

Scientology -- Is this a Religion?

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Abstract

Although some social scientists insist that Scientology is a religion, the more appropriate position to take is that the organization is a multi-faceted transnational corporation that has religion as only one of its many components. Other components include political aspirations, business ventures, cultural productions, pseudo-medical practices, pseudo-psychiatric claims, and (among its most devoted members who have joined the Sea Organization), an alternative family structure. Sea Organization's job demands appear to allow little time for quality child rearing. Most disturbing, however, about Sea Organization life is that members can be subject to extremely severe and intrusive punishments through security checks, internal hearings called "Committees of Evidence," and a forced labour and re-indoctrination program known as the Rehabilitation Project Force (RPF) and its harshest companion, the RPF's RPF. Taken together, these harsh and intrusive punishments likely violate a number of human rights clauses as outlined by two United Nations statements.

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1) Introduction

Rarely, if ever, in the post-war period have diplomats from the superpowers troubled themselves over questions about the alleged religious nature of a transnational organization. Consequently, the recent debate between Germany and the United States over the alleged religious nature of Scientology is remarkable. The fact that German officials, institutions, and citizens are seeking additional information about this organization is understandable, and perhaps this article will provide additional insights that may help to clarify the issues in this debate.

For the record, I did not have any contact with German parliamentary officials before I prepared this article, which I originally presented as a talk in a session of the 1997 Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag. While in Canada and writing the talk, I spoke by telephone for about ten minutes with one German professor who was involved with the German government investigation (called the Enquete Commission), but we only touched briefly on issues related to Scientology. The German *Kirchentag* [a bi-annual, week-long, Lutheran Church event] paid my air fare and my hotel in Leipzig, and *Berliner Dialog* [a 'counter-cult' Christian-based magazine] covered some of my expenses, but no person or institution paid me a fee or honorarium. I prepared my talk while in Canada, and did not consult with anyone in Germany or elsewhere about its content. I had complete freedom to write whatever I wanted around the general topic of the debate about Scientology's religious claims.

As a person trained in religious studies, I find the debate about Scientology's alleged religious nature to be an interesting and important one. It should not be, however, the only issue over which we evaluate the German-American debate over Scientology's religious claims. Intimately related to the religious question are human rights questions. Some people assume that religious practice is a guaranteed human right, but even a superficial examination of world events shows that many atrocities occur in the name of God or religion. Universally, therefore, religious *belief* must receive absolute protection, but religious *practice stemming from that belief* must receive protection only until it begins to violate the rights of its members or nonmembers. Following from this last point, I argue that even if Scientology contains a theology and cosmology that some members interpret religiously, its organizational actions and behaviours raise serious human rights questions. Without wanting to review the pronouncements from all German officials about the organization, I conclude that the German government had good reason to investigate Scientology's activities in its country. It also had compelling reasons to inquire about the well-being of German citizens in Scientology facilities in the United States and elsewhere. I will share just a few of the documents that led me to these conclusions, and some of them are available in numerous world wide web sites on the Internet. While I am aware of the historical and cultural context in which the debate about Scientology in Germany is occurring (see Hexham and Poewe, 1999), I remain convinced that German officials and others based their concerns about the organization primarily upon analyses of the organization's stated policies and sanctioned practices (including many of the ones that I am about to discuss).

2) Is Scientology a Religion?

For a number of my social scientific colleagues around the world, the debate between Germany and the U.S. revolved around the question of Scientology's religious claims. Many of my social scientific colleagues had examined *some* Scientology documents and possibly participated in *some* Scientology events, and they had deduced that the organization *is* religious in nature. Bryan R. Wilson (b. 1926), for example, who is a respected British sociologist of religion, concluded "that Scientology must indeed be regarded as a religion" (Wilson, 1990: 288). He reached this conclusion after comparing Scientology's belief system with twenty characteristics usually found within what he called "known religions" (Wilson, 1990: 279). Significantly for the current debate in this country, he dismissed historical information from the early 1950s about Dianetics presenting itself as "a mental therapy and Scientology a science." Specifically with these early self-representations in mind, Wilson insisted that "even if it could be conclusively shown that Scientology took the title of 'church' specifically to secure at law as a religion, that would say nothing about the status of the belief-system, and it is with the belief system that we are specifically concerned" (Wilson, 1990: 282-283).[1]

¹*Note:* -- Undoubtedly because of this interpretation, Wilson has become a champion of Scientology's religious claims (see also Wilson, n.d.: 35) and the organization alludes to him ("[t]he foremost sociologist in the world") as an academic who concluded "that Scientology was setting the trend for the 21st century for all religions -- as it offers practical solutions for people's problems in the real world" (International Association of Scientologists, 1995: [10]). Scientology also employs his opinion in arguing before an American court that the organization has the right to keep secret its upper level materials (Wilson, 1994: 11).

In fact, I have made precisely the argument that Wilson dismisses. In a study that]*Berliner Dialog* (*Heft* 1-97) translated into German, and in another study that I hope to publish soon, I show that L. Ron Hubbard (Scientology's founder) claimed that Scientology was a religion because he saw the claim as a marketing device to make money and avoid taxes (Kent, 1997b: 25ff; Miller, 1987: 199-203, 220) as well as a way "to reduce the likelihood of governmental interventions against it for allegedly practising medicine without a license" (Kent, 1996: 30). Moreover, Scientology denies its reputedly religious nature if it is attempting to enter a country that might react adversely to religious proselytization (such as Japan or Greece [Kent, 1997a: 18-19]). Nevertheless, the historical reasons behind Scientology's religious claims, as well as the organization's selectivity in making the claims, do not diminish the probability that many Scientologists view their commitment as a religious one.

From a social scientific perspective, and probably from a legal one as well, the objective "truth" of an ideology is not the determinant of a group's "religious" designation. Mere belief in supernatural beings or forces may be enough to get an ideology designated as religious, even if the origins or doctrines of the belief system are highly suspect. Along these lines, the inspirational figure in the sociology of religion, Max Weber, refused to exclude charlatans from his identification of charismatic figures, *since the devotion of followers was a far more salient fact than authenticity*. After mentioning two types of charismatic figures, Weber added that "[a]nother type is represented

by [the founder of a major faith], who may have been a very sophisticated swindler (although this cannot be definitely established)" (Weber, 1968: 242). Similarly, from a social scientific perspective, a belief system is religious if it contains supposedly supernatural elements, regardless of the accuracy of those elements. Perhaps unlike the religious founder whom Weber named, Hubbard's sophisticated swindle has been exposed by a number of researchers (for example, Atack, 1990; Kent, 1996; Miller, 1987) who have shown that his religious alignment was purely expedient. Now, however, many of his followers see their lives in the context of the doctrines that he developed.

3) Scientology as a Multi-Faceted Transnational

Even if we grant the point that Scientology cosmology and soteriology have supernatural elements that classify the belief-system as religious (regardless of these elements' suspect history), neither government officials nor society at large should *necessarily* grant Scientology religious status for purposes of receiving societal benefits. Rather than struggling over whether or not to label Scientology as a religion, I find it far more helpful to view it as a multifaceted transnational corporation, only *one* element of which is religious. Coinciding with supernatural claims are equally important secular dimensions relating to political aspirations, business operations, cultural productions, pseudo-medical practice, pseudo-psychiatric practice, social services (some of which are of dubious quality), and alternative family structures. A few examples of each dimension will suffice, but countless examples of each one exist throughout both Scientology's literature and the social behaviour of its members. The most salient aspect of Scientology, however, is the totalitarian, some would say fascist, use of power that holds the organization together. I will speak about some of these totalitarian uses of power, and in doing so it will be very clear that the German government took the only appropriate avenue open to it.

3.1) Politics

Scientology's *political aspirations* have surfaced at various times throughout its nearly fifty year history, with the organization involving itself with politicians or political structures in Rhodesia (in 1966), Greece (in 1968 to 1969), Morocco (in 1972), and in the Russian city of Perm (where it was training city officials in Hubbard Management ideology). Observers wondered about the fate of Scientology training to Albanian government officials after the recent popular uprisings and social collapse in the late 1990s (see Kent, 1997a: 17-18).

3.2) Business

At times related to its political aspirations (as in Perm) are Scientology's programs designed to train business executives and professionals, often specifically targeting personnel in medically related areas. Through an organization named WISE (World Institute of Scientology Enterprises), Scientology offers a business consultancy and management program. A recent publication claims that "WISE [m]embers form a network of highly trained consultants in Hubbard Management Technology who can provide you with tailor-made training programs to suit your company's needs"

(WISE International, 1994b). WISE programs target various clients through numerous companies, and in Germany and other parts of Europe the best known WISE company is U-Man (see, for example, WISE International, 1994a). For all practical purposes, this dimension of Scientology is secular, regardless of how the organization portrays it.

3.3) Cultural

Culturally, Scientology has an entire industry devoted to the production and dissemination of Hubbard's writings and ideological material to both members and outsiders. The Scientology owned and operated (and now tax exempt) Bridge Publications, for example, produced a volume solely dedicated to *The Fiction of L. Ron Hubbard* (Widder, 1994), which discusses his writings of Westerns, adventure stories, mystery and detective stories, romance, fantasy, science fiction, plays, and screenplays (among others), and makes little if any mention of his supposedly "religious" writings. The actor and Scientology public relations officer, John Travolta (Anderson, 1980: 3; Church of Scientology International, 1994), is working on a movie version of Hubbard's science fiction work, *Battlefield Earth*, while a team of Hollywood producers is developing a film version of the Hubbard pulp novel, *To the Stars* (Reuters, 1997).

As these current film productions suggest, Scientology is eager to be involved with projects that disseminate its ideology to nonmembers through high profile cultural undertakings. One vital aspect of this dissemination effort involves cultivating the conversion and support of society's cultural celebrities. Beginning in 1955, Hubbard's "Project Celebrity" targeted what he called "prime communicators" with the hope that they would "mention" Scientology "now and again" ([Hubbard], 1955). By 1992, thirteen "celebrity centres" existed around the world (Church of Scientology International, 1992: 353), and their purpose was "[t]o fully utilize opinion leaders and Scientologists to permeate society and get all the different publics utilizing LRH's Technology in every aspect..." (Jentzsch and Foster, 1977: 1). This organizational push to get everyone using Hubbard's so-called technology has dramatic secular implications for such issues of how to organize an office, how to generate and handle money, and how to measure office growth. It presumably also may have implications for people's supernatural belief systems, but it is understandable that critics see Scientology celebrities as participating in the dissemination of secular Scientology goals.

In addition to free publicity for Scientology, celebrities also give large financial contributions back to the organization. Had Scientologist Chick Corea, for example, received money from the Baden-Wurttemberg state culture ministry for performing at state-sponsored events, then some of that income may have become part of his contributions to the International Association of Scientologists. The avowed purpose of this organization is "[t]o unite, advance, support and protect the Scientology religion and Scientologists in all parts of the world, so as to achieve the Aims of Scientology as originated by L. Ron Hubbard" (International Association of Scientologists, 1995: [back cover]). In one of the Association's 1995 magazines, both he and actress Kirstie Alley each appeared as having contributed (US) \$100,000 (Church of Scientology Celebrity Centre International, 1995: 8; International Association of Scientologists Administration, 1995: 49, see 60). By comparison, the \$2,000 contribution that John Travolta made seems small (Church of

Scientology Celebrity Centre International, 1996: 8; see International Association of Scientologists Administration, 1995: 60). What many Germans know, however, is that this organization provided grants to the Church of Scientology International in order to fund the series of anti-Germany ads in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* (both beginning, I believe, on September 15, 1994). Utilizing cultural productions and prominent cultural figures, therefore, to disseminate all aspects of Hubbard's so-called tech is an intimate aspect of the organization's overall public relations and (it would seem) financial strategies.

3.4) Pseudo-Medicine

A glimpse into Scientology's pseudo-medical practices -- in this case one that also relates to a social service effort of dubious effectiveness -- is its Narconon program. This program purports to rid the body of drug and radiation residues, and a 1996 Scientology publication told a story about an American Gulf War veteran suffering from Gulf War Syndrome who "arrived to do the detoxification program... complain[ing] of disorientation, dizziness, memory loss and muscle and joint pain. He finished the program and has no more dizziness, memory loss OR muscle and joint pain -- ALL his symptoms have been handled TOTALLY" (Church of Scientology International, 1996: 68 [original emphasis]). Recently Scientologists applied the Narconon program to children suffering from radiation-related illnesses in Chernobyl (Bev, 1997).

Regardless of how Scientology portrays these claims, they are medical ones that purport to offer a social service, but one about which experts remain highly critical. In the American state of Oklahoma, for example, a 1991 mental health board examined a Narconon program and concluded that "there is substantial credible evidence, as found by the Board, that the Narconon Program is unsafe and ineffective" (Mental Health Board, 1991; reproduced in Lobsinger, 1991: 58).

3.5) Pseudo-Psychiatry

Another dimension of pseudo-medical claims are pseudo-psychiatric ones. Scientology's hatred of psychiatry is worthy of a study in itself, and some of its own documents very clearly indicate that Scientology's primary social purpose is the destruction of psychiatry and its replacement with Scientology techniques. In, for example, a confidential document written for Scientology's intelligence branch (then known as the Guardian Office), the unidentified author, who most certainly was Hubbard himself, had a section entitled "The War." The text in this section stated that "[o]ur war has been forced to become "To take over absolutely the field of mental healing on this planet in all forms.'" The next sentences have significant implications for the current religious debate. "That was not the original purpose. The original purpose was to clear Earth. The battles suffered developed the data that we had an enemy who would have to be gotten out of the way and this meant we were at war" ([Hubbard], 1969: [5]). The central target in Scientology's efforts to "take over the field of mental healing" is psychiatry. Indeed, several Scientology organizations, including the Citizens Commission on Human Rights, the International Association of Scientologists, and *Freedom* magazine are working diligently in attempting to achieve the goal of "Eradicating Psychiatry" (Weiland, 1990: 21).

One aspect of Scientology's efforts to eradicate psychiatry and replace it with its own techniques is that members can take a course (called a rundown) that claims to teach members how to cure psychosis. Called the "Introspection Rundown Auditor Course," this course supposedly "factually handles the last of the 'unsolvable' conditions which can trap a person -- the psychotic break. And end forever the 'reason' psychs were kept around with their icepicks and shock machines" (Church of Scientology Flag Service Organization, 1992: [2]). This course is based upon what Hubbard described as "a technical breakthrough which possibly ranks with the major discoveries of the Twentieth Century." The consequence of this alleged breakthrough was that "THIS MEANS THE LAST REASON TO HAVE PSYCHIATRY AROUND IS GONE" (Hubbard, 1974: 346). The self-proclaimed "breakthrough" involved isolating the person having the psychotic breakdown while not speaking to the person, giving the person particular vitamins and minerals, determining what incident triggered the illness, then putting the person through a long and complex series of Scientology "counselling" sessions (called auditing) that focus on the triggering incident Hubbard, 1974: 353).

Currently this course is at the centre of controversy involving the December 5, 1995 death of Scientologist Lisa McPherson in Clearwater, Florida. After a minor car accident, McPherson exhibited bizarre behaviour -- publicly undressing, speaking in monotone with a fixed stare, exhibiting forgetfulness and confusion, and crying. Against medical advice, she signed herself out of a hospital and into the care of visiting Scientology "friends" who took her to the organization's Fort Harrison Hotel. Seventeen days later, Scientologists took her back to a distant hospital where a doctor was working who was a Scientologist, and he pronounced her dead. A State Attorney for Florida laid two felony charges [unauthorized practice of medicine and abuse and/or neglect of a disabled adult] against a Scientology organization as a result of the death (Circuit Court..., 1998), and McPherson's estate launched a lawsuit that accused Scientology "of allowing McPherson to languish in a coma without nutrition and liquids while she was in isolation as part of an Introspection Rundown" (Tobin, 1997: 12A). In this context, a Scientology lawyer acknowledged "that the Introspection Rundown remains 'part of church services'" (Tobin, 1997: 12A). Undoubtedly, therefore, Scientology practices pseudo-psychiatry, and the lawsuit over McPherson's death may establish the extent to which at least one of these practices can have potentially fatal consequences.

3.6) Scientology as an Alternative Family Structure

Finally, Scientology is an alternative family structure, at least as it is lived by its most devoted followers who are members of a Scientology organization called Sea Org[anization]. Scientology portrays the Sea Org as "a fraternal organization existing within the formalized structure of the Churches of Scientology. It consists of highly dedicated members of the Church [who] take vows of service" (Church of Scientology of California, 1978: 205). (The organization downplays the fact that these people sign billion year contracts.) Many indicators point to the fact that Scientology structures the Sea Org in a manner that damages parent-child relations if not the well-being of children in general. In essence, Sea Org becomes one's new family, often at the expense of spouses and children.

Indication of organizationally influenced damage caused by Sea Org parents to their children formed the basis of a critical article that appeared in a major newspaper of the Florida city near to where the Scientology organization called Flag is based. In November, 1991, the *St. Petersburg Times* ran a long article entitled, "Scientology's Children," and it contained an excerpt about a German mother and her son:

- Eva Kleinberg moved from Germany to Clearwater with her 9-year old son, Mark, in 1986. She had joined a group of Scientology staff members called the 'Sea Org.'
- Eva was told she would have two hours a day for family time. But with her travel time from work, she said she actually had only one hour with her son. Because of the 12-hour workdays, she couldn't always stay awake for the full hour.
- 'I would compromise with my son,' she said. After eating, she and her son would divide the remaining half-hour of their family time. 'I would play a game with him for 15 minutes, and I would go to lay down for 15 minutes and sleep.'
- While Eva worked, Mark cleaned up around the motel or played with friends.
- About a year later, Eva and Mark left the church.
- Asked what he thinks of Scientology, Mark, now 14, said, 'I don't think it's good 'cause the people... they don't get to spend time with their family and it's real expensive.'
- Church spokesman Richard Haworth said staff Scientologists actually spend three or four hours a day with their children, which he said is more than the average family (Krueger, 1991: 12A).

I believe the Kleinbergs' account rather than the one by the Scientology spokesperson because I had heard the same scenario (about parents having little time to spend with children) during an interview with a former Sea Org member that I conducted in December, 1987. At Flag in Florida during the late 1970s and early 1980s, infants apparently stayed in a Scientology-run nursery during the day when parents worked, and usually parents would return from work at about 6:00 in the evening and spend about an hour-and-a-half with their children before taking them back to the nursery at 7:30 for bed. Parents then caught a bus back to the Sea Org, and finally did not leave for the night until 10:30 or later. My informant told me that, in the morning, they would pick up their children from the nursery, have them dressed and in the dining room by 7:30 AM, drop them back at the nursery, and be on the bus going to work by ten minutes past 8. This former member added, however, that "there'd be some people who had kids who didn't go home for two or three days in a row. They'd be working all night" (Kent interview with Fern, 1987: 44, see 43).

The Kleinbergs' account about limited family time also rings true because of a series of internal memos (of which I have copies) from Scientology's Pacific Area Command (in Los Angeles, California) beginning in early November, 1989. These memos centre around an Executive Directive that the commanding officer issued which *abolished the one hour nightly family time*. He cited two reasons for doing so. First, he claimed, "[a] thorough research [sic] revealed that there is no LRH [L. Ron Hubbard] reference covering Sea Org members taking 1 hour family time per day. Also to have such break in schedules in the middle of production has been found to be detrimental to production...." Instead he wanted people to work the extra hour a day in order to build up their

production output so that they would receive a "liberty day" (Gouessan, 1989) once every two weeks (Shapiro, 1989).

Several parents objected, and their objections were revealing. One person asked rhetorically, "[h]ow can one keep track of one's child without even an hour a day with the child? I HAVE seen staff distracted by NOT caring for their children and this time could be well utilized for this" (Swartz, 1989). Another person cited the text of a Hubbard tape where Scientology's founder complained about a condition that he had seen (and which he said had existed in the Pacific Area Command): "I wish somebody would tell me why we consistently had to ORDER parents to see their children when they hadn't seen them for weeks" (Hubbard, Transcript of LRH Taped Briefing to CS-& and Pers Comm 22 Sept 73; attached to Shapiro, 1989). This same person acknowledged in his letter of protest that "[i]n the 19 years I have been in the Sea Org in PAC this condition (parental neglect, etc.) has several times been the source of major upset and enturbulation [agitation] on Church lines" (Shapiro, 1989 [round brackets in original]). Taken together, the interview material, media accounts, internal policy directive, and responses point to the fact that parents' time with their children is severely constrained and sometimes eliminated because of the organizational pressure and job demands under which Sea Org members work. It seems that Scientology, in its Sea Org manifestation, becomes something akin to an alternative or "fictive" family structure to its members (see Cartwright and Kent, 1992: 348-349), receiving more time and commitment than their own children.

On a related point, the new Sea Org family to which adults devote their lives may at times place children in medically detrimental situations. This fictive family may not always be a medically responsible one. The informant whom I interviewed in 1978, for example, complained to me that "the nursery conditions were terrible." She related that, in one nursery room, "there were, I think, sixteen babies in the room, all under a year old, and throughout the whole day, there were three nannies who did shifts in that room, looking after sixteen babies all under a year old" (Kent interview with Fern, 1987: 48). Under these conditions, children developed medical problems (according to my informant, Fern), because the facility did not have an isolation nursery. Consequently, common childhood illnesses (such as ear infections) spread rapidly among the children and remained in the nursery population for a long time. To support her assertion, this informant showed me medical records that she kept of her child's visits to doctors while the child was under nursery care, and compared them with similar records from after the time that she and her child left Sea Org and the nursery arrangement. The child made seventeen visits to the doctor's office during an eight month period while in the nursery, then only four visits in the twenty-nine months following the family's departure from the organization (Kent interview with Fern, 1987: 49-50).

Researchers always must be cautious in accepting as fact the account of a single person, but I heard similar stories about the condition of children's facilities in Scientology's child care program on the other side of the American continent -- Los Angeles, California. The person who related the account had occasion to visit the children's facility (called the Cadet Org) in the late 1970s or early 1980s, and she saw an infant who was the child of a man she knew. This child, she stated:

was very, very ill and she was laying in a urine soaked crib and she was -- she just had her diaper on.... She had lots of, like, little fruit flies and gnats on her body and she had been so ill that she had tremendous amounts of mucous plugging her nose and her eyes were, like, welded shut with mucous and I, I just snapped in my head (Kent Interview with Pat, 1997: 34).

After this incident of allegedly witnessing severe child neglect, the person began plotting how she would leave the organization.

The final example of alleged child neglect is documented in a report filed by the commanding officer of the Cadet Estates Organization in late October, 1989, concerning the hygiene of three children -- ages 4, 8, and 10 or 11. Two of the children had lice, and for one of them it was a recurring problem. A guardian was in charge of them, but she "is herself on mission quite often." [That is to say, the organization frequently sent her away on assignments.] The report continued by stating that, "[w]hile the guardian was on a mission, the kids were picked up at night by another staff member that [sic: who] lives next door, and the little one would be brought in in the morning while the other two older one[sic: ones] would walk to the Cadet Org by themselves [sic]. The children would dress themselves [sic] and we have no data who does the laundry or room hygiene for the children" (Gabriele, 1989: 1). We must be careful when interpreting this data on possible child neglect or endangerment, since none of it is current. Sufficient indicators exist, however, that investigative officials in the United States and elsewhere should examine Scientology's treatment of Sea Org children.

Because the attitude among some Sea Org leadership appears to be that children hinder adults from performing their vital assignments, researchers should not be surprised to learn of pressures that Sea Org women felt to either abort pregnancies or give-up children for adoption. My 1987 informant told me that when Sea Org operated on ships during the mid 1970s, women knew that they were not allowed to raise children on the vessels. Consequently, they experienced pressure to have abortions. She told me that, "on the ship, I know of a lot of people that [sic: who] had abortions, because they didn't want to leave the ship. It wasn't like anybody said 'You have got to get an abortion.' It was more an implied thing. If you don't you're going to leave" (Kent interview with Fern, 1989: 41-42). Years later I saw the same pressures described in a 1994 legal declaration by Mary Tabayoyon, who became a Scientologist in 1967, joined Sea Org in 1971, and stayed in it until her departure in 1992. She stated that in 1986, while on the Scientology base in Hemet, California, "members of the Sea Org were forbidden to have any more children if they were to stay on post[,] and the Hubbard technology was applied to coercively persuade us to have abortions so that we could remain on post" (M. Tabayoyon, 1994: 2). The pressure came partly through what Scientology called "ethics handling," which involved the organization pressing people to conform to Hubbard's policies and the organization's directives. Tabayoyon herself "gave up my child due to my greatly misguided obligation and dedication to the Sea Org" (M. Tabayoyon, 1994: 4). She relinquished her child after being "indoctrinated to believe that I should never put my own personal desires ahead of the accomplishment of the purpose of the Sea Org" (M. Tabayoyon, 1994: 5).

Taken together, the interviews, legal declarations, media accounts, and internal documents present

troubling glimpses into the lives of Scientology's most committed members. Sea Org obligations override many personal and family obligations and responsibilities, and devotion to the Scientology cause often appears to take priority over the needs of children. Equally disturbing, however, are accounts that some older children and teenagers have had to endure, along with Sea Org adults, the abuses of Scientology's forced labour and reindoctrination programs. Although several labour and intensive instruction programs have operated within the Scientology organization over the years, among the most intense ones is the Rehabilitation Project Force -- usually just called the RPF.

4) The Rehabilitation Project Force -- Forced Labour and Re-indoctrination

When Sea Org members commit what the organization considers to be serious deviations (such as dramatic E-meter readings, unsatisfactory job performance, or job disruption [including challenges to senior officials]), then they likely wind up in the RPF. Even discussing the policies and techniques that Hubbard wrote by using ideas other than his own was called "verbal tech" and apparently was a punishable act (see Hubbard, 1976: 546). Begun in early 1974 while Hubbard and his crew still were at sea, it now operates in several locations around the world. Currently RPFs are running at the Cedars of Lebanon building in Los Angeles; on Scientology property near Hemet, California; in the facilities in Clearwater, Florida; in the British headquarters at East Grinstead, Sussex; and in Copenhagen, Denmark. I cannot confirm the existence of RPFs in several other locations.

In a phrase, the RPF program places Scientology's most committed members in forced labour and re-indoctrination programs. The operation of these programs raises serious human rights questions, and their continuation reflects badly on nations that allow them to operate unchecked. Particular blame must be placed on American state and federal authorities, since at least three RPF programs have operated for years on American soil. Moreover, the American Internal Revenue Service granted Scientology tax exemption despite what almost certainly are illegal conditions under which RPF inmates must work, study, and live. Extensive material about RPFs in the United States has existed for years in various court cases, and now most of this information is readily available on the World Wide Web. German government officials know about the RPF, and almost certainly this knowledge played a major role in the government's continued opposition to the Scientology organization.

Getting assigned to the RPF is a traumatic event for most people. Procedurally, what is supposed to happen is that leaders call a hearing, known as a "Committee of Evidence," to evaluate a person's performance or attitude. A former member described this body as "a Scientology trial, where the Committee [members] act as prosecutors, judges and jury rolled into one" (Atack, 1990: 306). Committees sometimes obtain evidence against the person from security checks (called sec checks [see Kent interview with Young, 1994: 49]), which the organization portrays as "Integrity Processing" or "Confessional Auditing," but which is really a form of interrogation (Atack, 1990: 147). In fact, in 1960, Hubbard wrote a policy called "Interrogation" about how to use the device known as an E-meter as an interrogation device rather than merely as a spiritual aide in counselling or auditing sessions as the organization represents it to the outside world (Hubbard, 1960).

Hubbard had used security checks on his followers since 1959, but the most notorious sec check probably was the "Johannesburg Security Check," published April 7, 1961. It consisted of over one hundred questions, almost all of which inquire about previous or current participation in a wide range of deviant and criminal acts including spying, kidnapping, murder, drugs, sex, and Communism. The most revealing ones, however, involved people's thoughts about Hubbard (called by his initials, LRH) and his wife, Mary Sue Hubbard. The sec check specifically asked, "Have you ever had any unkind thoughts about LRH?," and "Have you ever had any unkind thoughts about Mary Sue?" Not only, therefore, were people forced to reveal personal information about serious transgressions, but also they were forced to reveal the existence of any negative thoughts about the leader or his wife. One former member-turned critic, Robert Vaughn Young, reported that he was sec-checked for several hours a day for about two weeks (Kent Interview with Young, 1994: 50).

An even more severe form of sec check was the "gang bang sec check," a process that presumably takes its name from group rape (a slang term for which is gang bang). Gang bang sec checks involve two or more interrogators rapidly firing questions and verbal abuse at a victim who is hooked up to or holding an E-meter. A brief description of this practice occurs in a legal declaration (sworn under oath) by former member Stacy Young. She declared that her repeated protests about the way that (the now-current head of Scientology) David Miscavige treated staff led Miscavige to send her to the RPF in September, 1982 (S. Young, 1994: 8, 65). The specific incident that triggered her assignment was that Miscavige learned that Young had reacted to his (alleged) screaming fits by telling someone that he was "a brutal, tyrannical bully" (S. Young, 1994: 65). In response, Miscavige:

- ordered me to submit to what was known as a 'gang bang sec check.' Two very large, strong men... locked me in a room and interrogated me for hours. During the interrogation, they screamed and swore at me. They accused me of crimes against Scientology. They demanded that I confess to being an enemy agent (S. Young, 1994: 66).
- Soon Young found herself in the RPF's 'Running Program,' which involved "running around an orange pole for 12 hours a day" (S. Young, 1994: 66).

When Committees of Evidence find Sea Org members guilty of serious crimes, then they send many of them to RPF programs. Inmates are not sentenced to the programs for specific lengths time. Instead, they remain in until they complete a rigorous program of hard physical labour, constant verbal abuse from immediate superiors, social isolation, intense co-auditing and sec checking, and study of Hubbard policies and techniques.

A series of policies about the RPF began appearing in January, 1974 when Hubbard was aboard ship, and a few revised versions of them have leaked out of the organization. One of these early documents revealed the totalistic nature of the program when it said that "[a] member of the RPF is a member of the RPF and of nothing outside of it, till released" (Boards of Directors of the Churches of Scientology, 1977: 3). Part of the program consisted of hard physical labour -- building structures, cleaning, renovating, garbage disposal, and moving furniture. Typically work projects of this nature took about ten hours a day, since people were supposed to get "around 7 hours sleep, 5 hours study or auditing, 30 minutes for each meal, and 30 minutes personal hygiene, per day"

(Boards of Directors of the Churches of Scientology, 1977: 4). They wore dark worksuits and were prohibited from speaking (unless necessary) with persons outside the RPF, and they ate and slept separate from other Sea Org members (Boards of Directors of the Churches of Scientology, 1977: 10). They had to run everywhere they went, and often they had to run extra distances for punishment. On a ship, running punishments usually meant laps around the deck (Pignotti, 1997: 18-19). On land, running punishments sometimes meant running around a pole for hours at a time, often in hot sun (see Kent Interview with Pignotti, 1997: 22; S. Young, 1994: 66). Severe restrictions were placed upon visitation rights with spouses or children (Boards of Directors of the Churches of Scientology, 1977: 10).

Accounts from former inmates indicate that RPF life can be extremely harsh, degrading, and abusive. Certainly experiences varied somewhat according to year and location, but Hanna Whitfield's description of RPF at the Fort Harrison Hotel in Clearwater, Florida in 1978 captures many common elements from other accounts that I have heard and read:

Some of us slept on thin mattresses on the bare cement floor. Some had crude bunk beds. There was no place for clothes, so we lived out of suitcases and bags which were kept on bare floors. Some privacy was maintained by hanging sheets up between bunk beds and between floor mattresses. The women and men had separate bathrooms and toilets but they were small. We were not allowed to shower longer than 30 seconds. We had only to run through the shower and out the other end. There was no spare time for talk or relaxation. We awoke at 6:30 A.M. or earlier at times, did hard labor and heavy construction work and cleaning until late afternoon. After [a] quick shower and change of clothing, we had to audit each other and 'rehabilitate' ourselves until 10:30 P.M. or later each evening. There were no days off, four weeks a month. We ate our meals in the garage or at times in the dining rooms AFTER normal meals had ended. Our food consisted of leftovers from staff. On occasions which seemed like Christmas, we were able to prepare ourselves fresh meals if leftovers were insufficient (Whitfield, 1989: 7-8).

A similar, but more passionate, description exists of the Fort Harrison RPF in the account written by a woman using the pseudonym Nefertiti (1997), who in turn reproduces excerpts from ten other former Scientologists who related RPF experiences aboard two Scientology ships, FLAG at Clearwater, Florida, Pacific Area Command in Los Angeles, and Happy Valley near Hemet, California.

Certainly the amount of work that RPF members performed varied according to era and circumstances, but in some instances conditions became unbelievably bad. For example, In a California RPF, former inmate Pat reported that her RPF crew "worked shifts of thirty hours at a time" (Kent Interview with Pat, 1997: 25). Her RPF team would "start working in the morning and we would work all night into the next morning and then we worked through the next day until we got our thirty hours and then we'd go to sleep" (Kent Interview with Pat, 199: 25).

The most extensive description of the RPF at Scientology's facility near Hemet, California appears in a sworn declaration by former Sea Org member Andre Tabayoyon (1994). From comments that Bavaria's Minister of the Interior, Dr. Gunther Beckstein, made in a January 15, 1997 press release, it is clear that he is familiar with this declaration. Tabayoyon stated that he spent approximately six

years in the RPF during his 21 years in the organization (A. Tabayoyon, 1994: 7, 8). In the RPF program that he was on beneath Scientology's Cedars Sinai Hospital building in Los Angeles, he allegedly slept on "a slab inside the vault of the morgue." In the RPF in the property near Hemet, he stayed in "the chicken coop dormitory... which still smelled of chicken coup droppings [sic]" (A. Tabayoyon, 1994: 18; see Kent Interview with Young, 1994: 20).

While nearly all RPF accounts speak of guards who were posted to prevent people from escaping the program, Tabayoyon reported that the guards at the Gilman Hot Springs facility (where Sea Org staff lived and an RPF operated) were armed (A. Tabayoyon, 1994: 25). Indeed, he helped to construct the facility's security system, which included "the perimeter fence, the ultra razor barriers, the lighting of the perimeter fence, the electronic monitors, the concealed microphones, the ground sensors, the motion sensors and hidden cameras...." He also said that he trained guards in the use of force, including the use of weapons, many of which had been purchased with "Church" money and are not registered (A. Tabayoyon, 1994: 15, 16).

This facility (which sometimes is called "Gold" and other times "Hemet" in various documents) is less than a two hour drive from Los Angeles and Hollywood, and on its property apparently are a number of facilities that Scientology's celebrities use. Part of the labour used to build an apartment for Scientologist and actor Tom Cruise allegedly was from the RPF (A. Tabayoyon, 1994: 53). As Tabayoyon himself stated, "[u]sing RPFers to renovate and reconstruct Tom Cruise's personal and exclusive apartment at the Scientology Gold base is equivalent to the use of slave labor for Tom Cruise's benefit" (A. Tabayoyon, 1994: 53). In one instance, when Cruise's apartment was damaged by a mud slide, "prison [i.e., RPF] slave labor" personnel allegedly were "worked almost around the clock" to repair it (A. Tabayoyon, 1994: 53).

5) The RPF's RPF

More extreme than the RPF is the RPF's RPF, an institution even described in one of Scientology's own dictionaries. According to the dictionary definition, the first inmate sent to the RPF's RPF was because the person "considered their [sic] RPF assignment amusing" (Hubbard, 1976: 451). Various accounts, however, also suggest that people who did not perform according to acceptable RPF standards ended up in this extreme program.

Hubbard succinctly outlined the ten restrictions under which inmates on the RPF's RPF operated. Six of the ten were:

- (1) segregated from other RPF members with regard to work, messing [eating], berthing [sleeping], musters [group assemblies] and any other common activity.
- (2) no pay.
- (3) no training.
- (4) no auditing.
- (5) may only work on mud boxes in the E/R [engine room]. May not work with RPF members. [Elsewhere Hubbard identified mud boxes as "those areas in the bilge which

collect the mud out of the bilge water" (Hubbard, 1976: 341)].

(6) six hours sleep maximum (Hubbard, 1976: 451).

Andre Tabayoyon, who spent 19 days on the RPF's RPF, summed up the program by saying that it "is designed to totally destroy any individual determinism to not want to do the RPF" (A. Tabayoyon, 1994: 9).

Accounts both about people who were on the program, and from inmates of the program itself, are chilling, and they reinforce Tabayoyon's summation. Monica Pignotti, for example, spoke to me about her five days in the RPF's RPF in 1975. She related that:

[A]t that point I was in a horrible depression and I was crying almost all the time all day long and I'm sure I was in a state where I probably would have been hospitalized if... any mental health professional had seen me then 'cuz I was severely depressed. But they sent me to the RPF's RPF and I was made to go down and clean muck from the bilges. That was my job all day long was to do that, getting up at four in the morning and -- it was all day long. And then I was allowed a short meal break to eat by myself and then I had to go right back down there and I had to clean all this sludge out and then paint, paint it.... [The person in charge of the RPF's RPF] would make the prisoners write these essays until they got it right, until they were saying what the group wanted them to say. So that was where I really snapped -- where I went into this state of complete -- where I didn't feel anything any more after that. I was completely numbed out and I'd do whatever they said and I didn't rebel any more after my experience on the RPF. I stopped rebelling for a while (Kent Interview with Pignotti, 1997: 26; see Pignotti, 1989: 28-29).

Nefertiti reported speaking with a woman in her 'thirties on the RPF's RPF whose ankles were chained together while she was performing a "nasty" job in the basement of the Fort Harrison Hotel in Florida (Nefertiti, 1997: 3). Finally, Dennis Erlich reported that, for the first day or two of his time on the program in the basement at the Fort Harrison, he was locked in a wire cage and had a guard outside the room (Kent Interview with Erlich, 1997: 8).

A final word must be said about the RPF, the RPF's RPF, and children. Some evidence exists that children may be subject to these programs. Monica Pignotti, for example, reported to me that she was an RPF inmate along with a twelve year old girl (Kent Interview with Pignotti, 1997: 30), and a posting in the <alt.religion.scientology> news group by Steve Jebson stated that he had seen children on the RPF and one child (whom he named) on the RPF's RPF (Jebson, 1997). Finally, a poorly reproduced document from Scientology's Pacific Area Command (circa 1989) spoke about the "need to re-institute the Children's RPF" (Cohee, n.d.).

One hardly has to point out that the RPF and the RPF's RPF are brainwashing programs. Scientology operates them to break the wills of, and correct deviations of, its most committed members, and then to reformulate them into persons whose personalities directly mimic the organizational mould. That mould is itself a reflection of Hubbard's troubled personality. I am fully aware that many of my social scientific colleagues insist that researchers should restrict using the controversial brainwashing term only to situations where there is incarceration and physical maltreatment (Anthony, 1990 :304). The RPF and the RPF's RPF, however, meet these criteria.

These two programs also used forced confessions, physical fatigue, intense indoctrination through extended study of the leader's policies and teachings, humiliation, and fear. Persons familiar with the early history of Scientology are not surprised to see that Hubbard sanctioned a brainwashing program for his followers, since he almost certainly is the author of a brainwashing manual that Scientology printed and distributed for years beginning in 1955.

6) Brainwashing

The manual that Scientology distributed was entitled, *Brain-Washing[:] A Synthesis of the Russian Textbooks on Psychopolitics* ([Hubbard?], 1955). Purported to be an address by the noted Soviet secret police chief, Lavrenti Beria, it was exposed as a fake in 1970 by debunker Morris Kominsky (1970). As Kominsky noted, much of the book was "a vicious attack against the sciences and professions of psychology and psychiatry, as well as against the entire legitimate mental health movement" (Kominsky, 1970: 538). Attacks of this nature remain a central element in Scientology's secular activities, and one former member-turned-critic was almost certainly correct when he stated that the brainwashing book or manual "[w]as secretly authored by L. Ron Hubbard in 1955...." The former member also was absolutely correct about the importance of the brainwashing manual when he concluded that Hubbard "incorporated its methods into his organization in the mid 1960s and beyond" (Corydon, 1996: 107). One thinks automatically of the RPF, but we know for certain that Hubbard had the manual as required reading for members of the Guardian Office (Anonymous, 1974).

One chapter of the brainwashing book is especially pertinent to understanding Scientology's contemporary tactics against Germany and its officials. The organization's attacks on the national character of the country; its continual attempts to paint current events in the context of 1930s Nazism (for example, *Freedom Magazine*, [1996?]); its efforts to discredit current German government officials by linking them to Nazism through (so I was told) their older relatives; and charges that German churches campaign against Scientology for fear of losing members to it (Church of Scientology International, 1997: 101); all seem to have general parallels with tactics advocated in the brainwashing manual.

I will read the relevant passages, but I will do so making similar substitutions of words in the text that Kevin Anderson made in his 1965 report to the Australian Parliament (Anderson, 1965: 198-199). By doing so, Anderson dramatically illustrated his claim that "a great part of the manual is almost a blue print for the propagation of [S]cientology" (Anderson, 1965: 84). Whenever the manual says "psychopolitics" or "psychopolitical," I will say "Scientology." I replace "psychopolitician" with "Scientologist," and I replace "Communist Party Members" with "Sea Org members." With these substitutions in mind, I now quote excerpts from Chapter VIII entitled, "Degradation, Shock and Endurance:"

Defamation is the best and foremost weapon of [Scientologists] on the broad field. Continual and constant degradation of national leaders, national institutions, national practices, and national heroes must be systematically carried out, but this is the chief function of [Sea Org Members] in general, not the Scientologist ([Hubbard?], 1955: 41).

....

The officials of government, students, readers, partakers of entertainment, must all be indoctrinated, by whatever means, into the complete belief that the restless, the ambitious, the natural leaders, are suffering from environmental maladjustments, which can only be healed by recourse to [Scientology] operatives in the guise of mental healers.

By thus degrading the general belief in the status of Man, it is relatively simple, with co-operation from economic salients being driven into the country, to drive citizens apart, one from another, to bring about a question of the wisdom of their own government, and to cause them to actively beg for enslavement.

....

As it seems in foreign nations that the church is the most ennobling influence, each and every branch and activity of each and every church must, one way or another, be discredited.... Thus, there must be no standing belief in the church, and the power of the church must be denied at every hand.

The [Scientology] operative, in his programme of degradation, should at all times bring into question any family which is deeply religious, and should any neurosis or insanity be occasioned in that family, to blame and hold responsible their religious connections for the neurotic or psychotic condition. Religious must be made synonymous with neurosis and psychosis. People who are deeply religious would be less and less held responsible for their own sanity, and should more and more be relegated to the ministrations of [Scientology] operatives.

By perverting the institutions of a nation and bringing about a general degradation, by interfering with the economics of a nation to the degree that privation and depression come about, only minor shocks will be necessary to produce, on the populace as a whole, an obedient reaction or an hysteria ([Hubbard?], 1955: 43-44).

With only a little imagination, one can see that the brainwashing manual seems to provide an outline for Scientology's battle plan against Germany.

Through, for example, innumerable publications such as *Freedom* magazine, Sea Org members and other Scientologists produce a barrage of material that denigrates the nation and its leaders. German Scientologists are now able to label its political leaders as violators of human rights, thanks in part to criticism that the United States Department of State levelled against the country's attempts to curb the organization and boycott films starring American Scientologists (Lippman, 1997). On the economic front, critics might see events in the Hamburg real estate market as evidence of Scientologists' attempt to cause what the brainwashing manual called "privation and depression" among apartment renters. Reportedly Scientologists bought rental properties and turned them overnight into cooperatives. The chairperson of the Hamburg branch of the German real estate agents association, Peter Landmann, told the *New York Times* that these Scientologists were "using disreputable methods to frighten and coerce the renters into buying them back at high prices" (Whitney, 1994: A12). Finally, of course, Scientology continues to blast psychiatry, attempting to

link it with both Nazism and current German efforts against it. Hubbard, or whomever wrote the brainwashing manual's instructions about how to degrade a country, undoubtedly would be proud of his followers' public relations successes thus far.

Indeed, from a public relations perspective, Scientology may be winning the battle, at least back in North America. When, for example, the prestigious *New York Review of Books* published an article on "Germany vrs. Scientology," the German reporter (who writes for the *Suddeutsche Zeitung*) strongly implied that government officials were scapegoating Scientology. His argument seems to be that attacks against the group have become part of a moral panic, when in fact other social issues, such as double-digit unemployment, declining state generosity, tensions over European union, and problems with national identity, should be the real areas of concern (Joffe, 1997: 20). This argument, however, as well as the American State Department human rights criticisms, shows a profound and increasingly inexcusable ignorance of disturbing if not dangerous abuses that occur as routine Scientology policy against many of its members.

7) Scientology and Probable Human Rights Abuses

Even to concede that Scientology may be a religion to many of its adherents, the basis for German governmental opposition to it has nothing to do with what people believe. It has everything to do with what German government officials know that the organization does. Consequently, this presentation concentrated heavily on the organization's social-psychological assaults on many of its most committed members, and I barely mentioned Scientology's ideological system. The assaults that I described are ones that German government officials know about, and with that knowledge they have no choice other than to see Scientology as a threat to the democratic state. Were officials to grant Scientology religious status, then even more citizens than already now do would increase their involvement to the point of becoming Sea Org members, and then at least some of them would be subject to the brutal conditions and programs that I described. With Germany's unique experiences with both National Socialism and Communism, it is unthinkable that responsible officials would facilitate the operation of a totalitarian organization that throws its members into forced labour and re-indoctrination programs.

One of the tragedies in this debate is that normal Scientologists will feel persecuted and threatened. These people likely know nothing about RPF conditions, and they genuinely feel that Scientology involvement has benefited them. The organization to which they belong, however, appears to be committing serious human rights abuses. Consequently, I conclude my article by highlighting areas of concern raised by examining the United Nations' 1948 resolution entitled *The International Bill of Human Rights* (United Nations, 1996b), and the 1996 *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (United Nations, 1996a).

First, Scientology's procedures involving committees of evidence, sec checking, gang bang sec checking, and the two RPF programs almost certainly violate Articles 9 and 10 of the *Bill*. Article 9 protects people against "arbitrary arrest, detention or exile" while article 10 guarantees "a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his [sic] rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him" (United Nations, 1996: 23).

Second, Scientology's punishment of members for merely discussing the merits of Hubbard's teachings, as well as its invasive probing into people's thoughts through sec checking, almost certainly violate Articles 18 and 19 of the *Bill* that deal with both "the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion" and "the right to freedom of opinion and expression" (United Nations, 1996: 25).

Third, the various Scientology practices and procedures that I discussed may violate Article 17 of the *Bill*, which states that "[n]o one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation" (United Nations, 1996: 49).

Fourth, the conditions of the RPF and the RPF's RPF almost certainly violate Article 7 of the *Covenant*, which discusses "the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work..." (United Nations, 1996a: 38). The article specifically identifies fair wages, "[a] decent living for themselves and their families..., [s]afe and healthy working conditions..., and [r]est, leisure, and reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay...." (United Nations, 1996a: 38). Indeed, many Sea Org jobs themselves may not meet these reasonable standards of propriety, safety, and fairness.

Fifth and finally, the extreme social psychological assaults and forced confessions that RPF and RPF's RPF inmates suffer almost certainly violate Article 12 of the *Covenant*, which recognizes "the right of everyone to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health" (United Nations, 1996a: 18).

These and probably other serious human rights issues swirl around Scientology programs that have tax exemption and operate within the boundaries of the United States. With these serious issues in mind, the American human rights criticism of Germany's opposition to Scientology is the height of diplomatic arrogance. By granting Scientology tax exemption, the United States government is cooperating with an organization that appears to put citizens from around the world at significant mental health and perhaps medical risk. While in no way do I want my remarks to be taken as a blanket endorsement of the German government's rhetoric or tactics, on the battle with Scientology the government has the high moral ground.

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