CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-009-01455-7 — L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology Studies
Donald A. Westbrook
Excerpt
More Information

Introduction

For many, the Church of Scientology is associated with a science fiction (SF) writer named L. Ron Hubbard (1911–86), celebrity adherents, esoteric scriptures, allegations of abuse, claims of brainwashing and cult status, a pay-as-you-go theology, an episode on the American TV show *South Park*, and a plethora of anti-Scientology books and documentaries (especially over the past decade). In a 2008 Gallup poll (Jones 2008), 52 percent of Americans surveyed had a "total negative" view of Scientologists. This was the highest of all religious groups surveyed, ahead of both Muslims and atheists, respectively. Only 7 percent of Gallup respondents reported a "total positive" view of Scientology, with 37 percent indicating that they were "neutral" on the topic.

This perception in popular culture is to a large extent a reflection of the literature about the Church of Scientology that has influenced the popular imagination since the 1950s. As the historian J. Gordon Melton put it more than twenty years ago, "Overwhelmingly, books on Scientology have been either publications by the church expounding and defending its position or attacks by its critics" (2000: 79). In more recent years, the academic scene at least has begun to change dramatically, resulting in what James R. Lewis referred to as a "small tsunami of new scholarship" (Lewis & Hellesøy 2017: 2). Massimo Introvigne has used the expression "Scientology studies 2.0" (2017a, 2018a, 2020; Westbrook 2020) to describe the more substantive approaches to the subject that are now emerging on the scholarly landscape.

This Element offers an overview of the history of Scientology studies, a subject that has received increased attention among scholars of new religious movements (NRMs) in particular (see, e.g., Dericquebourg 2017a; Religious Studies Podcast 2018; Doherty 2019; Gregg & Thomas 2019; Westbrook, 2019: 6, 204–06; Cusack 2020; Thomas 2020). In presenting the state of this field, I address problems of access and the place of academics in the Scientological imagination. I also turn to possible productive paths forward for would-be researchers of L. Ron Hubbard, Dianetics, and Scientology. This short work cannot and does not address all of the controversies associated with Hubbard and the church (see, e.g., Reitman 2011; Rathbun 2013; Wright 2013; Miller 2014), but rather is intended to help researchers navigate an academic subfield that continues to grow and develop in sophistication. Indeed, I have written this Element with graduate students and scholars primarily in mind, particularly those with a background in religious studies or a related interdisciplinary field such as history, sociology, or popular culture, and hope that any reader with an academic interest in Scientology will find it useful.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press and Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
978-1-009-01455-7 — L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology Studies
Donald A. Westbrook
Excerpt
More Information

Section 1 surveys the history of academic research and also introduces some of the terminological issues that confront researchers of the subject. Section 2 is more ethnographic, drawing on my fieldwork with the Church of Scientology before turning attention to how Hubbard is perceived among Scientologists. Section 3 makes the case that one way to examine Hubbard's influence and legacy, on an everyday and experiential level among the faithful, is through the church sites and institutions he created and the path to spiritual freedom he created in the "Bridge to Total Freedom." Section 4 takes a pragmatic turn and introduces the variety of archival resources available, especially in the United States, to researchers. Section 5 concludes with areas that remain open for scholarly analysis. Glossaries of terms and acronyms provide some of the needed vocabulary for Scientology research. Appendix A includes major dates in the life of L. Ron Hubbard, Scientology history, and Scientology research. It notes issues of controversy that have occurred in the life of the church. Appendix B lists notable archival collections along with links to finding aids and further information.

1 Scientology Studies: Theory and Practice

The origins of Scientology studies – if by this we primarily mean, as I do, *academic* attention as opposed to journalistic or popular coverage – might be traced to a 1958 interview that L. Ron Hubbard granted to J. Stillson Judah, an NRM researcher and librarian from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. Judah – who later became a well-known scholar of the Hare Krishna (ISKCON) movement and interviewed its leader as well (Judah 1975) – met Hubbard in his Washington, DC, office for an audio-recorded conversation that has been transcribed and published by the Church of Scientology (Hubbard 2012a: 87–91). Topics ranged from Hubbard's educational background to the origins of Scientology and, even earlier, the emergence of Dianetics, the mental health precursor to Scientology promulgated in the 1950 book *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*. Dianetics became a national phenomenon in 1950 and its popular success laid the groundwork for the movement's more spiritual direction as Hubbard pursued the "religion angle," as he wrote to his secretary in 1953 ahead of incorporating the first churches of Scientology (Urban 2011: 65–68; Westbrook 2019: 83–85). Not everyone in the Dianetics movement welcomed this development, however, since it deviated from Hubbard's original scientific intentions (Winter 1951) and the work of the Hubbard Dianetic Research Foundation (Ibanez et al. 1951; Sterling 1952; Fox, Davis & Lebovits 1959; van Vogt 1964; O'Brien 1966).

© in this web service Cambridge University Press and Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-009-01455-7 — L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology Studies
Donald A. Westbrook
Excerpt
More Information

Although the Church of Scientology was firmly in place by 1954, the first major academic study of Scientology was not produced until 1976 with Roy Wallis's seminal *The Road to Total Freedom: A Sociological Analysis of Scientology*. Based on interviews and fieldwork, some of it covert, Wallis examined the transition from the "epistemological individualism" of the 1950s Dianetics movement to the "epistemological authoritarianism" of the far more centralized Scientology churches (Wallis 1976/77: 14–18, 1975). One perception among outsiders, academics included, is that research and investigation of Scientology carry the risk of legal or even extralegal retaliation (see, e.g., Dallam 2011; Lord 2019). As a case study of this phenomenon, Wallis reported harassment at his university ahead of the publication of *The Road to Total Freedom*. He provided an advance copy of his work to church officials, incorporated numerous corrections, and even included a critical response authored by the Scientologist and sociologist J. L. Simmons (Wallis 1976/77: 265–69) in the final product. These difficulties may have deterred other researchers from this period, but one can find other publications in the intervening years (e.g., Bainbridge & Stark 1980) in evidence of ongoing academic research. The next major work on Scientology – and one that has too often been neglected in the literature, perhaps because the title does not adequately reveal its content – was the anthropologist Harriet Whitehead's *Renunciation and Reformulation: A Study of Conversion in an American Sect* (Whitehead 1987). Whitehead put forward a detailed account of auditing (i.e., mental/spiritual counseling), including features of Hubbard's electro-psychometer (E-Meter), based on fieldwork she conducted in Los Angeles among Scientologists for her dissertation at the University of Chicago entitled "What Does Scientology Auditing Do?" (Whitehead 1975). Whitehead in the United States, much like Wallis in the United Kingdom, relied largely on undercover or covert methods, which were more common and acceptable in the 1970s and predate the standards for consent now required by institutional review boards (IRBs).

In 1985 Roland Chagnon published a study of Scientologists in Canada, *La Scientologie: une nouvelle religion de la puissance* (*Scientology: A New Religion of Power*), that modeled the possibility of a more productive and cooperative relationship between a scholar and the church (Chagnon 1985). Another international work of note, and one that likewise received support from Scientologists, was Dorthe Refslund Christensen's 1999 dissertation at the University of Aarhus, "Rethinking Scientology: Cognition and Representation in Religion, Therapy, and Soteriology" (Christensen 1999). Christensen's research – which has been reproduced in articles and book chapters over the years (e.g., Christensen 2005, 2009, 2017) – offers an in-depth analysis of the transition from Dianetics (therapy) to Scientology (religion) based on

© in this web service Cambridge University Press and Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
978-1-009-01455-7 — L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology Studies
Donald A. Westbrook
Excerpt
More Information

Hubbard's vast writings about auditing (especially the "Technical Bulletins") that are now counted as scripture in the church. However, not all researchers from the 1980s and 1990s achieved this level of camaraderie with the Scientologists they sought to study. One example is Stephen A. Kent, a sociologist at the University of Alberta, who has produced a sizable body of work on Scientology (see, e.g., Kent 1999) along with an impressive archive on alternative beliefs and religions. Kent and his colleague Susan Raine also edited the interdisciplinary volume *Scientology in Popular Culture: Influences and Struggles for Legitimacy* (Kent & Raine 2017). Kent's criticisms of Scientology have led to tensions with the church – which labeled him a "false expert" on one of its websites (STAND League 2019) – and also to disagreements with other scholars of new religions, such as J. Gordon Melton (1999) and James R. Lewis (1999).

Melton, a professor at Baylor University, is a senior and foundational figure in the study of NRMs. He is yet another example of a scholar who has maintained congenial relations with the Church of Scientology, dating to a 1964 visit to a branch in Chicago (Melton 2017: 11). Since then he has produced several important contributions to Scientology studies, such as his work on the Sea Organization (Sea Org), the church's priesthood and senior administrators (Melton 2018), and the introductory volume *The Church of Scientology* (Melton 2000). James R. Lewis, currently at Wuhan University, is another monumental presence in the field, having produced numerous works, including two edited volumes (Lewis 2009; Lewis & Hellesøy 2017) and special issues of *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* (2015) and *Numen* (2016) devoted to Scientology. In recent years Lewis and some of his graduate students in Norway, when he taught at the University of Tromsø, shifted attention away from the Church of Scientology and toward independent Scientologists who disaffiliate from the church yet remain committed to their own interpretations of Hubbard's philosophy and practices (Lewis 2013; Hellesøy 2015). This new approach has received attention from others, for example, Reza Aslan's CNN television show *Believer*, which featured a 2017 episode on Scientology reform groups (Introvigne 2017b), and Aled Thomas's dissertation at the Open University, "Auditing in Contemporary Scientologies: The Self, Authenticity, and Material Culture" (Thomas 2019).

The second decade of the twenty-first century also witnessed the production of four monographs. The first came with historian Hugh B. Urban's *The Church of Scientology: A History of a New Religion*, a sweeping account of L. Ron Hubbard and his creations from the 1950s to the present that was produced with cooperation from ex-members, critics, and independent Scientologists (Urban 2011). Urban has continued to publish on Scientology, including impressive

© in this web service Cambridge University Press and Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
978-1-009-01455-7 — L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology Studies
Donald A. Westbrook
Excerpt
More Information

articles on the connections between Hubbard, Gnosticism, religious secrecy, and Western esotericism (Urban 2012, 2017, 2019). The second came from Aldo Natale Terrin, a Catholic priest and theologian whose *Scientology: Libertà e immortalità* (*Scientology: Freedom and Immortality*) outlined the beliefs and practices of the church (Terrin 2017a). The Italian scholar included phenomenological and empathetic perspectives and compared Hubbard's creations with other traditions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, New Thought, Theosophy, and especially Gnosticism (see also Terrin 2017b). The third monograph was my own *Among the Scientologists: History, Theology, and Praxis* (Westbrook 2019), based on fieldwork and interviews conducted with church members in the United States for PhD research at Claremont Graduate University. I have also published work in recent years on Scientology's "pilgrimage" sites (Westbrook 2016), intellectual history (Westbrook 2017b), evolving public relations (PR) strategies (Westbrook 2018), Gnosticism (Westbrook & Lewis 2019), and systematic theology (Westbrook 2015), including features of its anti-psychiatric theology (Westbrook 2017c). The fourth and most recent monograph is Aled Thomas's *Free Zone Scientology: Contesting the Boundaries of a New Religion*, based on his interviews and fieldwork conducted at Church of Scientology sites and especially among schismatic or independent Scientologists who have broken away from the church and in some cases were never members in the first place (Thomas 2021).

Finally, the scholarship and other professional contributions of Massimo Introvigne, an Italian sociologist and managing director of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), deserve special mention (e.g., Introvigne 2017c). The annual conferences held by CESNUR have offered NRM researchers a dedicated academic space to explore a variety of topics. Many researchers have presented papers on Scientology at CESNUR over the years, including most of the scholars just mentioned, in addition to some Scientologists, such as the French author and European church spokesperson Eric Roux, who has published academic and popular works (2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2020, 2021). The success of CESNUR and its network has paved the way for other conferences and symposia, such as the First International Conference on the Study of Scientology, sponsored in 2014 by the European Observatory of Religion and Secularism and the Faculty for the Comparative Study of Religion and Secularism in Antwerp, Belgium. The *Journal of CESNUR*, launched in 2017, has already contributed greatly to the study of new religions, including Scientology.

Gaining access to the Church of Scientology is of course easier said than done. Assuming that a researcher obtains permission from an academic IRB, other challenges await. It is not altogether surprising that PR departments within

© in this web service Cambridge University Press and Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-009-01455-7 — L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology Studies
Donald A. Westbrook
Excerpt
More Information

the church might be initially suspicious of would-be researchers in light of the innumerable times that the church has trusted journalists and scholars with sensitive information only to be disparaged in print, television, film, and social media. However, this is not to suggest that journalists and academics find themselves in the same category of outside researchers. On the contrary, compared to academics, journalists find themselves at a decided disadvantage. Hubbard wrote thousands of policies for Scientology organizations in which journalists are described in various unflattering and negative ways. They are "merchants of chaos" or even antisocial personalities known as suppressive persons (SPs) who spread preconceived notions and misinformation (black propaganda) (Hubbard 1972). As Hubbard cautioned:

> In the matter of reporters, etc., it is not worthwhile to give them any time, contrary to popular belief. They are given their story before they leave their editorial rooms and you only strengthen what they have to say by saying anything. They are no public communication line that sways much. Policy is very definite. Ignore. (Hubbard 2007a: 220)

To be clear, this does not mean that Scientologists view *all* journalists as evil or constitutionally incapable of producing a fair and balanced piece. After all, Scientology PR officials occasionally conduct interviews and, more frequently, publish press releases. However, it does explain how Hubbard's stance, now enshrined as scripture and followed by PR staff, has created a built-in obstacle for journalists, filmmakers, and others who seek access to the church. Academics, on the other hand, are not significant features in the Scientology canon, and Hubbard seems to have had relatively positive interactions with academicians during his lifetime, as with the example of J. Stillson Judah. Another instance came in the late 1960s with Hubbard's appreciation of Thomas Szasz, a critic of psychiatry based at the State University of New York (Syracuse), who in 1969 cofounded the church-affiliated Citizens Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) (2021). Academics, it seems, have the potential to fall within Hubbard's more favorable category of "opinion leaders" (OLs) (Hubbard 1971a). From the church's standpoint, sociologists, historians, religious studies scholars, and others are potential PR and legal allies. Other examples include interfaith leaders, politicians, police officers, judges, business executives, and Hollywood celebrities. They are poised to become allies of the church as it seeks to "safe point" (Hubbard 1982a) various sectors of society to allow the unencumbered presence and dissemination of Dianetics and Scientology. This includes ensuring that the church's religious nature is understood and safeguarded around the world, especially in locations where that status may be disputed or lack legal recognition.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press and Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-009-01455-7 — L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology Studies
Donald A. Westbrook
Excerpt
More Information

The favorable starting position afforded to academicians carries with it a variety of easy opportunities, particularly for researchers who live near a Scientology church. Examples include tours of churches, invitations to local events, and complimentary copies of Hubbard's books and lectures, which, as other scholars can attest, are often sent to teachers and librarians – whether solicited or not. This introductory access is indispensable, but it will likely prove incomplete for those who require a more in-depth understanding of Scientology's teachings and practices and the lived experiences of Scientologists. To gain this kind of access, at least among members of the Church of Scientology, it is imperative to familiarize oneself with the technical vocabulary of the organization so as to converse freely and comfortably with adherents.

One relatively easy way to become familiar with some Dianetics and Scientology jargon is to read through Hubbard's books, especially some of the basics such as *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, *Science of Survival*, *Scientology: The Fundamentals of Thought*, and *Scientology: A New Slant on Life*. The church has also done a good job of explaining specialized terms in works such as *What Is Scientology?* (1999) as well as on its website Scientology.org and videos posted to its Scientology TV channel. Hubbard published an extensive *Dianetics and Scientology Technical Dictionary* (1975) and every Dianetics and Scientology text contains an impressive glossary as well as the introductory statement that "In reading this book, be very certain you never go past a word you do not fully understand. The only reason a person gives up a study or becomes confused or unable to learn is because he or she has gone past a word that was not understood" (see, e.g., Hubbard 2007b: "Important Note"). Indeed, according to Hubbard's "Study Technology" (educational philosophy), misunderstood words (MUs) are the most formidable barrier to study, comprehension, and application. I have provided two glossaries – one for terms and another with acronyms – to help the reader with some of the terminology used throughout this work. They are by no means exhaustive but will, I hope, offer a starting point that is useful for the beginning researcher and serve as a springboard for tracking down even fuller glossaries and dictionaries to make the most linguistic sense of the Scientology worldview on its own terms.

I also recommend reading through Hubbard's books and listening to early lectures, ideally in chronological order, for a sense of the growth and evolution of Dianetics and Scientology terminology and practices. This would offer the researcher historical and theological senses of how the mental health therapy of Dianetics transformed into the spiritual world of Scientology and how the two remain interconnected to this day. In the end, though, much like learning a new

© in this web service Cambridge University Press and Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-009-01455-7 — L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology Studies
Donald A. Westbrook
Excerpt
More Information

language – and Hubbard's vernacular arguably does function as both jargon and a kind of dialect – it is perhaps best to immerse one's self, as much as possible, not only into the world of Hubbard's canon but also into Scientology's beliefs as practiced and understood among Scientologists themselves.

It is also necessary to become familiar with the church's internal structures and especially the PR organizations within the Sea Org. This includes the relatively well-known Office of Special Affairs (OSA) as well as a separate group called the Commodore's Messenger Organization (CMO). Sea Org members in the CMO occupy senior management positions in the church and staff the L. Ron Hubbard Personal Public Relations Office (LRH PPRO) (Church of Scientology International 1988).

OSA, in particular, operates as a gatekeeper for academic researchers. Each local church has an OSA representative known as the Director of Special Affairs (DSA), who coordinates PR and legal affairs with the OSA International office headquartered at the Church of Scientology International (CSI) in Los Angeles. OSA officials sometimes attend academic conferences, such as annual meetings of CESNUR and the American Academy of Religion, and have worked with religious studies scholars to produce court statements and publications. One of the more significant examples was the church's *Scientology: Theology and Practice of a Contemporary Religion* (Church of Scientology International 1999), a reference work that also featured articles from theologians, sociologists, and historians. It has since been republished and expanded at websites such as WhatIsScientology.org and ScientologyReligion.org. The relatively congenial relationship between OSA and some in the NRM community has led to the accusation, especially in online anti-Scientology networks, that such scholars are little more than cult apologists or shills for the church. The acrimonious relationship between academics and some Scientology critics is exacerbated by the church's hostility to vocal ex-members (see, e.g., Church of Scientology International 2011).

2 Fieldwork and the Scientological Worldview

My first, albeit passing, encounter with Scientology came in 2000 when I was in high school. While on a field trip to an outdoor mall in Sacramento as part of a visit to the California State Capitol, my friends and I came across a woman who had set up shop along one of the walkways. Copies of Hubbard's *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* were neatly stacked and the attendant, as you might guess, turned out to be a Scientology staff member. She was offering free "stress tests" with the use of the E-Meter, the ohmmeter that Hubbard designed based on earlier versions and that is commonly used in Scientology

© in this web service Cambridge University Press and Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-009-01455-7 — L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology Studies
Donald A. Westbrook
Excerpt
More Information

auditing and training. I was skeptical, but one of my friends eagerly took hold of the E-Meter cans as we watched the needle on the meter move back and forth while the staff member adjusted the knobs and claimed to pinpoint areas of stress. The friend, genuinely interested, described areas of distress in her life – family problems, trouble in school, and so on – and was impressed by the staff member and especially the ways that the needle swayed back and forth, sometimes rising, sometimes falling, and moving at different speeds. This apparently indicated some kind of precision and measurement. The whole experience lasted no more than a few minutes. None of us bought *Dianetics*, and I do not even remember the staff member being all that aggressive about making a sale. Maybe she assumed we did not have any money, or maybe she was simply happy that someone stopped to speak with her and learn more firsthand.

Scientology would not appear on my radar again until I began work on my doctorate in religious studies in 2010. At Claremont Graduate University, I took a class with the historian and Mormon studies scholar Richard L. Bushman entitled “American Scripture: From Thomas Jefferson to L. Ron Hubbard.” We studied texts and traditions from a number of mainstream and marginalized religious traditions such as Mormonism, Christian Science, and Scientology. At the time I was planning a dissertation related to Mormon history and ecumenical dialogue, but I became increasingly interested in L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology. After taking the class I decided to explore the Church of Scientology’s connections to Mormon studies.

One of the early projects that brought me into contact with Scientologists in Los Angeles involved comparing religious advertising among Mormons and Scientologists, especially in light of the similarities between the “I’m a Mormon” and “Meet a Scientologist” campaigns that existed at the time. To learn more about the Scientology side, I sent off an email to the PR department at the CSI. Soon after I received a response that launched my adventure into a world that has taken up much of my time and energy over the past decade. The representative who emailed me back was very pleasant and happy to answer my questions about the “Meet a Scientologist” campaign (Church of Scientology International 2021a), which included short videos of parishioners talking about their lives and successes with Dianetics and Scientology. These videos are still available at the Scientology.org website and on the more recent Scientology TV streaming platforms.

I ended up interviewing a Sea Org member over the phone and also took a lengthy and productive tour of the Church of Scientology of Los Angeles and the American Saint Hill Organization, both located near Sunset Boulevard and Vermont Avenue. I presented a paper on the Mormon and

© in this web service Cambridge University Press and Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-009-01455-7 — L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology Studies
Donald A. Westbrook
Excerpt
More Information

Scientology campaigns at conferences, including the 2011 Sunstone Symposium at Weber State University, and was interviewed about it by a public radio station in Salt Lake City. Overall, it was a positive experience and the radio program was well received by the Sea Org members with whom I had talked – despite their objection that I had focused too much on individualism in Scientology and not enough on community-wide and humanitarian programs.

After that first successful academic adventure into Scientology, I had an ambitious idea: what if the Church of Scientology would give me permission to interview members and even do some fieldwork? I floated the idea to some Sea Org members and there seemed to be some interest, so I wrote up a proposal, including a list of interview questions, which were IRB approved, and mailed it to the CSI in Los Angeles. I waited and waited – and waited some more. A few months went by and still no response. I had pretty much given up hope and began to think about other possible dissertation topics. I followed up one more time on the proposal to check in and, to my surprise, I was invited to a lunch meeting in Pasadena with one of the Sea Org members as well as the PR director at the Church of Scientology of Pasadena. Most of the visit involved catching up and chitchat, and at the very end I was invited to begin the project by conducting the first interviews at the Pasadena church.

Those interviews ended up being very successful. I soon got into a nice rhythm as an interviewer and became increasingly familiar with Scientology culture, teachings, and lingo along the way. Wishing to capitalize on those successes, I funded my own travel across the country and conducted as many interviews as I could. Most lasted for an hour or more, some up to three and four hours, and I was thrilled that Scientologists were open to speaking with me on the record. I interviewed and took tours everywhere I could – Los Angeles, Clearwater (Florida), New York, Washington, DC, Salt Lake City, Las Vegas, San Jose, Phoenix, Portland (Oregon), Florence (Kentucky), and Bay Head (New Jersey). I even traveled to England to visit the London Fitzroy House and Saint Hill facilities in East Grinstead. In the end, I conducted sixty-nine formal interviews and must have spoken with several hundred more Scientologists, including parishioners, staff members, Sea Org members, even a few ex-members, either informally or off the record in the course of tours and follow-ups in that blitz between 2011 and 2013. That project served as the basis of the book *Among the Scientologists* (2019), which included analysis of the interviews and excerpts from church members on a variety of themes: L. Ron Hubbard, David Miscavige – the church's current leader and head of its Religious Technology Center (RTC) that

© in this web service Cambridge University Press and Assessment www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
978-1-009-01455-7 — L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology Studies
Donald A. Westbrook
Excerpt
More Information

polices orthodoxy and orthopraxy – Dianetics, Scientology, Sea Org membership, confidential scriptures, money donated, previous religious affiliations, and many other personal and socioeconomic items.

Learning the Tech

I also gained permission to take Scientology courses and proceed up the Bridge to Total Freedom, most of which was completed at the Church of Scientology Celebrity Centre International in Hollywood in 2012 and 2013. For several months during this period, I spent most of my days at CC, as it is known, sometimes for ten or more hours at a time. I had a great time diving in and could not have asked for a better way to learn about and experience Dianetics and Scientology from the inside out. I came to an informal agreement with the PR head at CC not to advertise my status as a PhD researcher among Scientologists and it was also mutually agreed that I was there for personal and not merely academic reasons. Church policy would have otherwise prevented me from receiving auditing and taking classes. I explained to the CC OSA representative that I was indeed interested in the value of Dianetics and Scientology as both a participant and observer and I was allowed to proceed on that basis.

First, I completed the Dianetics (Book One) Seminar, which included learning about the basic principles of Hubbard's original text and especially how it was practiced in 1950 without the use of the E-Meter, a later addition. That seminar included delivering *and* receiving 1950s-style auditing, with the auditor seated across from the "preclear" (the one receiving counseling). Next came the "Book One Co-Audit," where participants are invited to continue co-auditing, as it is called, for as long as they would like with partners in the seminar. I spent several weeks co-auditing Dianetics and occasionally made use of the techniques presented in another early Hubbard work, *Self Analysis* (Hubbard 2007b, originally published 1951). During this period I also completed several introductory classes that required study of Hubbard's written materials in a class setting with course supervisors tasked with ensuring comprehension and application, per church policy (Westbrook 2015: 127–30). Courses included "Success through Communication," "Personal Efficiency," "Formulas for Living," "Ups and Downs in Life," "How to Get Motivated," and "Personal Values and Integrity." I also managed to finish more than a dozen extension courses, all based on Hubbard's books and lectures such as *Dianetics*, *Science of Survival*, *Scientology: A History of Man*, *Advanced Procedure and Axioms*, and *State of Man Congress*. I completed these and many other courses at home, with lessons emailed in to a course supervisor for grading and feedback.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press and Assessment www.cambridge.org