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Scientology : The Thriving Cult of Greed and Power

Monday, May. 06, 1991

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Hubbard wrote one of Scientology's sacred texts, Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health, in 1950. In it he introduced a crude psychotherapeutic technique he called "auditing." He also created a simplified lie detector (called an "E-meter") that was designed to measure electrical changes in the skin while subjects discussed intimate details of their past. Hubbard argued that unhappiness sprang from mental aberrations (or "engrams") caused by early traumas. Counseling sessions with the E-meter, he claimed, could knock out the engrams, cure blindness and even improve a person's intelligence and appearance.

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Hubbard kept adding steps, each more costly, for his followers to climb. In the 1960s the guru decreed that humans are made of clusters of spirits (or "thetans") who were banished to earth some 75 million years ago by a cruel galactic ruler named Xenu. Naturally, those thetans had to be audited.

An Internal Revenue Service ruling in 1967 stripped Scientology's mother church of its tax-exempt status. A federal court ruled in 1971 that Hubbard's medical claims were bogus and that E-meter auditing could no longer be called a scientific treatment. Hubbard responded by

going fully religious, seeking First Amendment protection for Scientology's strange rites. His counselors started sporting clerical collars. Chapels were built, franchises became "missions," fees became "fixed donations," and Hubbard's comic-book cosmology became "sacred scriptures."

During the early 1970s, the IRS conducted its own auditing sessions and proved that Hubbard was skimming millions of dollars from the church, laundering the money through dummy corporations in Panama and stashing it in Swiss bank accounts. Moreover, church members stole IRS documents, filed false tax returns and harassed the agency's employees. By late 1985, with high-level defectors accusing Hubbard of having stolen as much as \$200 million from the church, the IRS was seeking an indictment of Hubbard for tax fraud. Scientology members "worked day and night" shredding documents the IRS sought, according to defector Aznaran, who took part in the scheme. Hubbard, who had been in hiding for five years, died before the criminal case could be prosecuted.

Today the church invents costly new services with all the zeal of its founder. Scientology doctrine warns that even adherents who are "cleared" of engrams face grave spiritual dangers unless they are pushed to higher and more expensive levels. According to the church's latest price list, recruits -- "raw meat," as Hubbard called them -- take auditing sessions that cost as much as \$1,000 an hour, or \$12,500 for a 12 1/2-hour "intensive."

Psychiatrists say these sessions can produce a drugged-like, mind-controlled euphoria that keeps customers coming back for more. To pay their fees, newcomers can earn commissions by recruiting new members, become auditors themselves (Miscavige did so at age 12), or join the church staff and receive free counseling in exchange for what their written contracts describe as a "billion years" of labor. "Make sure that lots of bodies move through the shop," implored Hubbard in one of his bulletins to officials. "Make money. Make more money. Make others produce so as to make money . . . However you get them in or why, just do it."

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