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The Church of Scientology: A History of a New Religion, by Hugh D. Urban. Princeton University Press, 2011. 264pp., hb., $27.95. ISBN-13: 9780691146089.

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In *The Church of Scientology*, Hugh Urban implicitly addresses the question: "How do new religions succeed?" by considering the ways that Scientology began as a personal growth movement and morphed into a small but highly visible world religion. The book is a detailed, carefully researched history that defines religion as organized, collective behavior shaped by formal and informal doctrines about the ways that supernatural powers influence life on earth and chart what happens after death. In Scientology's doctrine, supernatural sparks of divinity are deeply hidden within every individual's psyche.

Urban describes how the faith's secrecy and its litigious responses to critics have impeded serious scholarship. However, insiders assisted him with documentary materials and access to current members because of his commitments to confidentiality and anonymity. He also sought out dissidents and critics who had left the group or never belonged to it. Urban's respectful stance toward every side of the myriad controversies surrounding Scientology enabled him to travel along numerous contested paths that ranged from the smooth ones charted by devotees' spiritual orthodoxy to the rocky terrain marked by harsh critics' apostasy.

While doing his research, Urban uncovered secrets and also recognized the functions that secrets and wisdom serve in attracting new devotees and motivating veteran believers, who are all eager to utilize esoteric knowledge in order to gain earthly rewards. Secrecy moreover, often protects Scientology from its external critics and apostates, although it also fuels damaging speculations by outsiders. Urban respects the Church's secrecy, while he also explores the functions that concealment serves for Scientology and its leaders.

Scientology is among the contemporary West's most publicized and stigmatized religions, and Urban documents and interprets how the faith became so notorious. However, it would have been helpful if he had compared it in more detail to other contentious, celebrity-heavy groups founded by charismatic leaders who have for the most part avoided public attacks and legal battles: for example, Kabbalah Center, JZ Knight's Ramtha Movement, and Transcen-

dental Meditation. Hubbard's bricolage of science fiction, popular psychology, hawkish politics and spirituality is no more violent or disconcerting than the beliefs of those three groups or established faiths like the Mormons.

When Urban considers how Scientology both countered and sometimes courted criticism, he might also have systematically examined the specific factors that differentiate Scientology from other groups and contributed to the conflicts surrounding it. Urban should not be faulted for his limited comparisons, however, because he examines Scientology as a specific case in terms of its own history, belief system and its changing internal structure. His account of the movement's history reveals the importance of the surrounding culture in contributing to Scientology's and other new religious movements' success or failure. Hubbard capitalized on the cultural continuity between Cold War ideology, American individualism and his own approach to human advancement.

In the 1930s, L. Ron Hubbard became widely known as a prolific science fiction writer, at a time when short story magazines and popular novels reached large, enthusiastic audiences in the U.S. After World War II, Hubbard grew increasingly interested in reincarnation and a number of Asian spiritual traditions and he incorporated them into his vision of psychotherapy for the masses. Like a number of his other spiritual entrepreneurs in the fifties, Hubbard sought ways to help Americans maximize their full human potential in order to create a more prosperous and peaceful world.

His early system of Dianetics, a "science of the mind," was a franchised approach to the psychology of personal growth that fit into the emerging self-help tradition epitomized by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Bill Wilson founded AA a decade earlier than Hubbard started Scientology and he wove spirituality into the Twelve Steps that led its members to lasting recovery and personal growth. AA was already well established at the time that Hubbard shaped Scientology into a new religious movement instead of a secular approach to self-actualization.

Hubbard established the Church of Scientology in 1953, as a defence against medical and media critics of Dianetics and also as a proactive effort to create a recipe that promised emotional growth mixed with moral repair and spiritual fulfilment. It was a Cold War religion that was shaped by the suspicion and secrecy characteristic of the politics and the zeitgeist of the times. Urban's depiction of the interactions between Scientology and the surrounding social context contributes to our understandings of the more general ways that new religious movements emerge during periods of dramatic social change.

These insights alone would make Urban's work a major contribution to sociology, history, and religious studies, but he does much more. Urban

demonstrates that the ethos of secrecy and surveillance that defines Scientology in the twenty-first century reflects the United States' FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's obsessive preoccupation with the Red Threat and fighting it with information control and psychological testing. Hubbard's personal correspondence with Hoover identified alleged Communist sympathizers and offered Dianetics as an effective antidote to socialism.

Ironically, the FBI responded to Hubbard's overtures by organizing a series of raids on Scientology's Los Angeles and Washington centers. In response, the Church of Scientology formed its own intelligence agency to weed out potential enemies and respond to external threats. The game of "Spy vs. Spy" continues today and there is an ongoing Cold War between Scientology, its apostates and its external critics.

Urban goes on to describe the ways that Scientology survived the "cult wars" of the nineteen seventies and ultimately became a legitimate tax-exempt organization in the nineties. Even though the Institutional Revenue Service designated Scientology as a legitimate religion, it is still informally stigmatized in America and formally penalized in France, Germany and other European Union Nations. Many of its current battles are being fought in cyberspace, as Scientology's deepest secrets are revealed and its monopolies on esoteric knowledge are threatened.

This book offers fresh perspectives on Scientology and Urban's balanced approach makes it a must-read for scholars of new religious movements and also motivated general readers. Although it is well written, the detail makes *The Church of Scientology* a challenging read for most undergraduates and students might benefit by reading excerpts rather than the whole book. Urban modestly acknowledges that he necessarily missed some important themes because of his focus on the group's history of secrecy and intense hierarchical control. It opens doors to more research about Hubbard's approaches to education and the ways that private schools run by Scientologists have had a broad impact. There is also the issue of how tight friendships draw and keep people in Scientology, as they do in other new religious movements. Don Lattin's *Distilled Spirits* (2012) would be an excellent book tor read in tandem with *The Church of Scientology*, because it traces the extraordinary rise of a far more open movement, Alcoholics Anonymous, in terms of the movement's similar cultural context and contrasting spiritual underpinnings.