

# THE CONTROVERSY OVER SCIENTOLOGY

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Most people have probably heard of Scientology. Many, though, have only been exposed to the negative side of the church most often portrayed in media, or have heard only of the stories of failure and ruin caused by the church. However, a significant number of people claim the church has changed their lives for the better, and say that they have complete and utter faith in its teachings. The Church of Scientology is controversial, not only because of the extreme and tendentious perspectives of it, but also because of the founder of the church, its various sectors and policies, and the plethora of claims (disputed, proven, and dropped) filed against it.

Lafayette Ron Hubbard was born in 1911, and in 1950, after pursuing careers in the military and pulp magazine writing, he wrote *Dianetics*, the text he would later base a religion off of. It was a self help book promising the reader various benefits ranging from freedom from negative emotions to curing blindness and improved appearance through a therapeutic technique known as auditing (Behar). As the leader of Scientology, Hubbard promised those who followed him all these benefits and more. However, L. Ron himself was, and still is, a highly controversial figure. On their website, *Scientology.org*, on a page titled “L. Ron Hubbard; Founder of Dianetics and Scientology,” the Church describes him as a compassionate man who, after returning from war, was “highly decorated for duties under fire, [and] deeply saddened by the resultant carnage and inhumanity.” This, the church explains, was the experience that motivated him to create an all inclusive church of redemption. However, according to an article written by Emily Yhar of *The New York Times*, Hubbard in actuality never saw direct combat while employed in the military. And, there have been multiple cases of alleged abuse in the church — abuse which, while possibly not directly condoned by Hubbard, was not stopped by him (Yhar). The dual persona of the man, with one side promulgated by the church and the other supported by evidence, led many people to question his ability to lead an organization as powerful as Scientology. Additionally, he was clearly more suited to writing science fiction than he was to leading a religion; the origin myths for Scientology, written by Hubbard claim that our earth that is over 100 billion years old, and feature intergalactic beings known as “thetans,” as well as a mysterious figure by the name

of Xenu who — according to legend — a “mere” 76 billion years ago destroyed the previous human race to pave way for current civilization (Wright).

For a church that claims to be based in science, the origin myth orchestrated by Hubbard is a bit unbelievable. However, origin myths, while important, are just that: myths. The real problems with Scientology arise when one considers the policies of the church. For one thing, the massive amount of money in the church’s possession is absurd. Each level one ascends up the hierarchical ladder of Scientology costs tens of thousands of dollars, and the self-help texts and videos published by the church, along with auditing sessions, have cost families upwards of \$200,000. And, although the exact value is not known, the church is estimated to be worth at least 1.2 billion dollars (Behar). Hubbard said once that “Writing for a penny a word is ridiculous. If a man really wants to make a million dollars, the best way would be to start his own religion,” (Wakefield). This, along with the fact that over 50 percent of profits from the church were at one point being directly funneled into the pockets of Hubbard and other high-ranking members, has led a large number of people to think that perhaps Hubbard was not motivated solely by his own goodwill to create the church. The church has also had a history of conflict with the Internal Revenue Service, bouncing between the tax exempt status of a church and not. In 1993 the IRS sued the church over tax evasion, but the suit was dropped after 2400 lawsuits against the IRS were filed by lawyers paid directly by Hubbard (Wright).

Bombardment by lawsuits was not the only extreme tactic used by the church to evade government policies. In his book *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief*, Lawrence Wright writes that in 1966, after being prohibited from multiple countries, Hubbard took to the seas. He purchased three retired naval ships and with the help of young Scientologists soon had them seaworthy. The “Sea Org,” as it was called, sailed around the Mediterranean Sea for three years, allegedly searching for a port to permanently stop and establish a branch of the church. However, time and time again local authorities would order them out of the ports, and no place was found. They searched for buried treasure Hubbard claimed he had hid in a past life (none was ever found), trained younger members of the group, and