

THE CREATION OF “RELIGIOUS” SCIENTOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the evolution of L. Ron Hubbard’s presentation of Dianetics as a mental health science to Scientology as a religion in the 1950s. It shows how Hubbard came to realize that a religious label likely would protect his alleged healing practices from governmental and medical interference, as well as provide him with tax breaks during a period of heightened financial difficulties. Part of the cosmology that Hubbard developed involved descriptions of priests and psychiatrists impeding the ability of soul-like entities (that he called thetans) from realizing their true nature. In tracing how Hubbard developed religious claims out of a reputed psychotherapy, the article clarifies why critics see this development as mere expediency on Hubbard’s part. Nevertheless, Scientologists are unlikely to know, or much care, about these issues from the early days of its movement.

Keywords

L. Ron Hubbard, Dianetics, Scientology,
thetan, anti-psychiatry, Xenu, Xemu

Among the most complex and mysterious ideologies of the so-called new religions today is Scientology. A multinational conglomerate dedicated to the propagation and implementation of L. Ron Hubbard’s beliefs and ideas, Scientology operated missions in approximately twenty-five countries and had an active membership of at least 75,000 in the early 1990s (Kent 1999a, 147 and n2). (More precise and recent figures are exceeding difficult to acquire.) Aspects of its elaborate ideological system relate to business practices (Hall 1998; Passas 1994; Passas and Castillo 1992), educational techniques, mental health (Wallis 1977), drug rehabilitation, moral values, environmentalism, and religion. Its religious theology and accompanying cosmology are poorly understood by researchers (for an exception see Meldgaard 1992),¹ who fail to appreciate how they motivate

1. One recent overview of Scientology contains a short section on Scientology’s origins and beliefs; however, as primary historical sources it included only reprints of two

members, identify societal opponents, and reflect the social and financial pressures that plagued its founder and sole theologian, L. Ron Hubbard, in the early 1950s.

This article documents the multifaceted self-representation of Scientology as a science, a mental health therapy, and a religion during its founding years. In doing so it pays particular attention to the social, economic, and ideological pressures on Hubbard that motivated him to claim religious status for his ideas. Consequently, the study provides an in-depth examination of the birth of a controversial faith, and it complements an earlier analysis that viewed Hubbard's religious representations of Scientology as attempts to protect his followers from charges that they were practising medicine without licenses (Kent 1996, 30–33). The first part of this study presents the ideological content of Dianetics and its offspring, Scientology, and the second part identifies social and economic pressures that were significant factors in Hubbard's creation of Scientology's religious claims. It concludes with some thoughts about the development of religious beliefs out of purely secular concerns, and underscores the contemporary difficulties brought about by an historical understanding of Scientology's early years.

The basic belief system of Dianetics

Hubbard had been discussing and developing his ideas at least since the summer of 1949 (see Miller 1987, 147–150; Winter 1987, 3). He first published his ideology of mental health techniques in the third week of April 1950, in the May issue of *Astounding Science Fiction*. His *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* followed shortly after (May 9, 1950) and differed from it to some degree.² The book's initial popularity owed much to the manner in which it addressed issues that were salient both to the science fiction community of its day as well as to the wider society.³

Hubbard books (Bromley and Bracey 1998). The article's reliance on Scientology-produced public relations material to glean some of its information led the authors to accept a few inaccuracies in that short section, beginning with the incorrect claim that "Hubbard's spiritual discoveries began in 1945, while he was recovering from injuries while serving as a naval officer that left him crippled and blind" (Bromley and Bracey 1998, 143). One of the very sources that they cite however, Russell Miller's biography, pointed out the inaccuracy of this statement (Miller 1987, 110).

2. The most obvious difference was that the *Astounding Science Fiction* article did not use the term, "engrams," to describe painful and debilitating events from the past, but instead called them "norns" (Hubbard 1950a, 70).
3. For example, one author, who was informed about science fiction, concluded that Hubbard's *Dianetics* appeared to offer a solution to the problem of human irrationality that science fiction fans believed always thwarted scientific and technological

Hubbard’s initial ideological model was not religious, and he specifically asserted that it was scientifically based. The title of his book, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (1950), suggested as much. Likewise, in the book’s opening pages, Hubbard announced:

the first contribution of dianetics is the discovery that the problems of thought and mental function can be resolved within the bounds of the finite universe, which is to say that all data needful to the solution of mental action and Man’s endeavour can be measured, sensed and experienced as scientific truths independent of mysticism or metaphysics. (1950b, x)

In the body of the book itself, Hubbard insisted that “once [a person] has used dianetics, he will not fall back to mystic efforts to heal minds” (Hubbard 1950b, 167). He made these claims three and a half years before he became involved with the founding of Scientology churches (see Attack 1990, 138). Part of *Dianetics*’s appeal was that its goal of “clear” was one “which some patience and a little study can bring about” (Hubbard 1950b, 17). No indication exists that Hubbard wanted Dianetics to be considered anything other than a science when he first presented it to the world.

Hubbard’s dissection of the human mind involved a series of claims that he insisted were developed through careful research, although he never produced copies of any research protocol. He asserted that people had a “sub-mind” that he called the “reactive mind” (Hubbard 1950b, xii). This reactive mind “is *always* conscious” (Hubbard 1950b, xii [*italics in original*]) and records (rather than remembers) all that occurs. It then impinges recordings (called “engrams”) of “physical pain and painful emotion” onto “the ‘conscious’ mind” (called the “analytical mind” [Hubbard 1950b, xiv, see 60]) when catalytic situations occur in relation to the one in which the reactive mind first recorded the pain (Hubbard 1950b, xiii). The third type of mind that an individual possesses is, according to Hubbard, the “somatic mind,” which is akin to science’s autonomic nervous system because it “takes care of the automatic mechanisms of the body, the regulation of the minutiae which keep the organism running” (Hubbard 1975a, 393; see 1950, 45; Bromley and Bracey 1998, 144–145).

Dianetics therapy involved a partner or Dianetics therapist (called an “auditor”) placing “the patient in various periods of the patient’s life merely by telling him to go there rather than remember” (Hubbard 1950b, xiv). By returning to these painful occurrences, a “patient” was supposed to have eventually erased the engrams along with their negative effects

progress (Berger 1989, 136). Other commentators have noted the combination of science fiction and occult orientations in Hubbard’s *Dianetics* (Whitehead 1987, 54) as well as his selective appropriation of popular psychological concepts from the period (Wallis 1977, 31–38).

and attains a state called “clear,” in which “full memory exists throughout the lifetime” (Hubbard 1950b, xv). Furthermore, a clear allegedly was entirely free from “any and all psychoses, neuroses, compulsions and repressions (all aberrations) and [...] any (self-generated) diseases referred to as psycho-somatic ills” (Hubbard 1950b, 8). IQ also “soars” (Hubbard 1950b, 90). Hubbard even claimed that Dianetics techniques could recover “prenatal engrams” (Hubbard 1950b, xvii; for a more extensive summary see Atack 1990, 109–113). (In contrast to the reactive and analytic minds, the somatic mind plays a minor role in both Dianetics and Scientology systems.)

Within months after the appearance of Dianetics, practitioners were claiming to find engrams caused by experiences in past lives (see Whitehead 1974, 579). By October 1950, Joseph Winter (who was a medical doctor) resigned from the Board of Directors of the Hubbard Dianetic Research Foundation in New Jersey, partly because he was “alarmed by the auditing of ‘past lives,’ which he considered [to be] entirely fanciful” (Atack 1990, 115; see Winter 1987, 188–191). On this same issue Hubbard also ran into trouble with one of his early financial backers, Don Purcell, apparently during the summer of 1951 (Miller 1987, 197; see Hubbard 1951, 61 n*).

Increasingly, however, belief in (and Dianeticists would insist, experience of) past lives became part of Hubbard’s unfolding pseudo-scientific ideology, and he discussed the concept in his second Dianetics book, *Science of Survival* (Hubbard 1951, 61; see Miller 1987, 194). The next year (1952), Hubbard was insisting that auditors would achieve only mediocre results unless they took patients (now called “pcs” or “preclears”) “prior to this lifetime” (Hubbard 1975a, 6). By 1958, it appears that much of Scientology’s “Advanced Clinical Course” at England’s Hubbard Association of Scientology International (HASI) “was devoted to students investigating each other’s past lives” (Miller 1987, 231).⁴ He insisted, however, that “[p]ast lives are not ‘reincarnation’ [...] There evidently is no gradient

4. Hubbard himself frequently discussed his own alleged past lives (Miller 1987, 197, 281, 362). Several of his past lives apparently took place on different planets (see Miller 1987, 246) and in one he claimed to have been “‘a race car-driver in the Marcab civilization’” (Mary Maren, quoted in Miller 1987, 278). According to Hubbard’s *Technical Dictionary*, the Marcab Confederacy consisted of “various planets united into a very vast civilization which has come forward up through the last 200,000 years, [and] is formed out of the fragments of earlier civilizations. In the last 10,000 years they have gone on with a sort of a decadent kicked-in-the-head civilization that contains automobiles, business suits, fedora hats, telephones, spaceships. A civilization which looks almost [like an] exact duplicate but is worse off than the current U.S. civilization” (Hubbard 1975a, 243).

scale of advance, as in theories of reincarnation, but there are cases on record of preclears who got well after a life as a dog or other animal was run out by a Scientologist” (Hubbard 1958, 18, 18–19).

The secular reasons that Dianetics auditors uncovered past lives – which became central to Scientology’s pseudo-scientific and religious claims – stemmed from social-psychological and ideological pressures that likely existed inside Dianetics and Scientology centres from 1950 to 1953. These pressures almost certainly contributed to clients believing that they were discovering past life information. Wallis, for example, suggested that “coaching the pre-clear may have had an important part in the effective running of Dianetic auditing” and that “[i]t is not hard to see how a conviction of past lives would develop out of Dianetic technique” (1977, 41, see 42n1). What may have happened is that failures to clear individuals who had examined what they conceived were their basic engrams propelled them to believe that “there *must* necessarily be an earlier incident to resolve” (Wallis 1977, 90 [italics in original]). Some evidence suggests that Hubbard “briefly resisted the notion that this material [in pre-clears’ cases] emanated from past lives” (Wallis 1977, 90), but by June 1952 (and probably much earlier) Hubbard himself was leading suggestible people into past life recalls involving lives in other galaxies.⁵

Hubbard and his followers could have maintained their discussions of reputedly past life data strictly within a pseudo-scientific Dianetics framework (see Miller 1987, 203). In his August 1, 1951 book *Science of Survival*, for example, Hubbard claimed that “evidence is growing – good evidence of a highly scientific nature on a much more practical level than parapsychology – that the human soul does exist in fact” (Hubbard 1951, 7). That discussion, however, already had become commonplace among Dianeticists, many of whom nonetheless had become disappointed with their ideology’s techniques and results (see Wallis 1977, 87). Hubbard’s eventual translation of allegedly past life recall into an ideology of the soul allowed him to make claims about the superiority of Scientology over Dianetics as part of his efforts to regain “control over the Dianetics community” (Wallis 1977, 91). It also allowed him to reach out to new

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5. Volney G. Mathison, for example, described Hubbard’s auditing of him during the June, 1952 Scientology conference: “Ron audited me one afternoon, and through his remarkable methods of interrogation, caused me to disclose – theta-wise – both to him and to myself, that I am one of the principal inventors of a weapon allegedly styled as a ‘Facsimile One’ machine, which I first developed in the T-8 Galaxy forty-two trillion years ago, and which, as a member of the Eighth Invader Corps, I used twenty trillion, two and one-eighth years later to take over an entire system of planets in the Arcturus Area” (Mathison 1954, 5).

members of the public who were outside of science fiction fandom (Spencer 1981, 171, see 181).

In addition to past lives, another reputed discovery that remains central to Scientology practice to this day is the utility of using an electro-psychometer (called by members an E-meter) when auditing (Atack 1990, 126; Miller 1987, 201). This device supposedly gives accurate measurements of emotions through small electrical currents that flowed through the machine's wires into tin cans that the pre-clear held and which registered on a dial that was adjustable to sensitivity. Hubbard introduced it to the Dianetics community on March 3, 1952, and very quickly his followers were using these machines to unravel the reputed engrams of current (or "present-time") and past lives.

The basic belief system of Scientology

Thetans and creation

Following on the heels of the E-meter's introduction was Hubbard's self-proclaimed revelation that he had discovered the human soul, the study of which he called Scientology. Dianetics, Hubbard claimed, only addressed the body (Miller 1987, 203), but Scientology explored the process of freeing souls (which he called thetans) from their entanglements in the physical universe or material world (called MEST or "matter, energy, space, and time" [Hubbard 1975a, 248; see Wallis 1977, 103–106]).

Nowhere did Hubbard present a concise, coherent description about the formation and evolution of the universe and the thetans in it. I, however, will attempt to systematize Scientology's cosmology, and will do by following its chronological unfoldment as much as possible.

Hubbard's cosmology stated that originally there existed an energy "separate and distinct from the physical universe" called "theta" (Hubbard 1975a, 429). Theta may be the same as Scientology's "eighth dynamic" – the Supreme Being, which "the *science* of Scientology does not intrude into" (Hubbard 1973, 38 [*italics in original*]). Under obscure and poorly described conditions, the single theta blew apart, and individual thetans formed from the explosion. These thetans are spirits or souls, and each one begins its existence having "no mass, no wave-length, no energy and no time or location in space except by consideration [i.e., thought] or postulate [i.e., self-created truth]" (Hubbard 1975a, 432, see 90, 304). In essence, at first these thetans have the same qualities as theta. Hubbard, however, was not clear about how a thetan was different from a static, which "is something without mass, without wavelength, without time, and actually without position" (Hubbard 1975a, 405). Thetans do have, how-

ever, the ability to create, which soon becomes crucial for the unfolding of universes (Hubbard 1973, 55; 1975a, 432).

At some point thetans form their own universes, each of which is called a “home universe” (Hubbard 1975a, 199). The creations of each universe involved “making illusions,” almost as forms of play or game (see Hubbard 1981, 4). In a process that Hubbard again described poorly, one thetan “got a universe and it just ate [the other thetan’s] universe all up. And this is what the mest universe is doing. Evidently it is an expanding universe and it just keeps on eating into everybody’s time and space” (1981, 4; see 1975a, 47).

A number of significant doctrinal developments emerged from the account about thetans. Hubbard claimed, for example, that thetans had to inhabit bodies along with lesser entities known as “theta bodies” or “body thetans.” The uncoupling of thetans from theta bodies became the basis for the secret OT (ie., operating thetan) levels that appeared in the mid-1960s (Atack 1990, 129), and was central to the story that Scientologists read in OT III.

OT III

The events in OT III allegedly occurred 75,000,000 years ago, but Hubbard claimed that he first unravelled them in 1967 (presumably through auditing). He called these events “Incident 2.” Most significant was the solution to overpopulation engineered by Xenu (or Xemu), who was head of a group of seventy-six planets called the Galactic Confederation that each had populations averaging 178 billion. He transported people to Teegeeack (ie., Earth), then set off hydrogen bombs on the major volcanoes (which, of course, killed the people). The people’s souls or “thetans” that survived were transported (both from the Pacific area to Hawaii and from the Atlantic area to Las Palmas, Canary Islands) and grouped together as “clusters.” Xenu’s renegade supporters (elsewhere identified as priests and psychiatrists) implanted the thetans with false and misleading information, some of which involved concepts of God and the Devil. (These implanted clusters are body thetans that the Scientology’s OT level courses aspire to separate and free.) After Xenu’s “crime,” officers who were loyal to the people attacked him but could not capture him for six years. When Xenu was finally apprehended, the thetans punished him by placing him in an electronic jail in a mountain where he remains to this day (text reproduced in Corydon 1996, 357; Corydon and Hubbard 1987, 364; see Atack 1990, 31–32; Lamont 1986, 50–51).⁶

6. Worth noting is that this essential story appears in a book by E. J. Gold (1986, 56–58).

Also contained in this OT material was “Incident 1,” which was an implant that allegedly took place some four quadrillion years ago and was “the gateway to our universe” (Atack 1990, 32). As Jon Atack summarizes it,

the unsuspecting Thetan was subjected to a short, high-volume crack, followed by a flood of luminescence, and then saw a chariot followed by a trumpeting cherub. After a loud set of cracks, the Thetan was overwhelmed by darkness. (1990, 32)

In any case, these alleged body thetans clarify for Scientologists why they can be “clear” but still have emotional or physical problems. In essence, Scientologists believe not only that they have to rid themselves of past life engrams in addition to current life (or “present time”) ones, but also that some of these engrams dated from eons ago and have to be discovered through Scientology techniques. Hubbard’s attitudes about two groups, Christian religious leaders and psychiatrists, become additional, important theological developments connected with Scientology’s doctrines about thetans.

Implants about Christianity

As Hubbard’s cosmology evolved (see Meldgaard 1992, 172–177), it became increasingly clear that these two occupations allegedly had performed the implanting for Xenu. In essence, Hubbard stated the Christian doctrines that emphasized sexual control if not abstinence, humility, and salvation through Jesus’ crucifixion simply were implants designed to prevent the thetan or soul from realizing its true nature (see Hubbard 1954a, 25–26). Neither Hubbard nor his organization widely publicized his beliefs about the harmful roles that implanting priests and psychiatrists played in the cosmological past, nor did they publicize Hubbard’s belief that both occupations continued to implant people in contemporary time.⁷

A related implant was the Christian doctrine of heaven, a place in 1963 (or in Scientology dating AD13 [i.e., thirteen years after the publication of *Dianetics* in 1950]) that Hubbard claimed to have visited. In an *HCOB* (*Hubbard Communications Office Bulletin*), Hubbard announced that he, along with all Scientologists, had been to heaven, but only he was able

Assuming that the OT III has existed in Scientology since the late 1960s, then it well may be that Gold simply appropriated it.

7. In a 1984 *Hubbard Communications Office Bulletin* designed to repair problems associated with aspects of auditing, auditors were required to ask preclears a series of 109 questions, including question 102: “**IN THIS LIFETIME, HAVE YOU BEEN IMPLANTED BY A PSYCHIATRIST OR PRIEST?**”(Hubbard 1984, 9 [capitalization and boldface in original]).

to remember what it was like because he had uncovered the process of implanting as it twice occurred to him many trillions of years ago. Regarding his alleged first visit, Hubbard described the Gates of Heaven, the statues of saints that led up to them, and the marble angels that sat at the gates’ pillars. The grounds of heaven were like Pasadena, California’s Bush [*sic*: Busch] Gardens. The implanting supposedly took place in a town, which included a sidewalk, bistro, train tracks, bank, and several other structures.

Regarding the second supposed visit, heaven was much shabbier, with the vegetation missing, the pillars dilapidated, and the saints and angels absent. Hell appeared as a pit or hole that Hubbard compared to an archaeological dig. An effigy of Joseph existed that was leading a donkey that carried Mary and the baby Jesus from Bethlehem. In any case, heaven was not a place floating in the sky but instead was on a mountain of a planet, the name of which Hubbard did not provide (Hubbard 1963a).

In both cases, the implants seem designed to make thetans not only forget about past lives but also believe that being in heaven was a desirable goal (Hubbard 1963a, 2–3). His alleged discoveries about the true purpose of heaven explained why there has been such religious insanity throughout history (Hubbard 1963a, 4). Further publications discussed additional implants, including some that supposedly took place in trains, others that occurred when thetans met the Marcab Invasion force in this universe (Hubbard 1963c), and still others that always took place in the presence of either gorillas or gorilla symbols (Hubbard 1963b).

Admittedly, non-Scientologists have difficulty understanding or appreciating much of this (to use Scientology’s term) “space opera” cosmology,⁸ and several commentators on Hubbard have suggested that reputed

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8. Probably because of the significance that events in other universes and eons play in Scientology cosmology, the organization’s official dictionary carries the term “space opera” and reproduces the definition from *Websters [sic] Third International Dictionary*: “a novel, motion picture, radio, or television play, or comic strip usually of a stock type featuring interplanetary travel, beings of outer space often in conflict with the people of earth and other similar science fiction themes” (Hubbard 1975a, 398). Observers of Scientology likely would feel that the cosmology reflects Hubbard’s work as a science fiction writer, while Hubbard himself presumably felt that his science fiction stories as well as those of other writers were actual representations of past life experiences. Hubbard made comments along these lines in his Philadelphia Doctorate Course Lecture on the evening of December 11, 1952. Speaking about science fiction writers, Hubbard informed his audience, “[w]ell, now, take one of these space opera writers, if he’s really been on the track – he won’t write about it if he hasn’t been. He just won’t have the knack. That doesn’t mean you couldn’t be ingeni[o]us enough to invent the whole thing from one end to the other. It just means they don’t. Also they don’t write science fiction if they haven’t been solidly on the track. They’ll write something else – fantasy or something” (1952, 8–9). Later he added, “[a] lot of your bad science fiction

visions such as these and others (specifically including the OT III material) were influenced by his drug abuse.⁹ Nonetheless, one point about the contents of his reputed trips to heaven seems rational and obvious. Among Scientology's cosmic enemies were people whose Christian religious views pitted them against his organization's own religious claims. Cosmology, it seems, paralleled real life, as social scientists would expect.¹⁰

Implants from cosmic devils: psychiatrists

Hubbard's hatred of psychiatrists was unbounded, and he battled them and other mental health professionals in countries around the world through a Scientology-sponsored group called the Citizens Commission on Human Rights (Kent 1999a, 150–151, 157; see Bowles 1996, 1013–1015) and, since 1984, the International Association of Scientologists (International Association of Scientologists 1993). He despised their therapies, he reviled them for some doctors' use of psycho-surgery (such as lobotomies), he excoriated them for using electroshock therapy, and he coveted their alleged influence over governments and education. In all areas of mental health, Hubbard was convinced that psychiatry had destructive influence, and he was determined to replace that influence with Scientology.

Viewing Dianetics, Hubbard seems to have believed his techniques as worthwhile mental (and often physical) health techniques (see Kent 1996, 30–33). In *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, Hubbard began his public attack on the medical (and especially the psychiatric) professions in a manner that both condemned their techniques and invited them to adopt the techniques of his new pseudo-scientific ideology. As he did throughout the rest of his life, Hubbard condemned psychiatrists for their alleged use of various forms of electric shock and psycho-surgery (see Hubbard 1950b, 151). Members of the psychiatric community,

is written by boys who [...] they were just bad the whole track, but they weren't very bad. The guys who really write the good stuff and so forth, boy, were they horrible!" (1952, 9). He quickly denied that he had written science fiction, insisting that his work in that genre "doesn't classify as science fiction" because his stories were "straight off the record [ie., whole track]. No fiction to them, really. They're hopped up; that's about all" (Hubbard 1952, 9, 10).

9. Many people who knew Hubbard personally attest to his drug abuse. See Atack 1990, 171; Corydon and Hubbard 1987, 288, 300, 303; and Miller 1987, 266.
10. Hubbard apparently believed that some of the implants which had occurred in the far reaches of the past also occurred (as he would have said) in "present time." In the 1984 "False Purpose Rundown Auditor Course," Hubbard instructed auditors to ask pcs (preclears) whether a psychiatrist or priest had given them implants in their current lives (Hubbard 1984, 11). The definite implication from his question was that psychiatrists and Christian priests did implanting in past lives.

however, replied in a series of stinging book reviews. While a couple of reviews by medical doctors were favourable (F. L. 1950, 45–46; Wolffe 1951, 70), others hammered or ridiculed Hubbard’s book and the therapeutic techniques that it outlined (see Fishbein 1950). A critical review, for example, in the October, 1950 issue of *American Scientist* concluded:

[a]ny intelligent reader with scientific orientation will find serious flaws in the Hubbard logic and will be aware of the fundamental shakiness of the substructure. Apart from the highly questionable basic assumptions, there are countless passages in this book which imperil its claim to scientific status. (Gittleson 1950, 607)

Other reviews from the period were even more condemning and sometimes ridiculed Hubbard himself (see Bures 1950, 32; Peck 1950; Rabi 1951; Stearns 1951).

While we cannot be sure that Hubbard read any of these reviews, it seems likely that he realized how chilly if not hostile prominent persons in the medical and scientific communities were to his ideas. Certainly the Dianetics community was aware of these criticisms, and members fought back by “bombarding the offending publications with indignant letters” (Miller 1987, 161). Any doubt, however, in Hubbard’s mind about the medical community’s hostility would have been removed in January 1951, when the New Jersey Board of Medical Examiners accused Elizabeth, New Jersey’s Hubbard Dianetics Research Foundation of “teaching medicine without a licence” (*Elizabeth Daily Journal* 1951; see Miller 1987, 174).

In response, Hubbard’s enmity toward the mental health profession grew to religious, and at times cosmic, dimensions (Church of Scientology 1969, 5; Hubbard, 1982a). In his mind, “psychs” had been causing dysfunctions for eons. Thus, when he identified pain and sex as “two items in this universe that cause more trouble than many others combined,” Hubbard indicted the “psychs” for utilizing them in their techniques (Hubbard 1982b, 1–2).¹¹ Moreover, the first international edition of *Freedom* had a cartoon on the front cover of horned, goateed, cloven-hoofed, pointed-tailed psych devils performing electro-shocks and lobotomies on the peoples of the world (Church of Scientology 1969, 1). Hubbard thought that they had been performing analogous implants throughout people’s past lives.

11. This portrayal resembles his earlier attacks against Christian priests. He did mention, however, priests becoming “flagellants and cut[ting] themselves to pieces with self-whipping” as an example of people who get overwhelmed by pain and addicted to it (Hubbard 1982b, 1).

Emerging religious claims

Unrelated to Hubbard's hostility toward some religions (most notably Christianity) and his attempts to appropriate major traditions (such as Buddhism, Taoism, and parts of Hinduism [see Hubbard 1971, 10–35; Kent, 1996]) into his own ideology, Scientology as a religious system contains some unique supernatural elements. These supernatural elements are central to its cosmology and its soteriology, even if they remain marginal to most aspects of organizational operations.

A fierce debate rages, however, between Scientology and its critics over the sincerity of Hubbard's initial religious claims. Critics insist that the "religion" of Scientology either was Hubbard's scheme designed to avoid taxes or was his attempt to regain lost control over the Dianetics organization. Miller, for example, who played on the phrase, "bare-faced liar" for the title of the biography (*Bare-Faced Messiah*) that he wrote on Hubbard, takes a cynical position (Miller 1987, 199–203). In Miller's words, "Hubbard would introduce Scientology as a logical extension of Dianetics, but it was a development of undeniable expedience, since it ensured that he would be able to stay in business even if the courts eventually awarded control of Dianetics and its valuable copyrights to [...] [former financial backer, Don] Purcell" (1987, 202–203). As we shall see, Hubbard's organizations had been under attack by regulators and creditors, and the representation of Scientology as a religion gave the movement new financial advantages.

Miller uncovered a letter (dated April 10, 1953) in which Hubbard was plotting "to make real money" by "developing the religion angle." In a letter that he wrote in London and sent to Helen O'Brien (who at the time ran an independent but loyal Scientology office in Philadelphia [see Miller 1987, 194; Wallis 1977, 127]), Hubbard insisted:

we don't need a clinic. We want one in operation, but not in name. Perhaps we could call it a Spiritual Guidance Center. Think up a name, will you? And we could put in nice desks and our boys in neat blue, with diplomas on the walls and one, knock psychotherapy into history and, two, make enough money to shine up my operating scope, and three, keep the HAS [Hubbard Association of Scientologists] solvent. It is a problem in practical business.

I await your reaction on the religion angle [presumably referring to a Spiritual Guidance Center]. In my opinion, we couldn't get worse public opinion than we have had or have less customers with what we've got to sell. A religious charter would be necessary in Pennsylvania or N.J. to make it stick. But I sure could make it stick. We're treating the present time beingness. Psychotherapy treats the past and the brain. And brother

that’s religion, not mental science. (Read into court transcript of California Superior Court 1984, 1976–1977; also see Corydon 1996, 330)

Another section of the same letter gave even stronger evidence that Hubbard was plotting to transform Scientology into a financially lucrative enterprise:

if we were able to return there [Phoenix] we’d be able to count on 10 to 15 preclears per week at \$500 for 24 hours of processing. That is real money. I have seen it happen before. We get more preclears at \$850 per week intensive. Charge enough and we’d be swamped. We need that money. We should not long plan to have it siphoned away. (California Superior Court, 1984, 4620)

Although a few of these passages are open to varying interpretations, Miller and other critics (for example, Corydon and Hubbard 1987, 310) interpret them to indicate that Hubbard saw religion as a way to make money and protect his techniques from scrutiny by mental health and medical regulators (and likely tax agents) while trying to replace psychotherapy.

As these critics realized, financial and organizational pressures weighed heavily upon Hubbard in the early 1950s. By early 1953 he had experienced financial and organizational setbacks. In addition to the probe in January 1951 by the New Jersey Board of Medical Examiners, Hubbard lost his Dianetic organization in Wichita, Kansas in February 1952 (Miller 1987, 199–200). Moreover, in December, 1952 Hubbard signed a court agreement to make restitution for over \$9,000 that he had taken from the bankrupt Wichita operation (Miller 1987, 211). Consequently, critics insist that financial difficulties motivated him to seek money-making schemes during the period between 1952 and early 1953.

Moreover, their argument has merit, since it explains Hubbard’s shift toward religion in a manner contrary to his original antipathy toward it in *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*. While it is true that the alleged evidence about past lives emerged early in Dianetics auditing, Hubbard did not give the material a religious interpretation until after he experienced financial strain and membership decline. Arguably, he capitalized on the opportunity that presented itself by the past life material to develop religious claims out of a pseudo-therapy (see Atack 1990, 125).

Hubbard’s introduction of religion into Scientology (which formally occurred at the end of 1953) traces to an April 28, 1953 newsletter in which he tried to chart the continuity from Dianetics to Scientology. In the first two sentences of the piece Hubbard teased his audience with the observation that:

it probably has not occurred to the field [of followers] at large what I am attempting to do in the relationship to theta clearing and aberration. Theta clearing, even to auditors who have taken the course, continues to be something very special, perhaps allied with religion, perhaps a mystic practice, and possibly just another form of Christian Science or plain Hubbardian nonsense. (1976b, 315)

Five days before that newsletter (on April 23, 1953), Hubbard had advised readers that the next issue of *The Journal of Scientology* would contain “*The Factors*, which announces the gaining of the highest echelon planned at this time for Scientology” (Hubbard 1976a, 312).

The Factors appeared in mid-June 1953, and its first ten statements (out of the total thirty) provided Scientology with something like a philosophical creation story:

1. Before the beginning was a Cause and the entire purpose of the Cause was the creation of effect.
2. In the beginning and forever is the decision and the decision is TO BE.
3. The first action of beingness is to assume a viewpoint.
4. The second action of beingness is to extend from the viewpoint, points to view, which are dimension points.
5. Thus there is space created, for the definition of space is: viewpoint of dimension. And the purpose of a dimension is reaching and withdrawing.
6. The action of a dimension point is reaching and withdrawing.
7. And from the viewpoint to the dimension points there are connection and interchange. Thus new dimension points are made. Thus there is communication.
8. And thus there is light.
9. And thus there is energy.
10. And thus there is life. (Hubbard 1976c, 375)

Elsewhere in the publication Hubbard began making tentative connections between Scientology and religion. He formulated the awkward category, “Para-Scientology,” in which he placed what he called “all greater or lesser uncertainties” such as “Dianetics, incidents on the ‘whole track,’ the immortality of Man, the existence of God,” as well as “past lives, mysterious influences, astrology, mysticism, religion, psychology, psychiatry, nuclear physics and any other science based on theory” (Hubbard 1976c, 377). Scientology, Hubbard asserted, was the science of certainty, and Dianetics (like the other beliefs and practices that he mentioned) “is a specialized thing based on theory which, no matter how workable, requires specialized observation” (1976c, 377). Presumably this distinction makes sense to some of Hubbard’s followers.

Apparently propelled by secular reasons to develop in a religious context the past life material that had emerged within Dianetics, and having provided a creation story of sorts to his followers in the doctrinal list called “*The Factors*,” in December 1953 Hubbard incorporated three new churches in New Jersey: the Church of American Science (the parent organization of the other two), the Church of Scientology, and the Church of Spiritual Engineering. Soon afterward (February 18, 1954), Dr. J. Burton Farber incorporated the Church of Scientology of California (*Aberree* 1954, 1, 4; Miller 1987, 220). After early March, 1954, Scientology auditors began receiving ordination in the Church of American Science (see *Aberree* 1954, 4), which had within its chartered creed its intention “[t]o practice the teachings and beliefs and to propagate in accordance with its tenets healing of the sick and suffering by prayer or other spiritual means without the use of drugs or material remedy” (Certificate of Incorporation 1953, 3). In August 1954 Hubbard acknowledged that to some people his recent efforts to connect Scientology with religion “seems [like] mere opportunism, to some it would seem that Scientology is simply making itself bulletproof in the eyes of the law, and to some it might appear that any association with religion is a reduction of the ethics and purposes of Scientology itself” (1976d, 1). He, of course, denied the validity of these charges, asserting connections between Scientology, the Vedas, and Buddhism (Hubbard 1976d). Nevertheless, amidst a growing number of religious assertions, Hubbard still insisted that “Scientology has opened the gates to a better World. It is not a psycho-therapy nor a religion. It is a body of knowledge which, when properly used, gives freedom and truth to the individual” (1976d, 5).

It seems very likely, however, that the charges about opportunism essentially were true, and in his denial Hubbard did not acknowledge the protection that religion would provide his group in California. Evidence about the essential truth of the charges comes from an April 1954, article on Scientology’s new religious direction that appeared in a publication of a break-off Scientology group in Phoenix, Arizona. When discussing the reaction of Phoenix Scientologists to these churches, the article indicated:

[t]he news was received with mixed emotions. Some were outspokenly antagonistic to the idea. Some who’d nursed the glories of self-determinism since Book One [*Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*] couldn’t subscribe to the new idea that the best way to win is to BECOME the enemy [i.e., religion]. Many from California feared that designating Scientology as a religion would classify it with the state’s 9,857,385,237 1/2 cults.

In announcing the action, officials of the H.A.S. [Hubbard Association of Scientologists] stated that there is little doubt but 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. [...]

With the formation of the Church of Scientology in the State of California by Dr. J. Burton Farber of Glendale, and the granting of a charter, auditors in that area can avoid the recent fiasco in which a Pasadena practitioner is reported to have spent 10 days in that city's torture chamber [i.e., prison] for 'practicing medicine without a license'. On March 5, Dr. Farber appeared in Phoenix, and before 30 clinical students, taped a ceremony in which L. Ron Hubbard was made Doctor of Divinity and awarded Certificate No. One. This gives him legal authority to lecture, perform marriages, baptisms, and other religious rites (*Aberree* 1954, 1, 4 [capitalization in original]).

Having had his New Jersey foundation raided in January 1951 for allegedly teaching medicine without a licence, Hubbard likely realized that "the religion angle" would insulate his fledgling Scientology practices from secular regulators.

In his denial of opportunism Hubbard did not indicate how his identification of Scientology as a religion contributed to his diverse marketing efforts for his movement. In the spirit of his earlier comment to O'Brien about making money through a week-long intensive course that would cost \$850.00, Hubbard's Advanced Clinical Course (which already was on its fifth series by May 10, 1954) cost \$800.00 and gave Scientologists the opportunity to receive certificates as a Doctor of Scientology, a Freudian Psycho-analyst, or a Doctor of Divinity (Hubbard 1976e, 32). Through these three degrees Hubbard could market Scientology as a science (through the Doctor of Scientology), a therapy (psychoanalysis), or a religion (through the divinity degree). He told his followers that "[b]ecause of the legal situation in various places, The Church of Scientology [i.e., religion] is your best bet in such areas. Alliance with the Freudian Foundation [i.e. therapy] is possible. Continuing as an HAS associate is possible" Hubbard 1976e, 34). Late the following month (April 30, 1954), Hubbard quipped that "[s]eeing that Scientology can embrace a science, a religion, a psychotherapy, one of the wittier DScns [Doctor of Scientologists] invented Scientocracy, which is 'Government of the people, by the thetans'" (1976f, 54 [capitalization in original]). Presumably Hubbard liked the term and what it represented, since it epitomized the goal of his Scientology movement.

Conclusion: the secular origins of an insistent religion

Economic circumstances and social pressure propelled Hubbard first to transform his Dianetics creation into the grander system of Scientology, then to assert that his scientific creation actually was religious in nature. Critics of the organization who understand these transformations often resist its contemporary religious presentations, believing that it continues to use religion as an expedient device to gain the freedom to operate with minimal governmental interference. Members, however, are almost certainly unaware of the early historical complexities in their organization’s past, and probably care little about them. In that way, Scientologists differ little from others who hold positions of faith – critical historical understanding rarely is a factor influencing people’s beliefs and practices. People’s experiences of their faith’s claims, usually in the context of communities whose members act collectively according to its tenets, play far greater roles in explaining why people consider themselves to be religious.

In Scientology’s case, current members probably care little about the financial pressures that bore down upon the founder of their faith. Scholars of religion, however, may find the information useful (*cf.* Wilson 1990, 282–283), since the flexibility that these religious claims gave Scientology in its early days continues into the present. While religious *practices* (in contrast with religious *beliefs*) are scrutinized by various governmental authorities, religious bodies nonetheless receive financial benefits and social status that few secular bodies can rival. Scientology’s religious claims operate as a legitimating device (see Kent 1990, 397–398, 402). This device allows the organization to engage the wider culture in ways that would be closed to it if it were to adhere to Hubbard’s initial scientific assertions, while at the same time these claims provide it with a degree of protection from some forms of governmental incursion in many Western countries (including taxes; see Saunders and Appleby 1998). Not surprisingly, therefore, countries like Germany that scrutinize Scientology carefully (see Freeman 1997; Hexham and Poewe 1999) pay considerable attention to the complicated historical circumstances of the organization’s initial religious claims, since they view them as expedient devices (see Kent 1999b).

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