

## Church of Scientology International

The Church of Scientology International (CSI) is the "Mother Church" within the vast and complex array of churches, missions, corporations, publishing houses, and other entities that comprise the global Scientology network (Church of Scientology International 2018; see also →Dianetics and Scientology). The original Church of Scientology was first incorporated in 1953 by L. Ron Hubbard (1911-1986), a prolific author of Science Fiction and fantasy stories who had also developed a new science of the mind called "Dianetics" a few years earlier in 1950 (Hubbard 1950; Urban 2010). While Dianetics had primarily been a *non-religious* form of self-help therapy, the Church of Scientology was presented as a specifically *religious* organization, with complex ideas of the human spirit (called the Thetan), the remembrance of past lives, and an elaborate "space opera" history of the universe and life on other planets (Urban 2010; Kent 1999a; Lewis 2009). At the same time, Scientology also developed a hierarchy of increasingly esoteric levels of advanced training called "Operating Thetan" (OT), in which the Scientologist learned the secret history of the universe and the human self, while at the same time acquiring an array of supernatural abilities (Hubbard 2006; Hubbard 2007; Rothstein 2009; Urban 2010, 100-105).

As Scientology grew rapidly in the 1960s and 70s, it proliferated into a vast array of different religious and secular entities, ranging from local churches and missions to drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, publishing houses, and its infamous "Celebrity Centres". At the same time, it also became enmeshed in a massive and protracted legal battle with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service over its growing wealth and its claims to tax-exemption as a non-profit religious organization. Although several Scientology churches had been awarded that status, they were all stripped of tax-exemption after IRS investigations the 1960s (Urban 2010, 155-177). In response, Scientologists launched what they called "the War" against the IRS, which involved literally thousands of lawsuits, as well

as a variety of illegal activities. The most infamous of these was the infiltration of IRS offices by covert operatives from Scientology's intelligence agency, the Guardian's Office, in the mid-1970s. After a series of investigations and raids by the FBI, eleven Scientologists were arrested, including Hubbard's wife Mary Sue, while Hubbard himself went into hiding until his death (Reitman 2013, 114-124).

In the wake of the FBI investigation, Scientology underwent a massive reorganization and consolidation, which led, among other things, to the creation of CSI (Melton 2009, 28-29). Incorporated in Los Angeles in 1981, CSI was designed to serve as a kind of governing body, particularly with regard to legal matters, business affairs, and intellectual property, within the sprawling global Scientology empire. As such, CSI succeeded and/or absorbed the many diverse Scientology entities that had proliferated over the years, such as the Hubbard Association of Scientologists (established in 1952), the Founding Church of Scientology (1955), the Church of Scientology of California (1956), and others (Melton 2009; Urban 2010).

In the 1980s and early 1990s, CSI continued Scientology's long battle with the IRS, explicitly emphasizing the "religious" nature of the movement. The Scientology cross and creed were to be openly displayed, organizations were identified as "churches," leaders were to wear priestly collars, and so on (Sappell and Welkos 1990). In its filing for tax-exemption in 1993, CSI made extensive use of clearly "religious" language, asserting that it is an *ecclesiastical body* overseeing the many churches, missions, clergy, services, and religious activities that comprise the Scientology "faith:"

Church of Scientology International (CSI) was organized as a California nonprofit religious corporation on November 19, 1981, "for the exclusive purpose of serving as the Mother Church of the Scientology faith and exercising ecclesiastical authority as to the practice and propagation of the religion throughout the world...CSI operates exclusively for religious purposes by guiding, supporting, and coordinating the activities of Scientology churches, missions, and related organizations on matters relating to the ministration of religious services, training of clergy, dissemination and propagation of the faith, ecclesiastical administration and social-betterment activities (CSI 1993:1).

CSI's war with the IRS was eventually successful. After a complex settlement in 1993, the church was awarded a remarkable blanket exemption for all Scientology-related entities – including the most seemingly “secular” entities such as its Galaxy Press, which publishes Hubbard's science fiction (Reitman 2013, 168-170).

Today, the number of different entities that fall under the CSI umbrella is indeed vast and includes a huge array of both religious and secular organizations spread across the globe. As Stephen Kent (1999b) aptly observes, Scientology is thus best understood not simply as “a religion” but rather as a massive multinational corporation, of which “religion” is just one of many different components. The various organizations within the CSI network include, among many others: the Watchdog Committee, which is its executive management organization; the Finance Network, which manages the church's global financial activities; the Office of Special Affairs, which is the church's intelligence agency; the Flag Service Organization, which is centered in Clearwater, Florida, and administers advanced levels of training; Celebrity Centre International, which manages the global network of Celebrity Centres that cater to prominent celebrity members of the church; Golden Era Productions, which produces Scientology films and is responsible for marketing; Bridge Publications, the church's primary publishing outlet; and numerous other corporate and/or religious entities (Church of Scientology International 1993, 1999, and 2018).

Because Scientology is as much a global business empire as a religious organization, much of CSI's activities have involved the licensing of trademarks and service marks within the global Scientology network (Church of Scientology International 1993 and 2018). Through a complex corporate arrangement, the rights to Scientology trademarks are held by the church's Religious Technology Center (RTC, led by Scientology's current head, David Miscavige), which in turn grants CSI the right to use and sub-license them throughout the many Scientology churches, missions, and publishers. Since the 1980s and 1990s, both the RTC and CSI have fought numerous lawsuits over alleged copyright violations and dissemination of the church's most confidential materials (Urban 2010, 178-200). One of the most significant was CSI's suit against ex-Scientologist Stephen Fishman in 1994, as a

result of which all of the most esoteric Operating Thetan materials were first entered into the court record and then soon found their way onto the internet. Today, CSI seems to have largely lost the war of information, as the inner secrets of Operating Thetan and other confidential materials circulate promiscuously in cyberspace. Indeed, the Internet and its inherently anarchic dissemination of information may well prove to be the most significant challenge for CSI and other Scientology entities in the twenty-first century. (Urban 2010, 178-200; Urban 2017).

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