32 (3) July, 1982: 259-278.
- Kent, S. A. Interview with Sam Durston [pseudonym], December 15, 1992.
- Lamont, S. *Religion. Inc. The Church of Scientology*. London: Harrap, 1986.
- Larson, G. J. *Classical Samkhya*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969.
- Ling, T. *A Dictionary of Buddhism*. Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi & Company, 1981.

- Malko, G. *Scientology: The New Religion*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1970.
- Miller, R. *Bare-Faced Messiah: The True Story of L. Ron Hubbard*. London: Michael Joseph, 1987.
- Monier-Williams, M., Sir. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1899.
- Oosthuizen, G. C. "The Church of Scientology: Religious Philosophy, Religion and Church", Booklet. United Kingdom: No Publisher, 1976.
- Perera, T. H. "Matters Judicial", *Buddhist Annual*, 1965; reproduced in Hubbard, L. R. "Historical Precedence of Ethics", *Hubbard Communication Office Bulletin*, December 29, 1966; in Hubbard, L. R., 1974b: 459-462.
- Pickering, J. "Cure-All Machine Like Lie Detector", *Detroit Times*, March 27, 1953.
- Rhys Davids, T. W. *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*. Volume IV. 1965 Reprint. London: Lazac & Company, 1921.
- The Times* [London]. "Dalai Lama Invited to India: Buddhist Anniversary", January 17, 1956: 10g.
- The Times*. "Hospital Visits by Spiritual Healers", March 29, 1960a: 6c.
- The Times*. "Hospitals Urged to Reconsider Visits of Spiritual Healers", March 30, 1960b: 6d.
- The Times*. "Spiritual Healers in Hospitals", April 18, 1960c: 7e.
- The Times*. "Spiritual Healers: Admission Left to Hospitals", June 21, 1960d: 6d.
- The Times*. "Spiritual Healing", June 27, 1960e: 6g.
- Wallis, R. *The Road to Total Freedom: A Sociological Analysis of Scientology*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.
- Weekly Law Reports*. "Regina v. Registrar General Ex parte Segerdal and Another", *Queen's Bench Division* [Great Britain], 1970a.
- Weekly Law Reports*. "Regina v. Registrar General Ex parte Segerdal and Another", *Court of Appeal* [Great Britain], 1970b (Held on July 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 1970): 479-488.
- Whitehead, H. *Renunciation and Reformulation: A Study of Conversion in an American Sect*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1987.
- Woods, J. H. *The Yoga System of Patanjali*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1914.
- Zimmer, H. *Philosophies of India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951.