"LRH4ALL!": The Negotiation of Information in the Church of Scientology and the Open Source Scientology Movement

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Introduction: Keep Scientology Working

In February 1965 L. Ron Hubbard released an HCO policy letter entitled “Keeping Scientology Working”. While initially formulated as a statement addressed to official church staff, the letter was quickly adopted as the central text around which a series of church-wide policies condemning “non standard” Scientology beliefs and practices were issued. The original letter would be re-printed at least two times over the coming decades, during especially tense moments of internal fracturing within the Church of Scientology. By its third reissue in 1980 “Keeping Scientology Working” (ksw) was accompanied by the prefatory note “actions which neglect or violate this policy letter are HIGH CRIMES” against the Church of Scientology (CoS), and Hubbard urged all church members to work towards the letter’s total enforcement (Hubbard 1980: 1).

At the heart of ksw is the mandate that Scientology technology must at all times be practiced in consonance with official CoS guidelines. Also known by Scientologists simply as “the tech”, “Scientology technology” refers to the practices of auditing and spiritual advancement outlined by L. Ron Hubbard throughout Scientology scriptures. The Church of Scientology International (the self-defined “mother church” of CoS) defines the tech broadly as “the methods of application of the principles” of Scientology (Church of Scientology International 1992: 155). The ksw mandate to guard against non-standard tech meant in practice that ksw was a statement of the re-assertion of official church control over the proliferation of adaptations and interpretations of church practice that had bubbled up from the lived practices of Scientology since the early 1950s, couched in the language of the correct relationship of Scientologists to the science and technology of Hubbard’s “discoveries”.1

1 L. Ron Hubbard is known, in part, for his early adoption of a number of scientific rhetorical devices into the language of church doctrine and mythology. He described himself as both the “researcher” and “discoverer” of Scientology, which he further described as a set of new universal spiritual “laws” that together “provide a systematic oath with exact procedures,
Implicit in ksw was Hubbard’s struggle with a growing movement of independent scientologists – individuals who had become convinced of the efficacy of Scientology practices but disillusioned with the church hierarchy and insistence on control. Calling these practices and individuals “aberrant” and “suppressive”, Hubbard continued to highlight the need to protect Scientology from “improper” use as a core issue facing CoS until his death in 1986. By 1966 independent Scientologists had begun reporting aggressive censorship and coercion leveled against them as punishment for their “misuse” of the tech.2

In particular Hubbard feared the proliferation of non-standardized tech would render Scientology unworkable, acting as a sort of contagion that would ultimately sabotage the spiritual health of the entire universe by burying Hubbard’s “true” and “original” discoveries under a campaign of misinformation.3 Hubbard’s authority as the sole arbiter and manager of Scientology’s doctrines, texts, and practices was centrally located in the ksw policy and the letter serves as a particularly keen example of the struggles between church authority and lived religion more broadly – one that Hubbard understood to be explicitly in tension at the time he issued ksw. Hoping to sway disgruntled church members to his side, Hubbard worked in ksw to balance his own explanations of the universal scientific validity of his discovery of Scientology with assertions of his personal authority over the ways in which that science could be duplicated.4

which achieve standardized predictable results” that would perfect human society. James R. Lewis has argued that these rhetorical devices have served primarily as a legitimation strategy for the movement (Lewis 2010).


3 Keeping within the tradition of their use of scientific rhetoric, as the first splinter groups began to shift away from CoS in the early 1960s leadership responded by employing a rhetoric of “standardness” and “inerrancy”, combatting rogue Scientologists by making it clear that Scientology only “worked” as far as the technology was applied correctly and under the right protocols (Hubbard 1965; Hubbard 1989; Hubbard 2007a; Hubbard 2007b).

4 This tightrope dance Hubbard performed in ksw forced him to work on two fronts: (1) to address popular conceptions about how science and the scientific method worked more broadly, and (2) to incite a PR campaign for church members that felt CoS control over the lived practices of Scientology were becoming too harsh. Hubbard’s answer in ksw was simple: for whatever reason, he had discovered the pure and true Scientology tech, and that tech would be destroyed if others modified it in anyway. Hubbard, as the original discoverer of the tech, was the only person capable of articulating its proper use, despite how narcissist it may make him seem: “This point will”, Hubbard explained, “of course, be attacked as ‘unpopular’, ‘egotistical’ and ‘undemocratic’. But it is also a survival point” (Hubbard 1965: 3).