chapter 5

Danish Dianetics: Scholarship in the Church of Scientology in Scandinavia

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L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, began establishing the Church of Scientology (CoS) outside of the United States when he established a center in Dublin in 1956. He later moved his headquarters to Saint Hill near East Grinstead, Sussex, in England in 1959. Though French Scientologists had established an early organization in Paris during the same year, the church that was opened in Copenhagen in June of 1968 became the center of Scientology activities in continental Europe. Scientology was introduced into Sweden as well in 1968. This was well before “New Religious Movements” became established as a distinct field of study. As a consequence, it would be more than a dozen years before Scandinavian academicians turned their attention to CoS. When they did, it was Danish researchers who took the lead, in part because of the proximity of the major Scientology center to the University of Copenhagen in the country’s capital. In this chapter, we will survey the scholarship that has been produced on Scientology in Scandinavia, emphasizing Danish contributions.

Denmark

Merethe Sundby-Sørensen

The study of Scientology in Denmark started after the Church asked Arild Hvidtfeldt, then Professor of Sociology of Religion at the University of Copenhagen, to make a statement for one of their court cases. Hvidtfeldt subsequently introduced another sociologist of religion at Copenhagen, Merethe Sundby-Sørensen, to Scientology. Sundby-Sørensen followed up by conducting two surveys of Danish Scientologists in 1982 and 1992, and was preparing a third when she died from a heart attack in 1997.¹ Peter B. Andersen, another sociologist of religion at the University of Copenhagen, completed this third survey in 1999.²

² Notes on the data collected by these three surveys included at the end of this article.
Her 1991 chapter, “Scientologi,” in Tim Jensen’s *Minoritetsreligioner – religionssociologisk set* was a survey piece that provided information on the group’s historical background, ideas and rituals, demography, and relations with mainstream society. Additionally, she included a number of primary texts as well as source material from media.

Sundby-Sørensen also wrote a short piece, “Danish Members’ Perceptions of the Founder of the Church of Scientology,” for Eileen Barker and Margit Warburg’s edited volume, *New Religions and New Religiosity* (1998). In that chapter, she refers to Roy Wallis’s discussion of how, in term Weberian terms, L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, moved from being a magician to a mystagoque and, eventually, to an exemplary prophet (1976, 252). She then goes over findings from her second survey which indicated that, rather than regarding Hubbard as being primarily the Founder, a Philosopher or other options (based on the categories found in CoS’s internal literature), members of the Church regarded him primarily as a Researcher – a finding Sundby-Sørensen attributes to the fact that most Danish Scientologists continued to be members of the Danish National Evangelical Lutheran Church, regarding Scientology as a form of therapy and self-development rather than as a religion.

Finally, Merethe Sundby-Sørensen examined how women’s roles were understood and communicated in three different NRMS. She asked if this can explain why women are a minority in NRMS in her 1989 article “Køn, kvinder og de ‘nyreligiøse’” [Gender, women and the “new religions”]. With respect to CoS, she quotes Scientology texts in which women are portrayed as subordinate to the men, but also points out that men and women are trained together and evidently have the same possibilities of obtaining leading positions in the Church. The uneven gender balance in these groups must thus have other explanations than that of NRMS’ view on women.

In recent years, the data on Danish Scientologists that Sundby-Sørensen and, later, Peter B. Andersen collected has been utilized by James R. Lewis as one component of a larger argument regarding the increasing age of new converts to alternative religions (Lewis 2014a) and, in another article, to support the contention that the Church of Scientology is declining in numbers (Lewis 2014b). Finally, Inga B. Tøllefsen and James R. Lewis used the same data set to argue that, in contrast to the great majority of other religious groups, Scientology seems to recruit a majority of male members (Tøllefsen and Lewis, forthcoming).

**Peter B. Andersen**

Peter B. Andersen, another sociologist of religion, worked with Sundby-Sørensen to gather demographic data on Danish Scientologists. In “Kilder til et