

Silencing the Voices: The Church of Scientology's Justifications to Keep Its Critics Quiet

By Karen Pressley

Considerable literature describes the Church of Scientology International's (CSI's) struggle to define itself as a religion since its emergence in 1950, especially on the topic of CSI's identity as a non-profit religion versus a cult or a business in order to establish its legitimacy (Locke, 2004). This struggle seems to be a basis for criticism and disputes about the legitimacy of CSI as a church and its harsh treatment of staff, former members and other critics. This literature review focuses on how CSI has positioned itself as a science and as a religion in order to justify actions it takes against its critics, provides examples of conflict between ex-members exercising their freedom of speech to expose negative experiences with CSI, and CSI's use of various methods to silence its critics through its public relations machine.

Cult apologist J. Gordon Melton said the critical literature on Scientology and its founder, L. Ron Hubbard, while concentrating on documents less favorable to Hubbard and Scientology, is weakened by its lack of access to the many pertinent documents housed in the church's archives (Melton, 2000). Melton's statement raises a question of whether research may prove more favorable of Hubbard or Scientology if researchers could access the church's archival documents. As former Church of Scientology International Management employee, I have accessed many pertinent documents that Melton refers to, in the form of primary research, which I have stored in my personal library since my Scientology days from 1982-1998. Some of this primary research, which appears to be absent from Melton's research, is used here to strengthen this literature review. This primary literature was written by Hubbard for internal use in his Scientology organizations and is considered sacred law. Included are references that describe some of Hubbard's views (generally only available to insiders) about specifically why it is so important that Scientology staff members are to safeguard the reputation of Scientology, to what lengths staff are to go in order to protect Scientology and its founder, how Scientology should view its critics, and the actions it should take to silence its critics in order to protect Scientology's reputation.

A View of Scientology

Information about Scientology is so easily accessed on the Internet, versus the pre-world wide web days when the Church of Scientology was more successful in keeping its mysteries inaccessible. In summary, Scientologists see founder L. Ron Hubbard as having privileged access to supernatural knowledge of a kind never before revealed, which renders established disciplines like psychology and psychiatry invalid. Through his materials, Hubbard presents himself as a reincarnated Buddha who had located a means of transcending human limitation and the downward spiral of man's spiritual nature (Wallis, 1976). Hubbard published his theories as millions of words, which became the "technology" of Scientology. He produced dozens of books and series of internal policy letters on a plethora of topics (e.g. public relations, finance, marketing, study, management, investigations, personnel, counseling procedures, art, cleaning, writing music, you name it), which are considered the scriptures of Scientology. Staff members and Scientology public are required to follow these policies explicitly, and are forbidden to alter them or stray from them, under threat of discipline and expulsion if they violate that rule. Scientologists, therefore, submit themselves to total adherence to Hubbard's teachings, while staff members submit themselves to the totalitarian rule of CSI's central authority, the Religious Technology Center and the Sea Organization, which controls all aspects of their lives.

Hubbard desires to replace psychiatry with Scientology as the world's solution for mental health, with Scientology being humankind's only hope for keeping itself from destroying this planet. He persuades his followers to commit their lives to the deadly serious activity of safeguarding Scientology. Thus, anyone who criticizes Scientology is perceived to be an enemy of all humankind. Consequently, CSI operates with a "the ends justifies the means" mentality that underlies all actions to silence its critics (originally known as "fair game" tactics), doing so in the name of religious freedom for all. In doing so, Scientologists believe they are preserving the destiny of humankind and the immortality of the "thetan," or the spirit of every human.

CSI's justifications and use of its PR machine for attacking its critics

Here we refer to some of Hubbard's policies that give his perspectives about the importance of Scientology and why critics should be attacked. The "Public Relations (PR) Series" documents Hubbard's theories and rules about public relations. One key PR Series policy dictates that a Scientology organization must exist and expand in a favorable operating climate, despite its opponents. The policy instructs staff to persuade and control people in its environment so they think favorably about Scientology, no matter what the

circumstances. He describes this persuasive control phenomenon as “PR area control” (Hubbard, 1988:158). Hubbard also coined a phrase popular in CSI rhetoric, that PR is the “long enough lever to move the world” (Hubbard, 1988:162). He says an org’s PR area control should so penetrate the community that “attacks on the local org would be rebuffed by the people in the area who would think that the attackers are nuts...Such attacks are generally just a pack of lies anyway, whereas (with Scientology) you’re putting in truth—and in the final analysis truth always wins” (Hubbard, 1988:162). Hubbard positions Dianetics and Scientology as the only effective help for mankind, so anyone who does not support his efforts, or criticizes them, can be made to feel ashamed or guilty for not aligning with Scientology’s purpose. Hubbard writes, “and can be made to agree and cooperate out of a fear they will be exposed as anti-social or pariah” (1988:157). Hubbard expects PR area control to be so persuasive and dominating over the org’s environment that even the most resistive people have to cooperate. Public relations staff believe they possess deadly tools (Scientology technologies) and don’t really have to care whether people in their environment believe in Scientology’s purpose, just so long as they get them to cooperate (Hubbard, 1988).

Hubbard’s “Admin Know-How Series” instructs staff how to deal with critics of Scientology. Hubbard says CSI staff can become potential trouble sources (PTS) for the church because of their connections to suppressive persons (SPs) (Hubbard, 1966). Suppression is defined as “a harmful intention or action against which one cannot fight back” (Hubbard, 1966:374). No criticism of Scientology is ever accepted by CSI as valid, so any opposition to Scientology’s purposes is perceived by CSI as suppression. CSI staff are trained to fight back against suppression, to remove SPs from the environment, and to develop a system to restrain the SPs from easily influencing CSI personnel and members (Hubbard, 1966). Perceived SPs include psychiatrists, psychologists, priests, reporters and critical media, government agents, and former members, especially those who speak in public about Scientology. Staff are ordered to investigate SPs who say anything critical about Scientology, to find the scandal or crimes in their background, and to attack by exposing them (Hubbard, 1966).

One of CSI’s tactics against its critics was originally known as the “fair game.” A critic of Scientology becomes fair game like a deer with a target on its back being hunted in the woods. Hubbard says anything can be done to a critic or SP who has been named as fair game, including being cheated, lied to, sued, or destroyed. Hubbard says society would be better off without SPs (Hubbard, 1951), so anyone who brings harm to an SP

will be praised and even rewarded, and they will not be found culpable within Scientology for their actions. The Church of Scientology insists it cancelled the fair game policy years ago. No one has the authority to cancel an original LRH policy, although David Miscavige has his fingers in the alteration of plenty of what comes out published under the name L. Ron Hubbard. So, aside from any claim that the piece of paper that bore the policy may have been cancelled, the practice of fair game tactics have never been discontinued, and are alive and well today.

Melton falsely reported that CSI's practice of declaring people fair game was formally abandoned in 1968, two years after it was instituted (Melton, 2000). He says a comprehensive investigation of fair game accusations was included in the Internal Revenue Service investigation of 1993, when CSI sought to gain tax-exempt status as a non-profit religious organization in the U.S. and won. Satisfying the IRS that there was nothing to CSI's practice of fair game was an important part of the agency's reaching a final decision on granting the church its non-profit status. Gaining tax-exempt status as a recognized religion was important to CSI for the monumental tax breaks this offered. The incentive this gives to its members who could now pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to Scientology, and tax-deductions, would stimulate income for CSI. An even greater benefit is being a recognized religion, which puts CSI outside of the government's control of them as a business. Melton's report, however, contradicts ample existing evidence that shows CSI continues its fair game tactics, so Melton should minimally be blushing from his irresponsible reporting.

Examples of this are easily accessed on the Internet, whether through testimonies and affidavits from ex-members, lawsuit testimonies, published memoirs, newspaper interviews, and more. One need only look into recent and current lawsuits to find details. CSI continues to label its opponents as SPs and publish derogatory information about them on Internet sites and in media to harm their reputation, such as CSI's website, www.religiousfreedomwatch.com, and news reports which document how CSI investigates critics' backgrounds through private investigators and CSI's other minions such as RTC and/or OSA staffers. I have personally been the subject of CSI's fair game tactics and can testify to the kinds of actions CSI has taken against me and other critics.

Urban's 2006 study of Scientology as a "Cold War religious movement" also explores Scientology's use of "fair game" tactics on its opponents. Urban provides an extensive description of Scientology's PR machine as the development of an apparatus of secrecy and surveillance that rivaled and mirrored that of the FBI. CSI

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 PR exists through the Office of Special Affairs (OSA), the legal and public affairs arm of CSI, and the L. Ron Hubbard Personal Public Relations Officers (LRH PPRO), which propagandizes positive images of Hubbard and works to prevent negative mentions in the media (Hubbard, 1969). This PR machine publicizes an image of the movement which will attract new followers, to stimulate sympathy and support from non-members for Scientology policies and practices, and to rouse antagonism towards Scientology's opponents. Wallis (1978) says that this PR machine strives to legitimate the tactics and hostilities of the movement's leaders toward its critics by purporting an esoteric ideology, which draws on acceptable rhetorics of justification: "We should attack with the end in view of taking over the whole field of mental healing" (Wallis, 1976:239).

Social Sciences' views of Scientology and its methods used on its critics

A cult, a sect, or what?

Understanding Scientology as a cult or sect is pertinent to CSI's social position as a self-appointed caretaker of the world's spiritual condition, and how this relates to CSI's responses against critics. Wallis (1976) discusses Scientology's position as a cult and a sect, and defines both from a sociological perspective. A "cult" is a new religious movement which deviates from the culture's normative forms of religion and substitutes a unique view of the individual, his world, and how this world can be attained (Wallis, 1976). A sect is a faction of people subscribing to religious doctrines different from those of an established church from whom the faction has separated.

Wallis says the transformation of a cult into a sect "is viewed as a strategy by means of which leaders seek to perpetuate and to enhance their status by arrogating authority in an attempt to create a stable and cohesive following" (Wallis, 1976:5). Sects lay claim to a unique and privileged access to truth and salvation. Their adherents believe that error only exists outside the confines of their beliefs, which legitimates their belief that they must be protected from defilement, misuse and criticism. This belief calls for extensive control over those to whom access is permitted. This proves their superior status, and tends to generate hostility to outside society and state. State and society are seen to threaten and conflict with its notion of what is truth, "which causes the sect to defend its vision by isolation and withdrawal" (Wallis, 1975:93), as he describes of Scientology.

Why Scientology needs a conspiracy theory to mobilize adherents to loyalty

Wallis uses “legitimation” to label the means by which the prevailing social order and CSI’s institutional practices are symbolically represented as historically necessary and morally right. Legitimation involves the elaboration of an ideology which employs a rhetoric acceptable to the bulk of the members to explain and justify tactics of the leadership against its critics. Such an ideology should also provide a means of mobilizing sympathy and support from non-members as part of a strategy of “creating a safe space for Scientology” (Wallis, 1976:239). Wallis’ outline of this conspiracy theory is clearly central to the process of legitimating CSI’s organizational behavior toward any individual or cultural effort to threaten its safety or legitimacy. In the face of a perceived world conspiracy to crush the movement, rigorous internal control and harsh ethics have been a necessary defense to prevent infiltration and maintain the organization. “Attacking its attackers” could also be legitimized by the seriousness of the threat. “In that, self defense is an apposite defense. One is not obliged to wait for the first blow to be struck” (Wallis, 1976:239)

How Scientology undermines opposing beliefs

Wallis discusses “nihilation” and “legitimation” as the discursive strategies employed by CSI to undermine opposing beliefs and justify supporting beliefs. Nihilation involves endowing external challenges “with a negative cognitive status, and accounting for them in terms of concepts drawn from the accepted ideology” (Wallis, 1976:239). Scientology’s nihilation strategy centers on applying a general conspiracy theory to critics, notably the medical and psychiatric professions, that CSI perceives to be its staunchest opponents. These groups are presented as part of a broad plot to dominate the world against which Scientology stands as a lone opponent, a characterization that works both to provide effective proof of the claim and to account for why these groups attack CSI. Also, their opposition is interpreted in terms of Scientology’s own concepts, so that in the final step of nihilation, critical opposition is presented as a confirmation of Scientology’s beliefs.

The rhetoric of the wider society can also be deployed for the defense of CSI’s beliefs and practices. Scientology could be defined as a science and also as a religion (Locke, 2004). Locke says whatever the merits of these seemingly incompatible claims, they had the useful consequence of providing two alternative sets of imagery for display through CSI’s propaganda. Until the early 1960s, CSI’s rhetoric of itself as a ‘science’ was more prominent throughout its literature. After the FDA raid in 1963, when government officials seized boxes of Scientology records, spiritual books and materials, CSI’s PR arm positioned the nature of Scientology as a religion. This is another example of its motive to be viewed as a religion, which would be out of governmental

Scientology's Justifications to Keep its Critics Quiet - by Karen Pressley reach, rather than the money-making business it is. Hence, CSI could characterize the FDA's and subsequent government actions throughout the world as religious persecution (Wallis, 1976).

Peckham's study of Scientology and its Internet critics (Peckham, 1998) serves as a vehicle to learn about the interaction between social movements and counter movements in situations like the above, concentrating on resource deprivation and damaging actions. He rethinks the meaning of resources to include virtual resources like the Internet which facilitates movement and countermovement interaction, such as CSI's. He says a group like Scientology often tries to undermine its opponent's position by "neutralizing, confronting, or discrediting its corresponding countermovement" (Peckham, 1998:319). He argues that the interaction is primarily one of resource deprivation or damaging actions, where the said debate enhances our understanding of how demobilizing an opponent's resources can be the focal point of Scientology's actions to silence its critics (Peckham, 1998).

A changing spiral of silence

Noelle-Neumann's (1987) communication theory, "spiral of silence," explains this to mean the increasing pressure people feel to conceal their views when they think they are in the minority. She believes that media accelerates the spiral of concealing their views, but to grasp the role of the media in the process we first must understand people's extraordinary sensitivity to the ever-changing standard of what society will tolerate. Whether in religion, politics or ethics, Noelle-Neumann defines public opinion as opinions on controversial issues that one can express in public without isolating oneself (Noelle-Neumann, 1987). She believes that people can tell when they are out of sync with public opinion and they fear being isolated for holding views that aren't in favor. People who see themselves in the minority, such as former Scientologists who have been subjected to Scientology's fair game tactics and PR area control, could be well into a downward spiral of keeping silent. She said that people who notice their own personal opinion is spreading, or is expressed by popular opinion, will show an upward spiral of expression by voicing their opinion more often or more self-confidently in public. This contrasts with people who see that their opinions have lost ground or are less popular, who will be inclined to adopt a reserved attitude, and be more prone to keeping quiet.

Noelle-Neuman's theory explains the phenomenon of publication of critical books about Scientology. After the publication of Jon Atack's *A Piece of Blue Sky* in 1990, no books critical of Scientology were published until 2008 (although some critical articles were published in anthologies and academic journals). This

lacuna occurred shortly after David Miscavige seized the leadership role of the Church of Scientology after Hubbard died in 1986, when the organization went into its aggressively totalitarian operating condition. During this time, C of S gained its reputation as most the litigious organization in the U.S. Perhaps realizing that this nasty public image was hurting, not helping, their "church" recruitment and public front, the church softened their tactics to some degree. Celebrity biographer Andrew Morton spearheaded the upward spiral that broke the silence of other Scientology critics with his book, *An Unauthorized Biography of Tom Cruise* (St. Martin's Press). Scientology officials threatened him and St. Martin's with a lawsuit for publication, but the publisher proceeded boldly, and no lawsuit occurred. Since then, at least ten non-fiction books have been published, and none of the authors have dealt with a lawsuit from Scientology.

CSI's actions against its critics

Conflicts between CSI and critics have led to a number of highly publicized court cases including Paulette Cooper, Larry Wallersheim, Dennis Erlich, Cult Awareness Network, Lisa McPherson Trust, Marc and Claire Headley, and so many more. While the church initiated cases in response to instances in which it felt it had been significantly harmed, a sizable portion was not initiated by the church. However, in each the church reacted vigorously and in the process gained an image as an extremely litigious organization (Melton, 2000).

Through the 1990s, two issues dominated the church's court appearances. CSI moved against those individuals who attempted to publish documents containing some of CSI's confidential spiritual teachings on the Internet. This issue also involved many people not otherwise concerned with the church and its critics, as many who believe in the absolute freedom of access to materials on the Internet aligned themselves with the church's critics, while others defended the church's right to protect its copyrights.

In 1994 the first Internet case was filed against former Scientologist Dennis Erlich who had the previous year published OT materials on an Internet bulletin board (Peckham, 1998). A ruling in November 1995 was the first indication that an Internet provider could be held liable if it knowingly allows a copyright infringement to occur. The following year the court upheld an injunction against Arnaldo Lerma for posting the confidential documents. Subsequent to these verdicts, a set of similar judgments was handed down in the U.S. and several European countries. These cases culminated in the March 1999 settlement with FACTnet, the organization led by Larry Wollersheim which had earlier won a large judgment against CSI. FACTNet agreed to return all

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copyrighted Scientology material in its possession or control, refrain from reproducing any Scientology materials in the future, and pay to the church \$1 million should it or its agents break in the future the agreement reached in the settlement. These cases not only broke new ground concerning the application of copyright law to the Internet, but established the church's ownership and right to control what it considers its most holy documents.

As the Internet cases were being adjudicated, CSI also moved against the Cult Awareness Network (CAN), an opposition group advocating action against what they perceived to be cults, or new religious movements which deviate from the culture's normative forms of religion and provides a sometimes subversive or dangerous view of society with an exclusive method of attaining unique spiritual states. CAN's former director, Cynthia Kissler, said Scientology is "quite likely the most ruthless, the most classically terroristic, the most litigious and the most lucrative cult the country has ever seen. No cult extracts more money from its members" (Urban, 2006:357). More than a dozen CSI members from around the country filed suits against CAN. Though none of the members won individual suits, through them CSI collected intimate details concerning CAN's inner workings. CSI discovered that CAN engaged in referrals to deprogrammers and other type of counselors. Subsequently, Kendrick Moxon, an attorney who had worked on a number of CSI's cases, agreed to represent Jason Scott, a member of the United Pentecostal Church who had initiated a lawsuit following his unsuccessful deprogramming. In 1995, Scott won a large judgment against his deprogrammers and the jury also included CAN in the judgment. The judgment, upheld on appeal, forced CAN into bankruptcy. After CAN's bankruptcy, CSI and a coalition of other groups who had been criticized by CAN as cults, pooled their resources and purchased CAN's name. That coalition now operates the continuing Cult Awareness Network out of offices in Los Angeles. When callers phone in to discuss issues about cults and Scientology, these phones are being answered not by cult experts or cult counselors, but by Scientologists.

So much is happening in this arena that the day this information is updated, new information is reported that makes the last report obsolete. For example, in June 2010, Scientology lawyers are trying to get Marc and Claire Headley's lawsuit for human rights, human trafficking, and labor law violations dismissed on the grounds that the Headley's were "ministers," as they were employed by a religious organization and thus were covered by the "ministerial exemption" not subject to wage and hour laws. The church also argues that human trafficking laws cannot be applied to "the employment relationship between a church and its ministers." (St. Pete Times,

2010). So, this means that a religious organization is allowed to engage in human trafficking and human rights violations under the guise of freedom of religion?

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In summary, this literature review focuses on how the Church of Scientology International has positioned itself as a science and as a religion in order to justify actions it takes against its critics, provides examples of conflict between CSI and ex-members exercising their freedom of speech to expose negative experiences, CSI's use of various methods to silence its critics through its public relations machine, and explores Social Sciences' theories and views about Scientology and its methods used on critics. Little research has been published on how former members of CSI are affected by the "spiral of silence." My future research will focus on the communication tendencies of former members who have recently left the Church of Scientology's management body, the Sea Organization, to explore whether they have spoken critically about Scientology and what method were used; whether CSI has attempted to silence them; and whether their willingness to speak openly is influenced by public opinion of Scientology. Through this I will test the "spiral of silence" theory by examining whether former members are more confident in speaking out about their experiences when mass media presents Scientology in an unfavorable light, or whether CSI has any degree of control over them to keep them quiet.

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