

A psychiatrist's perspective on the Scientology organization: Three articles by the late Dr. L. J. West

Psychiatry and Scientology

by L. J. West , M.D.

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The Church of Scientology began as a pseudo-scientific healing cult, Dianetics, described by L. Ron Hubbard, a science fiction writer, in his best-selling book "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health" (1950). At first, Dianetics attracted followers by promising to cure psychiatric and psychosomatic disorders through a procedure called "dianetic auditing," based on pop-psychology, hypnosis, and cybernetics. Hubbard's theory was based on the principle that people can achieve health through abolishing ("clearing") negative influences ("engrams") from their minds by going back (often to the womb) on a "time track" while in a dianetic reverie" in the presence of a listening "auditor." The subject is hooked up to a simple psychogalvanometer, called an "E-meter," which displays galvanic skin responses (GSRs) to questions posed by the auditor. Emotionally charged items are then addressed.

In its early years Dianetics was faced by legal problems related to statutes governing the practice of medicine and other health professions. However, in 1954 Hubbard and his attorneys legally transformed the non-professional psychotherapy of Dianetics into a religious enterprise called the Church of Scientology. Under the privileged status as a religion, there was no stopping the extraordinary expansion of Scientology. Despite a series of scandals and lawsuits, the bizarre little mental healing cult grew into a multi-million dollar, international enterprise, openly peddling its private brand of psychotherapy under the aegis of a religion -- thus remaining immune from malpractice lawsuits (although not from suits for damages or fraud), statutes governing the healing arts, and health professional committees on ethics.

Dianetics auditing offers a series of therapeutic "courses" (with payment by contract in advance) on a path from "pre-release" to "release" to "pre-clear" to the rare but ultimate "clear" (of all engrams) to reach "total freedom." Each treatment course is really a succession of auditing sessions to rid the individual of unwanted attitudes, emotions and behaviors. Auditors themselves receive training through courses of their own. This works

as a sort of pyramid scheme, with thousands of people auditing those at levels below them while being audited by others at levels above them. As in all pyramid schemes, most of the money ends up at the top.

The final challenge for the "clear" Scientologist is to become an "Operating Thetan." Here again there are several further steps for advanced Scientologist to gain greater comprehension of Hubbard's "religious" teachings (grafted on to the original Dianetics) about how aberrant behavior was implanted in humans 75 million years ago by an evil ruler named Xenu from another galaxy. Xenu froze humans and dropped them into volcanoes. After killing humans with hydrogen bombs to combat overpopulation, Xenu collected their spirits as they rose from the volcanoes and implanted the spirits with evil thoughts. Since then, hordes of these evil spirits ("body Thetans") have attached themselves to humans as they are reincarnated through eons of time, and are responsible for all aberrant behaviors.

Enlightenment isn't cheap. Depending on ability to pay (or willingness to mortgage one's future) individuals can spend from initially small amounts up to \$1000 per hour of auditing which is purchased in twelve half-hour blocks called "intensives." It can cost \$50,000 to \$100,000 or more to complete -- if ever -- the numerous courses. There are also hundreds of optional courses based on Hubbard's teachings which can range in price up to \$16,500. A growing number of members now have families within the organization. Their children attend private schools run by Scientologists. Staff members are subject to a detailed code of behavior, with progressive punishments for errors, misdemeanors, crimes, and high crimes.

Scientology portrays itself as a victim of persecution by a conspiracy involving the media, the U.S. government, various medical organizations (including the World Federation of Mental Health and the National Association of Mental Health in Great Britain), and a number of individuals including government officials, some traditional clergy, certain physicians and others who have openly criticized their practices. It has filed hundreds of lawsuits over the years, taking on the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, Internal Revenue Service, and endlessly harassing a number of individual critics. On August 15, 1978 a Federal grand jury in Washington, DC indicted 11 top leaders of the Church of Scientology for conducting a wide range of illegal activities including the infiltration, bugging and burglary of the Justice Department, the IRS, and other federal agencies. Scientology also conducts sophisticated intelligence and propaganda operations against private organizations and individual critics who are classified as enemies or "suppressive persons." A special branch created by Hubbard in

1966 performs "dirty tricks," such as calling in anonymous death threats, smearing individual enemies, sending out phoney compromising letters on the "suppressive person's" letterhead, making anonymous phone calls to the IRS accusing enemies of cheating on their taxes, etc. "Dirty tricks," like more formal public relations campaigns and spurious lawsuits, seem primarily intended by Scientology to destroy the individual enemy's reputation, to harass, discourage and intimidate. All this is justified by Hubbard's policy declaring "suppressive persons" to be "fair game."

The Citizen's Commission on Human Rights (CCHR), one of Scientology's front organizations, is frequently behind both personal and professional attacks against members of the medical profession, especially of the American Psychiatric Association (APA). The CCHR was established in 1969 to investigate and publicize psychiatric "violations of human rights." These "violations" include the profession's use of electroconvulsive therapy, the use of methylphenidate (Ritalin) for children with attention deficit disorder and indeed any use of medication by psychiatrists from Phenothiazemes to Prozac. In fact, they literally declared war on Newsweek for running a cover story on Prozac in a recent issue. For some years the Scientologists organized by the CCHR have staged demonstrations at the time and place of the annual APA meeting. Sometimes airplanes fly overhead pulling banners proclaiming, "PSYCHIATRY KILLS." These protests often attract significant media coverage. Meanwhile, individual critics may be picketed, defamed, abused and harassed in various ways without respite for years.

Another Scientology front group is Narconon, a nationwide enterprise that claims to rehabilitate drug addicts using withdrawal, diet supplements, exercise, sauna sessions and, inevitably, dianetic auditing. They claim an 86% cure rate. So cunning has been their sales pitch that Narconon has attracted considerable extramural support. Two school systems in Idaho hire Narconon agents to instruct their schoolchildren about drugs. In Michigan the Department of Corrections contracted with Narconon to rehabilitate its prisoners. Currently in Newkirk, Oklahoma, Narconon is attempting to obtain a permanent license for a treatment facility at the nearby Chilocco Indian School. Last year in Spain, authorities charged Narconon with swindling clients and luring them into Scientology. Seventy-one people were arrested, including Scientology president Heber Jentsch; hundreds of documents were seized; and a Spanish judge froze bank accounts holding \$900,000. (The suspects were released after a brief jail stay while the investigation continued.)

The medical profession as a whole, and psychiatry in particular, has generally failed to fight back or even take notice of Scientology, its slanders and other depredations. In the

medical literature there are only a handful of references to Scientology. It is clear that the legitimate healing professions have not come to grips with the dangers posed by cults in general, and with the peculiarly hostile and antipsychiatric "church" of Scientology in particular.

Most people know surprisingly little about Scientology. Only a handful of books and articles, and a few journalistic pieces in the popular press, have been written about Hubbard and his organizations. In May 1980 and September 1981, the Reader's Digest published two articles about Scientology and its dangers. Recent informative books on Hubbard are: "L. Ron Hubbard, Messiah or Madman" by Bent Corydon and L. Ron Hubbard, Jr., and "Barefaced Messiah" by Russell Miller. An excellent six-part series about Scientology in the Los Angeles Times began in the edition of June 24, 1990.

Unfortunately, the harms done by Scientology go far beyond attacks on psychiatry or on critics. It is Scientology's membership, and their families, who are the most likely to suffer. Many damaged personas are emerging from the cult, often with symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder including prominent dissociative features. Some of these refugees seek help from psychiatrists. We owe it to them, and to ourselves, to continue investigating the nature of harms done by cults such as the Church of Scientology and to publish our findings regardless of the consequences.

The late Dr. West was professor of psychiatry, School of Medicine, University of California, Los Angeles. Dr. West had granted permission to share this article widely.

Scientology II: CCHR and Narconon

by L. J. West, M.D.

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In a previous article (SCPS Newsletter, July, 1990) I provided an historical account of the Church of Scientology. It is a pseudo-scientific healing cult that was formed in the 1950s, and has grown, with the help of extravagant lies and deliberate deception, into a multimillion dollar, international enterprise. Through its many publications, but especially through its newspaper "Freedom," Scientology regularly defames its critics (such as myself) and praises its friends (such as Thomas Szasz).

Scientology conducts sophisticated intelligence operations and campaigns of

misinformation both directly and through a variety of front organizations. One such entity is the citizen's Commission on Human Rights (CCHR), the main purpose of which apparently is to attack psychiatry, especially in its biological aspects, and to harass, discourage, and intimidate private organizations and individual critics classified as enemies of Scientology. Established in 1969, the CCHR's central office is in Los Angeles with local offices throughout the United States and abroad. The CCHR is frequently behind both personal and legal undertakings directed against members of the American Psychiatric Association and also, of course, against the specialty as a whole. The attempts (and sometimes) successes of the CCHR to discredit the psychiatric specialty are documented in its publications such as "Psychiatric Abuse Bulletin" and "Psychiatry Update." These efforts have included number of lawsuits accusing doctors of negligence in prescribing methylphenidate (Ritalin) for children who, it is alleged, suffered side effects including violent and assaultive behavior, stunted growth, hallucinations, suicidal depression, headaches and nervous spasms. Interestingly enough the two companies that market methylphenidate (Ciba Geigy of Summit, New Jersey, and M.D. Pharmaceuticals of Santa Anna, California) are not named as defendants. The president of CCHR is Dennis Clarke. He is neither a scientist nor a clinician, but nevertheless is an oft-cited "expert" on Ritalin.

The CCHR is also behind recent attempts to force fluoxetine (Prozac) off the market, including letter-writing campaigns to a number of U.S. senators and congressmen and support of the Prozac defense" in which defendants claim their violent behavior was caused by Prozac. Similar tactics by CCHR aimed against electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) have had their effect: for example they have prompted members of the FDA to reconsider the classification of ECT devices from Class II (the category of trustworthy medical devices that require performance standards, such as x-ray machines) to Class III (reserved for devices presenting a considerable risk and requiring premarket approval, such as artificial heart valves). The CCHR sponsored California's present anti-ECT statutes, which have imposed rigid restrictions on the use of ECT and in many cases have resulted in the needless and prolonged suffering of patients thus denied appropriate and necessary treatment. (A small group of ECT patients grateful for the treatment's benefits, their family members, and the Association for Convulsive Therapy, have filed lawsuit, Doe v. O'Connor, to overturn this regulation on constitutional grounds.)

With Clarke often visibly in charge, the CCHR frequently stages demonstrations at the annual APA meetings to protest ECT, Ritalin, and psychiatry in general. At these rallies, seismologists and also disgruntled mental patients recruited for the purpose, picket, carry signs and dispense leaflets denouncing psychiatry, and may disrupt sessions to which they

ain admission. Sometimes they wear t-shirts that declare Psychiatry Kills." Occasionally, airplanes fly overhead towing banners that proclaim the same. Similar demonstrations are sometimes held outside psychiatric facilities, such as the UCLA neuropsychiatric Institute and Hospital. Such a picketing exercise is often covered by the local media, who are notified and invited in advance by those who have planned the scenario.

Another Scientology front group that impacts psychiatry is Narconon, an international enterprise that claims to rehabilitate drug addicts but which is primarily a recruitment program for Scientology. Narconon was founded in the late 1960s by William C. Benitez, while he was in Arizona State Prison. Benitez avowedly based his program on the writings of L. Ron Hubbard. After prison officials granted permission for inmates to participate in the new program, Benitez contacted Hubbard, who saw the potential to increase Scientology revenues and membership, and who offered the resources of the Church of Scientology to expand the program to other prisons and to the public. Soon thereafter, Narconon was incorporated (in 1970), under the direction of Benitez and two high-ranking Scientology staff members, Arthur J. Maren and Henning Heldt. Narconon's main headquarters is now in Los Angeles, but it has centers throughout the United States and elsewhere in the world. In the last few years, some of its facilities in Italy and Spain have been closed and their staff members arrested on charges ranging from fraud and medical malpractice to criminal conspiracy to extort money and unlawful detention. In North America, however, it is still considered business as usual for Narconon.

The five steps in the Narconon program include withdrawal, detoxification, sauna sweat-out, a communication course, and treatment courses in "learning improvement," "gaining control of life" and "living an ethical life," which are identical with Scientology courses compiled from the works of L. Ron Hubbard and taught in Scientology organizations and missions. Each treatment course is really a succession of dianetic auditing sessions, which claim to rid the individual of unwanted attitudes, emotions and behaviors, but which usually lead to contracts for more "advanced" courses costing more and involving the patient more and more deeply in the Church of Scientology.

As noted in the article last July, dianetic auditing offers a series of supposedly therapeutic courses based on Hubbard's science fiction amalgam of pop-psychology, hypnosis and cybernetics. Auditors themselves receive training through courses of their own. This works as a pyramid scheme, with people auditing those at levels below them while being audited by others at levels above them. The courses that make up the Narconon program, like those for other recruits to the Church of Scientology, represent the introductory or lowest level of the pyramid. Jerry Whitfield, a Narcononer-high-ranking staff member of

Narconon El Paso, tells how he was pressured to direct Narconon patients onto the BRIDGE from Narconon to the Church of Scientology (a process diagrammed in procedural manuals) and was required to transmit statistics weekly on the number of new Scientology recruits. Potential recruits are lured by promises that upon completion of all series of courses, they will gain permanent relief from unpleasant emotions and the sufferings of life, be ensured freedom from all past limitations, be immune to psychosomatic disorders, and even to the harmful effects of thermonuclear radiation, etc., etc.

The Scientology detoxification procedure, called the "Hubbard method" within Narconon or the "purification rundown" within Scientology, is supposed to dislodge toxins and drugs from fatty tissues through a rigorous regimen of exercise saunas (up to five hours a day, for up to 30 days), and megavitamins. Aspects of this procedure can be dangerous. For example, the "sweat-out" component requires individuals to perspire up to five hours per day, seven days a week, for approximately 30 days. The risk of dehydration is obvious. At least one death is said to have occurred during "the purification rundown." while the supposed rationale for the sweat-out is to rid the body of fat-stored drugs and chemicals, there is no scientific basis for the technique. Most drugs of abuse are removed from the body by detoxification and excretion through the liver, the kidneys and (in some instances) through the lungs. Although minute quantities of some drugs may be found in sweat, the amount represent such a small fraction of drug elimination that no matter how much an individual is forced to perspire through exercise and saunas, the clearance of most drugs of abuse would not be significantly increased. Nevertheless, Scientologists are aggressively promoting the Hubbard method to public and private employers for use with employees exposed to toxic substances on their jobs.

Narconon is now attempting to license its Chilocco/New Life facility near Newkirk, Oklahoma. This is its second residential drug-treatment center in the United States; all others are for ambulatory cases. In 1989, the Church took over the Chilocco Indian School, with a 25-year lease from the five Indian tribes that share the reservation. At a staged ceremony, local residents were impressed when a "benefactor" -- The Association for Better Living and Education (ABLE) presented Narconon a 200,000 check. In fact, ABLE shares Narconon International's Los Angeles address and is another Scientology front. Licensure of the Narconon facility at Chilocco has been vigorously opposed by community and professional groups. Narconon officials at Chilocco have strenuously denied any link with Scientology.

Narconon is widely touted by its vendors with advertisements going to health

professional of all kinds, and with heavy promotional activities on college campuses. Because of its name probably contrived for this purpose), Narconon is often confused with Narcotics Anonymous (NA) which is a reputable self-help group similar to Alcoholics Anonymous. Narconon's striving for an appearance of respectability is typical of cult-related ventures. Many such cults, like the Church of Scientology, the Unification Church, the Church Universal and Triumphant, and others with plenty of money to employ public relations experts and top law firms, are dangerously close to succeeding in their claims to legitimacy.

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Scientology III

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In previous articles in this newspaper (July, 1990 and May, 1991), I described how the Church of Scientology strives constantly to gain the appearance of respectability and to attract new members, as well as to discredit its critics. What follows is a continuation of that account, with special emphasis on Scientology's front groups, the purposes of which are to improve its credibility with the public, and to create new avenues for recruitment of members and generation of income.

L. Ron Hubbard long believed that celebrities could be useful in helping to promote Scientology. He dictated special efforts to recruit the most viable and successful people. In the 1950s Scientology tried unsuccessfully to recruit such public figures as Marlene Dietrich, Edward R. Murrow, Ernest Hemingway, Greta Garbo and Howard Hughes. Finally in the 1970s the actor John Travolta and the football star John Brodie credited their success to Scientology. Since then other performers such as Tom Cruise and Kirstie Alley have publicly praised the Church. A network of "celebrity centres" has been established to gather and to help in the recruitment of new members. The most famous of these is Hollywood's Celebrity Centre International, formerly the Manor Hotel, an enormous and magnificent mansion built in the 1920s.

One of Scientology's latter-day developments has been its putative detoxification procedure, called "the purification rundown." Within Scientology proper it is employed

along with the continual "dianetic" psychotherapy procedures as a health enhancement process. By Narconon (Scientology's drug rehabilitation front group) this is called "the Hubbard method." It is supposed to dislodge toxins and drugs from fatty tissues through a rigorous regimen of exercise, saunas (up to five hours a day, for up to 30 days), and progressively larger doses of various vitamins. There is no scientific basis for the claims about it. In fact, as noted in the previous article, the prolonged saunas can cause serious dehydration, and the high doses of certain vitamins may also pose a health hazard.

Nevertheless, the Los Angeles-based Scientology front organization named "The Foundation for the Advancement of Science and Education" (FASE), sponsors "scientific" studies (which are mostly conducted by Seismologists and/or Foundation officers) that predictably validate the Hubbard method. One beneficiary of FASE is the HealthMed Clinic, which is also run by Scientologists, and which administers the Hubbard treatment from its offices in Los Angeles and Sacramento. By using FASE-sponsored research findings to legitimate its treatment, HealthMed is able to attract new clients and thus carry out more "studies," to generate more income, and to steer more people into various Scientology courses from which still more money is harvested.

There are a number of other "front" enterprises through which the Church of Scientology attempts to gain influence in society, and even in the health-professional and scientific communities. For example, a branch of Scientology known as WISE (World Institute of Scientology Enterprises) has been pushing selected Scientologists to serve as "management consultants" to various professional entities. The plan calls for these consultants to promote the "management training techniques" of L. Ron Hubbard, and of course at the same time to recruit new members. This is done first by distributing a Scientology personality test (which inevitably detects major personality flaws) to businessmen and their employees, and later by encouraging clients to purchase progressively expensive Scientology courses that will correct those flaws.

Two such management consulting firms are located in the Los Angeles area. One, called The Advisory, operates out of Burbank. Its head, Arthur J. Maren, is also one of Scientology's three signatories on Narconon's Articles of Incorporation. The Advisory solicits physicians through advertisements mailed to their offices, with mailing labels purchased from the Los Angeles County Medical Association. The other (and much larger) company is called Sterling Management Systems. Sterling targets dentists, optometrists, podiatrists, physicians, veterinarians and other health care professionals. Its main offices are in Glendale, but it reaches nationwide through attractively packaged seminars and mailings of expensive brochures. It has been expanding rapidly. A recent

issue of the Los Angeles Business Journal ranked Sterling among the 35 largest management consulting firms in Los Angeles County. Sterling distributes slick promotional materials to health care professionals in private practice, such as "Today's Professional: the Journal of Successful Practice Management," which contains (inter alia) articles by Hubbard excerpted from Scientology documents.

Sterling was founded in 1983 by a Scientologist Gregory K. Hughes, a dentist in Vacaville, California. Dr. Hughes presents himself at "Winning With Dentistry" seminars as an example of how well the Hubbard method works. He doesn't discuss the fact that a number of lawsuits have been brought against him and his dental associates by former patients charging them with negligence and malpractice, or that he has been under investigation by the California Board of Dental Examiners.

Sterling begins by offering a three-hour introductory seminar to members of various health care professions in localities across the nation. At these seminars, attendees receive the basic "management" advice and are strongly encouraged to sign up (along with their spouses) for a week-long array (at a cost of \$12,000 - \$14,000) of courses at Sterling's California facility. The program consists of daily 12-hour sessions (including the Communication Course, an entry level course in Scientology) and a menu of self-taught courses from which to select. Clients are pressured to discuss their personal lives. Personal information divulged during auditing sessions has been used later to pressure clients into paying additional money. Pressure is also exerted on clients to enrol in dianetic auditing courses (starting at \$3,000) aimed at correcting the problems inevitably revealed by the personality test, and to purchase Scientology text-books, framed prints of text from Hubbard's science fiction novels (\$2,000) and \$800 scheduling system, and other items. The additional courses can cost as much as \$5,000 to \$18,000 a piece, and the books can cost several hundred dollars. A case in point follow.

Dr. and Mrs. Robert Geary, a dentist and his wife from Ohio, claim that during a five month period in 1988 they paid Scientology \$200,000. Under constant pressure in the context of a Sterling program, the couple was unable to resist signing checks and arranging for loans to pay for additional seminars. When Dr. Geary tried to break away, Scientologists allegedly kidnapped his wife and held her for two weeks while supposedly helping her to become a "Clear" (a Scientology term for someone without any remaining "engrams" or psychological problems). When Scientology officials refused to give Dr. Geary information about his wife or her whereabouts, he contacted the family lawyer, who promptly called the FBI in Ohio and California. Within a day Mrs. Geary was returned home, but she was "a physical and emotional wreck." The Gearys are now

warning fellow professionals to stay away from Sterling and Scientology. Other traumatized victims of Sterling are also beginning to speak out about their experiences, and to warn of the harms and costs that are never imagined at the outset.

Interest in Scientology has recently been whetted by cover stories in TIME (May 6, 1991) and other periodicals such as CALIFORNIA magazine (June, 1991). However, the cult reacts by greatly increasing its expenditures on public relations and advertising, with full-page ads in USA Today and costly television commercials.

As a psychiatrist who has for many years studied the practices of totalist cults, and noted the often harmful effects of these depredations upon cult members and their families, I continue to observe the actions of the Church of Scientology to recruit new members, silence critics, and gain political and economic influence through deliberate deception, misinformation, concealment, distraction, and harassment. It seems to me that there should be potent social and legal remedies to combat the Church of Scientology, deriving both from the recent evolution of a consumer protection tradition (as exemplified in the health field) and from the older legal matrix of redress for damages and civil wrongs.

Our laws and codes of ethics accept the vulnerability of people to intimidation and deception. They also accept the possibility that relationships of special trust (such as those enjoyed by physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers, attorneys, ministers, etc.) may be improperly exploited. Disillusioned and damaged "consumers" of the Hubbard method should be able to sue not only the Church of Scientology but also Narconon, Sterling Management, and other Scientology front organizations for damages done and losses endured. Of course, in order to win a recovery for such damages or losses, plaintiffs must develop proof, which necessarily requires investigations, witnesses and courtroom procedures. Nevertheless, if proof is forthcoming, then such lawsuits should lead to recovery of damages from which Scientology's claims of exemption as a religion should not make it immune. Ten years ago such suits were very rare. Recently, however, they are on the increase, and some have been successful. Needless to say, Scientology's efforts to discredit expert witnesses for plaintiffs in these cases have been vicious in the extreme.

If lawsuits of this type increasingly lead to recovery of damages, the harms done by Scientology may begin to subside, as victims and their families are provided greater protection under the law. Unfortunately, it is often extremely difficult for people thus damaged to initiate tort actions. However, on behalf of those few who do seek legal remedies, and also on behalf of their families, and also on behalf of all those still in bondage, or not yet recruited but currently exposed to risk, I hope that the legitimacy of

such legal sanctions will increasingly be affirmed by the courts with the help of knowledgeable experts from the health-related professions. Progress in this field depends heavily on the prospect that psychiatrists and other mental health workers will take a greater interest in the psychopathology and psychotherapy of cult victims, as these unfortunate people and their families increasingly turn to us for help.

The late Dr. West was professor of psychiatry, School of Medicine, University of California, Los Angeles. Dr. West had granted permission to share this article widely.