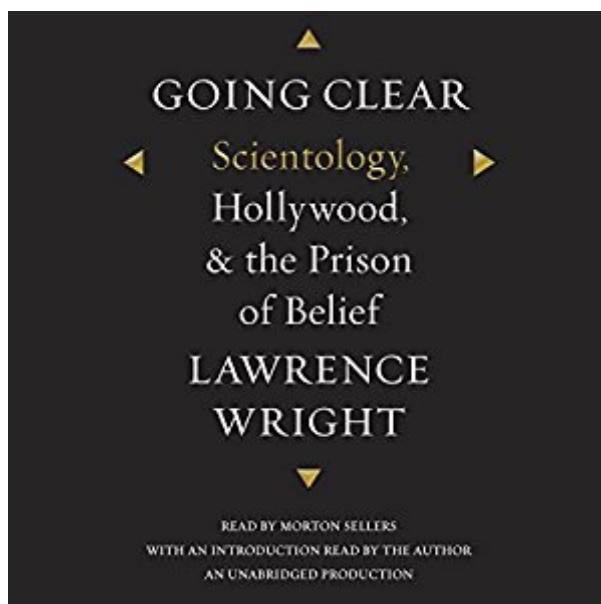


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Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, And The Prison Of Belief



Synopsis

A clear-sighted revelation, a deep penetration into the world of Scientology by the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of the *The Looming Tower*, the now-classic study of al-Qaeda's 9/11 attack. Based on more than 200 personal interviews with both current and former Scientologists - both famous and less well known - and years of archival research, Lawrence Wright uses his extraordinary investigative ability to uncover for us the inner workings of the Church of Scientology. At the book's center, two men whom Wright brings vividly to life, showing how they have made Scientology what it is today: The darkly brilliant science-fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, whose restless, expansive mind invented a new religion. And his successor, David Miscavige - tough and driven, with the unenviable task of preserving the church after the death of Hubbard. We learn about Scientology's complicated cosmology and special language. We see the ways in which the church pursues celebrities, such as Tom Cruise and John Travolta, and how such stars are used to advance the church's goals. And we meet the young idealists who have joined the Sea Org, the church's clergy, signing up with a billion-year contract. In *Going Clear*, Wright examines what fundamentally makes a religion a religion, and whether Scientology is, in fact, deserving of this constitutional protection. Employing all his exceptional journalistic skills of observation, understanding, and shaping a story into a compelling narrative, Lawrence Wright has given us an evenhanded yet keenly incisive book that reveals the very essence of what makes Scientology the institution it is.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Imagine if you were reading a novel that included a character who wrote sci-fi novels, was obsessed with wealth and status symbols, was paranoid about the government, treated others badly, and yet started a religion as a business venture that attracted thousands of devoted followers. You'd probably say, "yeah, right; a nice allegory for an aspect of the American psyche, but I don't think so." Although, if you were familiar with Scientology, you might not be so surprised. Many aren't familiar with Scientology, in part because the Scientologists have been relentless and devoted to stamping out dissent and negative portrayals of their religion (previous books on L. Ron Hubbard, Scientology's founder ended up with the publisher abandoning the project due to law suits and the British publisher of this book, dropped it for fear of libel law suits [which are easier to win in the UK]). New Yorker writer Lawrence Wright, who is known as one of our great investigative journalists, has prepared himself by doing an incredible amount of due diligence and fact checking (apparently the fact checkers at the New Yorker, which first published an article on Scientology by Wright, made herculean efforts to make sure they got the facts right). Scientology does not come off well in *Going Clear*. Wright portrays Scientology as in large part an expression of L. Ron Hubbard's whimsy: "Even as Hubbard was inventing the doctrine, each of his decisions and actions would become enshrined in Scientology lore as something to be emulated -- his cigarette smoking, for instance, which is still a feature of the church's culture at the upper levels, as are his 1950s habits of speech, his casual misogyny, his aversion to perfume and scented deodorants, and his love of cars and motorcycles and Rolex watches. More significant is the legacy of his belittling behavior toward subordinates and his paranoia about the government. Such traits stamped the religion as an extremely secretive and sometimes hostile organization that saw enemies on every corner." Wright, however, does not create a simple portrayal of Hubbard and Scientology. He grants him greater complexity than a simple con man. It seems Hubbard, who had a fertile imagination and intelligence (amazingly, he wrote 1,000 books--no small feat even if you were just the typist), believed in his own ideas. Obviously, there was something powerfully charismatic about him, but as someone who tends to gloss over at Hubbard's cosmology and "discoveries," it's hard to understand (and watching an interview of him online didn't shed any light for me on his appeal). It seemed that Hubbard was a congenital fibber--one of those people for whom reality just wasn't good enough so he had to embellish it and ultimately couldn't himself separate out his fantasies from reality. What's whacky and fascinating is that he got others to deeply believe in his ideas too. Why though? It was that part of this overall incredibly researched book that I found a bit lacking. The big picture how he did it is that Hubbard parlayed the success of *Dianetics*, his self-help bestseller, into a religion. In a way Scientology is a truly modern religion in that it mixes a faux-scientific veneer (it's founder after all

was a sci-fi writer) with a belief system and psycho-spiritual approaches. What I wanted was a better understanding of how that self-help book>religion initial transition actually worked. Not what are Hubbard's beliefs, but how he created believers. Hubbard seemed oblivious, even allergic, to practical details. It seems his third-ish wife (his marriage to his second wife wasn't legally sanctioned) Mary Sue, was the real organizer, but I still was left scratching my head about that leap from self-help and sci-fi writer to guru. It was clear what was in it for Hubbard; he became fabulously wealthy and revered. But what was in it for the followers, especially the initial ones who didn't have legions of fellow believers to bolster Hubbard's saintly status? Going Clear, however, is not just about L. Ron Hubbard. Wright covers the violent and tight-shipped rule of David Miscavige. Miscavige comes off as a classic tyrant (the purges and public community confessions reminded me of Mao's China) who needs to be deposed, yet he seems to have built an impregnable fort around him. As an outsider, one is mystified as to why Scientologists would accept such abuse. But by the time Miscavige's associates get to his inner circle they have invested years in the religion and all their friends and often family are believers. Being cast aside comes with a very heavy cost. Overall, this is a very worthwhile book. It reads well and raises interesting questions about what is a scam and what is a religion (for example, we mostly accept belief in a virgin births or parting seas as part of legitimate religions, but balk at Hubbard's visions of outer space theology). There are no easy answers, but one is left by a very uneasy feeling about Hubbard's legacy.

I've read another summary of Scientology - Wright's is far superior, and I especially like his detailing of the church's beliefs. He traces Scientology from its origin in the imagination of science-fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, its struggle to become accepted as a legitimate (and tax-exempt) religion, efforts to infiltrate governments (placed up to 5,000 Scientologists as spies in government agencies around the world, charging them with finding officials files on the church to help generate intimidating lawsuits,' vindictive treatment of critics (favorite weapon - lawsuits intended to bury the defendant in legal costs) and many who leave its ranks (often incarcerated in deplorable conditions for years and further punished if they tried to escape), and its impressive wealth. The objective, per Wright, of Scientologists, is to climb up the Bridge to Total Freedom's innumerable steps and then achieve eternal life. The organization's major goal is recruiting new members, increasingly achieved via exploiting celebrities such as Tom Cruise, John Travolta - he credits Scientology with putting his career into high-gear), and enlisting young members into its Sea Organization clergy - often as young 10 - 12 year-old children signing up for billion-year contracts and work under poor conditions for little/no payment (eg. 90-hour weeks for \$50/week, with one day off for schooling) and pressured

to undergo abortions if they became pregnant. (A billion years is but a temporary job in Scientology - they contend the world is already four quadrillion years old, and attaining immortality should certainly extend beyond one billion more years.) Scientology informally claims to have 8 million members (based on the number who have contributed members) and welcomes another 4.4 million new people every year. (Obviously, something is suspect about the numbers, unless Scientology has an incredibly high and fast dropout rate.) More credible is the estimate of a former high-level publicity person for the group - he estimated it only has 30,000 members, while the Statistical Abstract of the United States puts the number at 25,000. The church is believed to hold about \$1 billion in liquid assets and 12 million square-feet of property, including 26 properties in Hollywood valued at \$400 million and 68 more in Clearwater, Florida, valued at another \$168 million. Besides donations from members, Scientology also obtains the revenues from 1,000+ books written by Hubbard. (Hubbard's 'Dianetics' book sold 18 million copies, per the church.) David Touretzky, computer-science professor at Carnegie Mellon estimates that all the coursework costs nearly \$300,000, and the additional auditing (including 'repair auditing') and contributions expected of upper-level members may run the total to over half a million dollars. There are three levels of Scientologists. 'Public Scientologists' constitute the vast majority, many of these first solicited onto it in shopping malls or transit venues. They're first led to a Scientology location where they're given 'stress tests' with a quasi lie-detector (E-meter - again, adding to the 'science' label) or personality inventories that entice them into paying for courses or auditing therapies that address problems most on their minds. The second level is constantly pursued to boost its recruitment appeal and advance its causes such as attacks on psychiatry and the pharmaceutical industry for their having spoken out against Scientology, and promotion of its theories of education and drug rehabilitation. Anne Archer, Ted Danson, Michelle Pfeiffer, George Clooney, and Greta Van Susteren have been involved. The third level is that of its clergy, the Sea Organization, estimated to number about 4,000, concentrated in L.A. and Clearwater. Scientologists believe Hubbard discovered the existential truths of their doctrine through extensive research (hence, 'science') into the writings of Freud and others; he was not visited by an angel (eg. Mormonism) or divine (eg. Jesus), though he also states that his first insights came in a dentist's office while under sedation. Hubbard then 'realized' that 75 million years ago an evil overlord named Xenu sent human thetans to Earth in space vehicles resembling DC-8s. Supposedly Hubbard also healed himself of crippling war injuries; no injuries or combat service is documented in U.S. Navy records - supposedly because Hubbard was in secret intelligence work. He defined Scientology's goals as creating a civilization without insanity, criminals, or war, where Man is free to rise to greater heights - this idealism appeals to the young.

Another fertile recruiting ground - drug users who have become open to the idea of alternative realities. Therapy and evaluation (sometimes involving hypnosis) sessions focus on areas of supposed stress that cause the E-meter to jump, eventually to cleanse the mind of obsessions, fears, and irrational urges, thereby allowing the subject to 'Go Clear.' Often the process has led participants to recall past lives. Hubbard contended we are thetens, immortal spiritual beings incarnated in numerous lifetimes. (However, per Hubbard, when a thetan discovers that he is dead, he should report to Mars for a 'forgetter implant.' The ultimate goals of evaluating is to not just liberate one from destructive mental phenomena, but also from the laws of matter, energy, space, and time. Once free of these limitations, the thetan can roam the universe or even create new ones. Supposedly one who is Clear has flawless memory and the ability to perform mental tasks at great speed, as well as being less susceptible to disease. No credible examples, however, have been found, per Wright's research. Hubbard also reportedly cured 49er quarterback John Brodie's arm injury. Film director Paul Haggis (Oscar-winning, with an extensive Hollywood background) is a major figure in 'Going Clear,' with Wright documenting his story of indoctrination into the church and leaving 34 years later because he was ashamed of its support for California's gay-marriage ban ballot proposition and its smearing of ex-members, and calling it a cult. One has to wonder why those imprisoned by Scientology didn't walk out and call police. One explanation is the 'Stockholm syndrome,' lack of external friends is another, and a third is that they were told they would have to pay back eg. \$100,000 for Scientology classes they had taken. Wright also reports that Hubbard beat his second wife (married in a bigamous relationship, unknown to her), then tortured her with sleep deprivation, strangulations, and 'scientific torture experiments,' kidnapped their daughter, reported her to the FBI as a Communist, and suggested that she kill herself so he didn't have to incur the stigma of a divorce. She (Sara) declined, and after the divorce ran from him with her child as fast as she could. The 'bad news' is that Hubbard has been replaced by a reportedly authoritarian and violent David Miscavige. Scientologists now are encouraged to sever relations with non-believing relatives, and some marrieds are forced to divorce. Could such an obnoxious person who made things up science-fiction style as he went along also serve as a credible founder of a 'real' religion, and would a 'real' religion treat members such as Scientology has? Read Wright's excellent 'Going Clear' and decide for yourself. P.S.: Tom Cruise doesn't come out unscathed either. Wright tells us the church sent several young women to live with him, and that he received a considerable amount of free labor from young church adherents as part of their 'service.'

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