
Charisma, Authority, and Innovation in Scientology's "Golden Age" Narrative

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Abstract: This article discusses Scientology's "golden age" narrative. The first section discusses Scientology's hagiographic production of L. Ron Hubbard, which presents him as a cultural producer and hero of the American golden age of entertainment. Scientology connects elements of Hubbard's sacred biography with the secular realm by suggesting that the same extraordinary experiences that led to the discovery of Dianetics and Scientology also informed his fiction writing. The second section uses Michael Toth's model of "dual charisma" to frame the connection between Hubbard's charisma and the authority of Scientology's current leader, David Miscavige. Scientology's golden age narrative promotes a "renaissance" envisioned by Hubbard and realized under Miscavige; it bridges the past "otherworldly" charisma of Hubbard, the present executive acuity of Miscavige, and the prospect of a future "cleared" planet brought about by rapid international expansion. The conclusion suggests that Scientology's golden age is an innovation that responds to changing conditions in the modern media environment by providing an identifiable narrative that is to some degree universal but also unique to Scientology. It connects the past, present, and future as well as the charisma of the church's founder with the authority of its current leader. It is both external and internal communication that solidifies David Miscavige's authority within Scientology.

Keywords: Scientology, dual charisma, golden age, L. Ron Hubbard, David Miscavige

Introduction

Golden age myths are common in religious and cultural contexts around the world, and have been so for thousands of years (Heinberg 1995). Mythic golden ages are idealized pasts when people lived in harmony with each other, nature, and the gods. Denizens of mythic golden ages often also possess physical abilities, longevity, and wisdom superior to those of contemporary humans. The term "golden age" comes from the Greek poet Hesiod, who wrote that

first of all the deathless gods having homes on Olympus made a golden race of mortal men. . . Like gods they lived with hearts free from sorrow and remote from toil and grief; nor was miserable age their lot, but always unwearied in feet and hands they made merry in feasting, beyond the reach of evils. And when they died, it was as though they were given over to sleep. And all good things were theirs. For the fruitful earth spontaneously bore them abundant fruit without stint. And they lived in ease and peace upon their lands with many good things, rich in flocks and beloved of the blessed gods. (Quoted in Heinberg 1995, 47)

Many religious golden age stories are mythic—the Garden of Eden being one example. Many religions also promise a return to the golden age, or the forging of a new one, through the

practice of that religion in the present. This can be seen, for example, in the way evangelical Christians' eschatological narratives of heaven depict not only the future golden age but also the experience of "Heaven on Earth" during worship (Ingalls 2011). Mythic golden ages thus provide narrative threads with which religions bind the past and future to the present.

Golden age myths operate similarly in secular contexts. Cultural golden ages are periods in history identified as having heightened outputs of, or innovations in, for example, art, science, or literature. Like the denizens of mythic golden ages, the cultural producers of cultural golden ages are ascribed preternatural talents and elevated to iconic statuses. For example, led by mystic visions, artists such as El Greco, Zurbaran, and Velázquez helped shape a golden age for Spanish art in the sixteenth century (Stoichita 1997). Cultural golden ages are generally recognized retroactively but need not be past centuries or millennia—for example, the 1980s and 1990s often are referred to as the golden age of hip hop (McQuillar 2007). They can also be recognized in their own times; some entertainment journalists claim we are currently in a new golden age of television brought about by changes in the media landscape (for example, Leopold 2013). And, of course, golden ages of the future are predicted, particularly in technology-oriented fields (European Futures Observatory 2017).

Scientology's golden age narrative is both mythic and cultural. The future-facing elements of the narrative are mythic in that they suggest a utopian future can be achieved through the study and application of Scientology's religious precepts, especially L. Ron Hubbard's (1911–86) "auditing" technology. Scientologists believe that the mind is composed of two parts: the analytic mind and the reactive mind. While the analytic mind is rational and accurate, the reactive mind is not. Scientologists believe that psychosomatic illnesses and other aberrations are caused by past traumas, called engrams, which accumulate over time in the reactive mind. This collection of engrams limits an individual's ability to reach her physical and cognitive potential. Engrams therefore have deleterious effects on individuals and society and are the root cause of, for example, mental illness, drug addiction, and crime. Auditing is a process (or set of processes) through which Scientologists identify engrams and "release" them.¹ When all engrams have been released, the Scientologist has shed her reactive mind and achieved the state of "Clear." "Clears" benefit from, among other things, greater energy and improved health, perception, and communicative abilities. Scientologists believe that "clearing the planet" will bring about a utopia free of crime, conflict, and disease.

Although the future-facing aspects of Scientology's golden age narrative are mythic, its past-facing elements are cultural. Specifically, it looks back at American popular culture from 1920 to 1960—the "golden age" of several mediums and genres, including radio, television, film, and science fiction.² The American golden age of entertainment coincided with the rapid expansion of the country's spiritual marketplace in which entrepreneurial new forms of religious expression flourished at the intersections of popular culture and counterculture.³ It also saw the reorganization of American popular culture around the mass communications technologies of radio, film, and television. These technologies changed the ways Americans thought about and experienced intimacy (Taylor 2002) and, thus, the early to mid-twentieth century was a critical period during which the "cult of celebrity" became embedded in American popular culture. Stars such as Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, and John Wayne acted out tales of mystery, intrigue, and adventure for an enraptured public and, in doing so, achieved larger-than-life status in the popular imagination. Today, many golden age stars have transcended death, elevated to quasi-mythical or near-religious status through the continued circulation of their images.⁴

Just as changing media altered the cultural landscape in which Scientology developed during the American golden age of entertainment, so too has new media altered the cultural

landscape in which Scientology exists today. The rise of the Internet and changes in media production, distribution, and consumption have changed how religion is practised and promoted (Campbell 2013). I suggest that we view Scientology's golden age narrative in this context. This article proceeds in three sections. The first section discusses Scientology's hagiographic production of L. Ron Hubbard (Christensen 2005), which presents him as a hero and cultural producer of the American golden age of entertainment. Scientology connects elements of Hubbard's sacred biography with the secular realm by suggesting that the same extraordinary experiences that led to the discovery of Dianetics and Scientology also informed his fiction writing. Two examples—the annual L. Ron Hubbard Presents: The Writers and Illustrators of the Future contest and the twice-monthly *Golden Age Radio Hour* performances at the L. Ron Hubbard theatre in Los Angeles—show how the Church of Scientology (CoS) (re)produces Hubbard's charisma and the American golden age of entertainment in which that charisma is grounded. The second section uses Michael Toth's (1972) model of "dual charisma" to frame the connection between Hubbard's charisma and the authority of Scientology's current leader, David Miscavige (born 1960). Scientology's golden age narrative promotes a "renaissance" envisioned by Hubbard and realized under Miscavige; it bridges the past "otherworldly" charisma of Hubbard, the present executive acuity of Miscavige, and the prospect of a future "cleared" planet brought about by rapid international expansion. This bridge has been built through the reorganizing, reworking, and rebranding of Scientology under the banner of the "Golden Age." Since the 1980s, Scientology has reorganized its command structure largely around the Gold Base in California and its publishing under Golden Era Productions; it has reworked Hubbard's materials, releasing newly edited editions under the Golden Age of Tech, the Golden Age of Knowledge, and the Golden Age of Tech: Phase II initiatives; and it has launched an ambitious church-building campaign that seeks to rebrand Scientology as a "global religion." These initiatives have been presented as directives issued by Hubbard and realized by Miscavige. The final section suggests that Scientology's golden age is an innovation that responds to changing conditions in the modern media environment by providing an identifiable narrative that is, to some degree, not only universal but also unique to Scientology. This narrative connects the past, present, and future and also the charisma of the church's founder with the authority of its current leader. It is both external and internal communication that solidifies David Miscavige's authority within Scientology.

L. Ron Hubbard: Golden Age Producer, Golden Age Hero

The concept of a golden age resonates in Scientology because the church presents L. Ron Hubbard as both a golden age of entertainment cultural producer and hero. As a cultural producer, Hubbard's film credits include the script to the Columbia movie serial *The Secret of Treasure Island* (1938) and, according to the CoS, unaccredited work on *The Mysterious Pilot* (1937), *The Great Adventures of Wild Bill Hickok* (1938), and *The Spider Returns* (1941). Hubbard, though, is better known as a fiction writer. Between 1932 and 1950, he published over 150 short stories in several genres, including mystery, adventure, westerns, and science fiction (Widder 1994). Although his output across genres was fairly balanced, Hubbard is most often associated with science fiction and particularly for his contributions to the genre's seminal magazine of the time, *Astounding Science Fiction*. It was in this magazine where he published the first version of Dianetics in May 1950. The characters that populated Hubbard's fiction writing and the golden age more generally were larger-than-life heroes who courted mystery, intrigue, and adventure, all with no small amount of derring-do. This is also the persona that Hubbard and Scientology have crafted in his biography.

The facts of Hubbard's biography are contested (for example, [Atack 2013](#); [Miller 2015](#)). What is presented here is drawn from current [CoS \(2012\)](#) accounts and scholarship for the purpose of establishing the overall tenor of Hubbard's biographical narrative ([Christensen 2005](#); [Urban 2011](#), 29–33).⁵ Hubbard was born in Tilden, Nebraska, on March 13, 1911 and raised on a frontier ranch near Helena, Montana. An adventurer from the start, he “broke a buck” at age three and was made a “Blood Brother” of the local Blackfoot Indians at six years old. He moved with his family to Washington, DC, at the age of twelve, where he was befriended by the naval commander Joseph “Snake” Thompson. Thompson was a prankster, reptile enthusiast, and spy who had studied under Sigmund Freud in Vienna ([Bainbridge 2009](#), 40–41) and who exposed the young Hubbard to ideas that led him to think “something could be done about the mind” ([CoS 2012](#), 4).

Hubbard returned to Montana in 1925 to enrol in high school, where he began his career as a writer with submissions to the school's newspaper. He voyaged twice to the South Pacific, first in the summer of 1927 and again in 1928. On these trips, he “gain[ed] entrance into fabled Tibetan lamastaries scattered through the Western Hills of China and actually studied with the last in a line of royal magicians descended from the court of Kublai Khan” ([CoS 2012](#), 4). After graduating high school in 1930, Hubbard enrolled in George Washington University, where he studied engineering, mathematics, and nuclear physics. He also wrote for the drama society and became president of the university flying club. Hubbard left the university after two years, married, and pursued a living as a writer. In 1937, he moved to Hollywood to work on the screenplay for the Columbia serial *Return to Treasure Island*.

World War II interrupted Hubbard's writing career. He served as a commander of anti-submarine patrols in the South Pacific where he was injured badly enough to be admitted to the Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland, California. It was in this hospital that he healed himself and his fellow patients using an early form of Dianetics, which was the precursor to Scientology.

In the chapter “Inventing L. Ron Hubbard,” [Dorthe Refslund Christensen \(2005\)](#) suggests that Hubbard's biography as presented in Scientology is best understood in hagiographic terms. Hagiography presents the totality of its subject's life as a seemingly “divinely predetermined” series of events in which even the smallest detail is rendered religiously meaningful. Hubbard's hagiography presents the events of his life as leading inexorably to the creation of the body of knowledge that is Scientology. This is seen, for example, in the fourteen-volume series entitled *L. Ron Hubbard*, which is produced by the Scientology's publishing arm Bridge Publications. Each volume focuses on an aspect of Hubbard's persona (for example, adventurer, humanitarian, musician) and its contribution to the discoveries on which Scientology is based.

[Christensen \(2005, 230\)](#) also suggests that the hagiographic production of Hubbard's charisma is institutionalized through the process of textualization, which “transform[s] Hubbard from a historical person to a mythological character identified with a set of religious ideas and practices.” Christensen focuses on the connection between Hubbard's hagiography and the sacred realms of Dianetics and Scientology. But Galaxy Press, the literary agent for Hubbard's fiction, extends the hagiographic production of Hubbard to the secular realm of his fiction work. It does this by suggesting that, like the discoveries that lead to Dianetics and Scientology, each of Hubbard's stories is rooted in either personal experience or research. For example, the description for the adventure tale *The Headhunters* ([Hubbard 2011](#)) states:

In 1927, L. Ron Hubbard sailed across the Pacific to Guam to meet his naval officer father. It was the beginning of an adventure that would take him from the Western Hills of China to the

South Pacific islands. Along the way he met Cantonese pirates, Chamorro natives, British spies, and headhunters of the South Pacific. He was one of the few Westerners to come away from an encounter with a headhunter tribe not only unscathed, but bearing gifts as well. Those experiences and knowledge proved invaluable in the writing of such stories as *The Headhunters*. (Galaxy Press 2020a, "Author" tab)

In a similar manner, the summary for the science fiction story *Beyond All Weapons* (Hubbard 2012) states:

L. Ron Hubbard was a pioneer in his use and development of Einstein's theories of space and time as a plot point in his fiction. In *Beyond All Weapons*, he explains: "As mass approaches the speed of light ... it approaches infinity. And, as mass approaches infinity, time approaches zero. It was only nine days back from Alpha. But in those nine days, six thousand years have passed by Earth." It stands as one of the earliest—and most succinct—descriptions of the theory. (Galaxy Press 2020b, "Author" tab).

L. Ron Hubbard is presented in Scientology's sacred and secular communications as an important cultural producer of the golden age and also as the living embodiment of its heroes. Like the heroes of golden age tales, Hubbard's thirst for knowledge and adventure took him to the far-flung corners of the globe. And, like the golden age stars who have achieved religious status in popular culture, he is revered as an icon within Scientology.

Making the Golden Age Real

The argument up to this point has been that Hubbard's charisma is intertwined with the mythical associations of a golden age narrative and that this narrative holds special power in Scientology because it is grounded in a specific sociocultural moment—the American golden age of entertainment. Hubbard's biography presents him as a concomitant cultural producer and hero of this golden age, with all of its attendant mythological gravitas. The textualization of Hubbard rests on the claims laid out in his sacred biography, and Scientology extends this textualization into the secular world by integrating Hubbard's fiction into its golden age narrative.

Golden age narratives are efficacious in part because they "make real" the past and future in the present. Scientology (re)produces the American golden age of entertainment through two initiatives that highlight Hubbard's role as a cultural producer: the L. Ron Hubbard presents Writers and Illustrators of the Future contest and the *Golden Age Radio Hour*, which is held twice a month at the L. Ron Hubbard Theatre in Los Angeles.

The L. Ron Hubbard presents Writers and Illustrators of the Future contest is an annual contest that supports emerging science fiction writers and illustrators through financial awards and publication of work. Each quarter a panel of well-respected science fiction writers collects and evaluates submissions, selecting three authors to attend a five-day skills-building and technique-building workshop. Winners are awarded prizes of \$500, \$750, and \$1,000 respectively, with one annual winner receiving \$5,000 (Author Services 2020). Their work is also published in an annual anthology distributed by Galaxy Press. According to the contest website, Hubbard created the Writers and Illustrators of the Future contest in 1983 to "encourage the next generation of writers in the fields of science fiction and fantasy" (a similar contest for illustrators was added in 1988) (Author Services 2017).

The Writers and Illustrators of the Future contest is run by Galaxy Press, which acts as Hubbard's literary agent and is staffed by Scientologists. However, the contest is kept separate from Scientology; the judges are not Scientologists, and no overt mention of the religion occurs during the seminar week or at the awards gala. The contest is very much about Hubbard,

however. For example, the homepage of the contest website features a link to Hubbard's biography, placed prominently at the top of the page (Writers of the Future 2020). Each edition of the *L. Ron Hubbard Presents* annual also features an essay written by him. In an email to prominent Scientology critic Tony Ortega (2012b), the 2000 contest winner Fran Wu states that winners are given a tour of the Hubbard museum, and there is some "aggrandizement . . . directed to Hubbard" but "nothing very 'Scientology-y'." From the perspective of textualization, though, the contest is an effective means of (re)producing Hubbard's charisma by supporting a genre that is central to his hagiography and Scientology's golden age narrative.

Scientology also (re)produces Hubbard's charisma and the American golden age of entertainment in the present through the L. Ron Hubbard Theatre in Los Angeles, California. Established in 1997, the theatre is "dedicated to recreating [the] extraordinary experience" of 1920s radio theatre, which "in its heyday, brought family and friends together, as they gathered around the radio to share in thrilling adventures, raucous comedies and compelling mysteries" (Galaxy Press 2020c). It does this by presenting twice-monthly readings of Hubbard's works on its *Golden Age Radio Hour*. *Golden Age Radio Hour* performances are semi-staged and performed by local actors. The events are ticketed and open to the public, with complimentary refreshments both before and after the performance. Like the Writers and Illustrators of the Future contest, the *Golden Age Radio Hour* does not promote Scientology directly but does focus on L. Ron Hubbard. For example, Hubbard's fiction is prominently displayed for purchase in print and audiobook format, performances are prefaced with a presentation about Hubbard, and a bust of Hubbard sits prominently next to the performance stage (Purdom 2013).

The Writers and Illustrators of the Future contest and the *Golden Age Radio Hour* thus contribute to the hagiographic production of L. Ron Hubbard outside of an "official" Scientology context. First, both initiatives burnish Hubbard's legacy as a golden age writer. Second, they establish Hubbard as a visionary who created systems to perpetually support mediums that were central to the American golden age of entertainment. Finally, in the performance of these events, the American golden age of entertainment is (re)produced in the present, which is a kind of artistic "renaissance" for the mediums of pulp fiction and radio.

David Miscavige: Leader of Scientology's Renaissance

Scientology has undergone significant changes under the auspices of the "golden age." Promoted by the church as "a renaissance for Scientology," the main initiatives of this project are a reorganization that concentrates authority and media production at the Gold Base in California; the reworking and re-releasing of CoS material under the Golden Age of Tech, the Golden Age of Tech II, and the Golden Age of Knowledge; and the rebranding of Scientology as a world religion through the establishment of "Ideal Orgs" (short for ideal organizations) internationally (Scientology 2017e).⁶ Each of these initiatives has been promoted as a realization of Hubbard's Keeping Scientology Working directive, which is led by Miscavige.⁷ In other words, the golden age of Scientology provides a narrative that not only connects the past, present, and future but also Hubbard's institutionalized charisma to Miscavige's authority.

As noted above, Christensen (2005) observes that, since the early days of Scientology, Hubbard institutionalized his charisma through the constant production of books, lectures, and directives. Through textualization, he established himself as the "Standard Technology" through which Scientology works. In 1982, Hubbard took the further step of trademarking his own name and, in doing so, "initiated the ultimate formal routinization of charisma. He transformed himself into the ultimate legitimizing source: a registered trademark handed over to the control of the Religious Technology Center (RTC)" (245). Hubbard's move was significant:

in trademarking his own name, he enshrined himself as a socio-legal object of Scientology that existed beyond his corporeal form—an object that could be used by the RTC even after his death.⁸ In doing so, Hubbard created a powerful means for Miscavige, who became the chairman of the Board of the RTC in 1987, to legitimize his own authority within Scientology.

Max Weber ([1922] 1964) suggested that, when the original charismatic leader of a movement dies, their charisma must be “institutionalized” under new leadership if the movement is to continue. Weber defined charisma as

a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a “leader.” (358–59)

Michael Toth (1972, 93) notes that, for a social movement to survive after the death of its founder, the founder’s charisma must move in one of three directions: towards dissolution, towards traditional authority, or towards rational-legal authority. In other words, the movement must transition from collective behaviour, transforming into an institution. Building on Weber’s theory of charismatic authority, Toth suggests that the institutionalization of charisma requires two leaders: the original leader from whom the charisma originates and a second leader, often a protégé, who oversees its institutionalization and draws legitimacy from it. Toth’s ideal-type theory of double charisma posits the charismatic arc as a five-step process: (1) the appearance of the leader, who issues a call to her followers; (2) the gathering of an inner circle of disciples; (3) the sudden “martyrdom” of the founder, which leaves an initial, temporary void in leadership; (4) the rise from within the discipleship of a new charismatic leader who issues a call of consolidation and organization; and (5) the institutionalization of the founder and the treatment of this by the second leader and its followers as a legitimizing totem (93–94).

Scientology’s developmental arc, and Miscavige’s rise to leadership within it, closely resembles Toth’s model. Miscavige is presented by the Church of Scientology as a prodigy, having become the organization’s youngest professional auditor at the age of twelve. He worked directly under L. Ron Hubbard as a cameraman for Scientology’s training films and, in 1979, was appointed the head of the Commodore’s Messenger Organization, the youth group that gained the responsibility of enforcing Hubbard’s policies. Miscavige gradually assumed authority within Scientology during the early 1980s when Hubbard was no longer appearing publicly (Tobin 1998). During these years, Miscavige led a significant reorganization within Scientology; some prominent moves included the purging of several top leaders of the Guardian’s Office following the “Operation Snow White” scandal in 1981 and the establishment of the Religious Technology Center in 1982 (Tobin 1998). In 1987, a year after Hubbard’s death, Miscavige was appointed the chairman of the Board of the RTC. The CoS’s website describes him as the ecclesiastical leader of Scientology and also the bearer of “the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the standard and pure application of L. Ron Hubbard’s technologies of Dianetics and Scientology and for Keeping Scientology Working” (Scientology 2017a).

In Toth’s (1972, 95) formulation, the charismatic founder of a movement is distinguished from the subsequent leader by the “thrust and focus” of leadership:

The first leader is strange, fascinating, unusual, unearthly, the second is more conventional, mundane, practical; the first leader brings the elect together, the second creates an organization to contain them; the first leader is inspired by a vision, the second elaborates that vision into a plan.

Hubbard's biography paints him as an individual with unusual abilities. Miscavige's biography presents him as more "conventional"—but only just. Scientology's website describes him as a "prodigy," the youngest ever professional auditor and personal confidant of Hubbard's. He is also presented as both the custodian of Scientology and its saviour:

In 1983, L. Ron Hubbard described a heroic Church executive who cleaned the ranks of rogue staff attempting to seize control of Scientology while Mr. Hubbard was engaged in intensive research and absent from the Church. As Mr. Hubbard himself phrased it:

"So forgive me for not managing the Church when it almost fell into hostile hands. It all came out all right. Why? Because real Scientologists made sure it did. My faith was justified."

That real Scientologist L. Ron Hubbard spoke of was David Miscavige. (Scientology 2017a; emphasis in original)

The reorganization of Scientology in the mid-1980s concentrated authority with Miscavige and the RTC at Gold Base. Gold Base serves as an important symbolic and practical marker in the golden age narrative because it houses Golden Era Productions, "the dissemination center for the entire Scientology religion, responsible for all film, video, television, Internet and international event production" (Scientology 2017c).⁹ Golden Era Productions is also responsible for the production of Scientology's informational and training films as well as for public service announcements promoting the church's social betterment initiatives. As Hugh Urban (2017, 16) notes, one way that Scientology has attempted to reshape its public image in the face of accusations of abuse by former members and public ridicule of its esoteric teachings is to promote its social betterment campaigns.

Perhaps Golden Era Production's most important role in the production of Scientology's golden age narrative, though, is its restoration of all of L. Ron Hubbard's recorded lectures as part of the Golden Age of Knowledge initiative. The Golden Age of Knowledge is the centerpiece of a larger project, which also includes the Golden Age of Tech and the Golden Age of Tech: Phase II, that collected, restored, re-edited, and re-released almost all of Hubbard's voluminous output. This included not just his writings and technical manuals but also his audio- and video-taped lectures. The CoS claims that this was necessary because the original materials contained editorial errors and technological problems that inhibited complete comprehension of Hubbard's "tech." According to the CoS, the revised materials of the golden age are now presented as Hubbard originally intended, a return to "pure source." This is important to Scientologists, for whom "exact comprehension" of communications is an essential requirement for achieving Clear.

In 1996, the church unveiled the first Golden Age of Tech, which made significant changes to the way that auditors were trained. The CoS claimed that it had found multiple errors in some of the auditor-training levels and, after fixing them, required auditors to buy the new materials and retake some of the courses. Miscavige claimed the revised materials significantly improved the ability of Scientologists to quickly become auditors. However, prominent Scientology critic Tony Ortega (2012a) suggests that these "improvements" were controversial—at least to some Scientologists—because Scientology teaches that Hubbard's ideas and processes cannot be improved on.

In 2004, the CoS announced the release of the Golden Age of Knowledge. According to the CoS, Hubbard initiated this program in 1984 "to provide Scientologists the full legacy of his 50 years of research and discovery into the mind, spirit and life" (Scientology 2017b). The CoS claimed that some of the material found in previous editions was not "100 percent source" because of clerical, transcription, or editorial errors. It also involved the restoration of the original tapes of Hubbard's lectures, giving listeners the chance to hear Hubbard "as it should

be.”¹⁰ In 2005, the CoS released restored versions of the *Congress Lectures* (Scientology 2017b). This was followed in 2007 with a revised set of *The Basics*, the eighteen books and 280 lectures that comprise the core of Scientology. The Golden Age of Knowledge was officially concluded in 2009 with the *Advanced Clinical Course Lectures* (Scientology 2017b).

In 2013, the CoS announced the release of the Golden Age of Tech: Phase II, and, in 2015, the Golden Age of Tech: Phase II for OTs.¹¹ Like the previous golden age initiatives, Phase II involved a reworking and re-releasing of auditor-training material at both the lower and upper levels. Also, like the previous releases, the church presented the reworked materials as now being exactly as Hubbard had intended. The Golden Age of Tech: Phase II promised increased speed and accuracy for auditors, but it also meant that most already-certified auditors had to retrain, which necessitated the purchase of the new materials and courses.

As noted above, the CoS presents the Golden Age of Tech, Golden Age of Knowledge, and the Golden Age of Tech: Phase II as the realization of Hubbard's teachings as they were intended. However, critics of Scientology see it as a cash and power grab by Miscavige. According to Scientology critic Jefferson Hawkins,

having worked on the inside of Scientology's marketing, all I can say is "here we go again." The marketing problem Scientology has, and has always had, is how to keep the faithful coming back to spend again and again. Particularly if you have few if any new people coming in. Particularly if you really have nothing new to offer them. Hubbard solved it by constantly coming up with "new technical breakthroughs." That kept people coming in and, equally importantly, kept him popular, relevant, and indispensable. Miscavige can't do that. No Scientologist would put up with "new developments" from anyone but Hubbard. So he has to repackage and re-release, all based on the idea that he has a special inside line to what Hubbard "really" intended. He can always claim that Hubbard's "true intentions" have just been revealed in documents "recently discovered in archives." Miscavige has worked to position himself as "the only guy who truly understands Hubbard." (Quoted in Ortega 2012a)

Hawkins's comments point to a problem that faces many religious organizations: in competitive religious markets, organizations need to innovate in order to attract and keep devotees, who provide human and financial capital. "First generation" new religious movements (NRMs) have perhaps more room to innovate, especially if their founders are still active. As NRMs institutionalize, especially when the founder ceases activity, the successor must either develop new offerings or present existing ones in new ways. While Hubbard was alive, he provided innovations in the form of new "discoveries"—in contrast, Miscavige works with a codified set of materials that are considered unalterable.¹²

Although Miscavige cannot provide new textual offerings, he can innovate through the development of Scientology's physical infrastructure. A final important aspect of Scientology's golden age narrative, then, is the redesign and expansion of its physical spaces. Building on Christensen's textualization argument, Mikael Rothstein (2014) observes that Scientology has constructed an entire "religious geography" of buildings that it uses to further routinize the charisma of its founder. These include "historical" landmarks like the CoS in Washington, DC, and Saint Hill in Southeast England as well as its practice of producing a replica of Hubbard's office in each of its church buildings. According to Rothstein, Scientology's sacred architecture is forcefully interwoven with the cult of L. Ron Hubbard, thereby providing an example of how a new religion strives to create a three-dimensional identity by routinizing the founder's charisma in physical buildings of aggrandizing potency (53).

Miscavige has made his mark on Scientology both through remaking existing spaces as well as aggressively acquiring new ones, most notably in the establishment of Ideal Orgs, which are CoS buildings¹³ that are “configured to provide the full services of the Scientology religion to its parishioners, while also serving the community with social betterment and outreach programs” (Scientology 2017d). Like the Golden Age of Tech (Phases I and II) and also the Golden Age of Knowledge, Ideal Orgs are promoted as the realization of Hubbard’s vision to “clear the planet.” Yet, as Rothstein (2014, 73) notes, Hubbard only briefly mentioned “Ideal Orgs” in an executive directive circulated in 1970. Drawing on Christensen’s (2012) textualization argument mentioned above, Rothstein suggests that Ideal Orgs and other buildings in Scientology’s portfolio institutionalize Hubbard’s charismatic authority into the physical infrastructure of the church. He further suggests that this “pushes aside the demanding question of Hubbard’s reincarnation” and, in doing so, pre-empts challenges to Miscavige’s authority (51). Ideal Orgs are physical icons of Miscavige’s rebranding of Scientology as “the 21st century’s fastest growing” world religion (Rothstein 2014, 59–61). In doing so, they frame Scientology’s international expansion strategy as both “routine” and “innovative” (for example, Kent 1999).

Conclusion: The Golden Age: Routinization and Innovation

The fact that Scientologists consider both Hubbard’s materials and Hubbard himself as the “source” and, therefore, unalterable raises the intriguing question of what constitutes a religious “innovation” in Scientology. Hubbard’s charisma was already institutionalized at the time of his death and has become more so posthumously through textualization. George Chryssides (2012, 194) suggests that Scientologists have sought to preserve Hubbard’s institutional apparatuses rather than innovate new ones. Others have suggested that David Miscavige is the steward of Hubbard’s legacy. For example, Christensen (2005, 247) describes the Golden Age of Tech and the Golden Age of Knowledge as “initiatives” of Miscavige, but

it should be made absolutely clear that Miscavige’s position is not in any way comparable to that of Hubbard’s. Hubbard was the source and originator. Miscavige is the protector to guarantee the source . . . he has proven himself a loyal and valuable chairman in the most powerful organizational unit.

This is the claim put forth by the CoS as well. From a dual charisma perspective, though, the relationship between founder and successor is not so simple. Rothstein (2014, 71) notes that “David Miscavige, although increasingly promoting himself, is perceived as a harbinger of everything Hubbard is supposed to have decided or planned, rather than a religious leader in his own right and might.” But, in a footnote, he suggests that the relationship is not so clear-cut:

I [*sic*] should be mentioned, however, that Miscavige appears more in his own right and might than ever, although never detached from his basic function as Hubbard’s super factotum. It is entirely possible that he (Miscavige), at some point, may assume even the symbolic power over the organization, transmute into another object of devotion, and change the face and identity of Scientology. (25, 75ff)

It is true that Hubbard is given credit for the ideas that underpin Scientology’s golden age. As described above, depending on the view one takes, the reorganizing, reworking, and rebranding of Scientology is a “return to source,” a source of revenue, or a public relations strategy (or perhaps all three!). Miscavige is rightly viewed as the steward of Hubbard’s legacy. But I suggest that Miscavige is also an innovator, and Scientology’s golden age should be viewed as his innovation.

Religious organizations survive over the long term if they attract and maintain members who provide the human and financial capital needed to support the organization. This means that they must continually walk the line between “tradition” and “innovation.” In this regard, Scientology faces a particular challenge: it is predicated on the notion that Hubbard’s texts are unalterable and the only means through which Scientology “works,” yet some of the procedures Hubbard laid out in the 1950s (for example, media engagement) do not work today (Wagner 2017). It therefore must find ways to adapt its materials and institutional procedures, which were first codified in the 1950s, to the modern cultural and media environment. From a marketing perspective, the golden age addresses this challenge by repackaging material in a manner similar to the continual release of “remastered” Rolling Stones albums. Scientology’s golden age can also be viewed as a rebranding exercise—the development of a cross-platform narrative connecting its past, present, and future with the charisma of its founder and the authority of its present leader.

As Christensen (2005, 228) observes, Scientology’s hagiographic production “constitutes the most significant attempt by the church to continually renew interest in Hubbard.” Scientology’s golden age provides a narrative that is to some degree culturally universal and also particular to Scientology. It connects the sacred and secular; the past, present, and future; and the charisma of its founder with the authority of its current leader. It is external communication in that it could stimulate the interest of new converts, but, perhaps more importantly, it is an internal form of communication that encourages stakeholders to embody the ethos of the organization, and solidifies David Miscavige’s authority within Scientology. L. Ron Hubbard may be the material that constitutes Scientology’s golden age narrative, but David Miscavige is the one writing it.

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Notes

1. This usually involves a trained “auditor” asking a “preclear” a set of questions or giving her a set of directions to follow. In certain situations, an auditor can also audit herself. See Harley and Kieffer (2009) for a discussion of auditing and a description of several auditing techniques.
2. See, for example, Jewell 2007; Maltin 1997; Roberts 2016; Wilk 1977.
3. For discussions of Scientology’s resonance with elements of 1950s and 1960s occultism, mysticism, and science fiction, see Bainbridge 2009; Kent 1996; Urban 2011, 2012; Whitehead 1974.
4. Perhaps the most striking example of this phenomenon is the “religious” fervour of Elvis Presley’s devotees. See, for example, Rodman 1996.
5. As Hugh Urban (2011) notes in the introduction to his history of the Church of Scientology (CoS), most sources of information on the church are inherently biased. On the one hand, most accounts circulating in popular culture—for example, journalistic exposés and books by former members—tend to attack the church as a money-driven, mind-controlling cult. On the other hand, many academic accounts try so hard to be “neutral” that they become quasi-apologetic. Official CoS documents present a cleansed version of perceived facts, and the secretive nature of the church means that most outside resources are built on secondary material (thanks to an anonymous peer reviewer for this observation). By engaging with sources that fall across the range of this continuum, this article seeks to contribute to a body of work that has emerged in the last decade or so that not only privileges understanding over polemics but also applies necessary critique (to name a few, see Christensen 2005; Rothstein 2014, 2016, anything by Urban but especially Urban 2011).

6. The idea of a “renaissance” is important in Scientology’s Golden Age narrative. The term itself suggests a revival; it is most commonly used in reference to the revival of art, literature, and learning in Europe between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries that was spurred by the rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy and culture. Hubbard drew upon both in creating Scientology. For example, the name for Scientology’s analogue for the immortal soul, *Theatan*, is derived from the Greek letter *theta* (Θ). In *Mission into Time*, Hubbard (1973) suggests that he was a Roman tax collector in a past life. Columns that suggest ancient Greek and Roman architecture are often integrated into Scientology’s visual iconography as well.
7. Hubbard’s (1965) Keeping Scientology Working directive, first published in a *Hubbard Communications Office Policy Letter* on 7 February 1965, outlines a ten-step process designed to ensure the “correct application” of Scientology’s technology and, therefore, the desired results (that is, individuals experiencing the benefits of auditing). In it, Hubbard writes: “Trouble spots occur only when there are ‘no results.’ Attacks from governments or monopolies occur only when there are ‘no results’ or ‘bad results.’ Therefore, the road before Scientology is clear and its ultimate success is assured if the technology is applied” (emphasis in the original). Christensen (2005) argues that the Keeping Scientology Working directive is one of the most important documents for the institutionalization of Hubbard’s charisma because it establishes him as the ultimate source of authority within Scientology.
8. The Religious Technology Center (RTC) was created in 1982 as part of an organizational restructuring of Scientology. David Miscavige assumed the title of chairman of the Board of the RTC in 1987. Scientology’s website states that the organization is “the ultimate ecclesiastical authority regarding the standard and pure application of L. Ron Hubbard’s religious technologies,” but that it is “not part of the management structure of the Church” (Scientology 2017f). However, according to Urban (2011, 182), Miscavige “is largely recognized as the de facto ‘head’ of the larger Scientology conglomerate today.” An account of events that led to creation of the RTC and the rise of Miscavige can be found in former Scientologist and Scientology critic Jon Atack’s (2013) book *Let’s Sell These People a Piece of Blue Sky*.
9. In 2016, Scientology opened Scientology Media Productions (SMP). Like Golden Era Productions, SMP houses advanced film and sound production studios. As Scientology’s “global media center,” it is responsible for the collating and distribution of information about Scientology through its many magazine publications and social media platforms. Described as the place where “the Golden Age of Hollywood’s past merges with the most advanced state-of-the-art technology of today to help build a better world for tomorrow,” SMP furthers Scientology’s Golden Age narrative because it is built on a restored movie lot where, according to the church, L. Ron Hubbard was first invited to Hollywood in 1937 (Scientology Media Productions 2016, 20).
10. This is important because, as several Scientologists who I have spoken with have told me, Hubbard’s unique delivery is important to the proper understanding of his message. To this end, the church has hired voice actors to imitate Hubbard’s delivery in the translated tapes.
11. “OT” stands for “Operating Thetan,” which is the most advanced spiritual state one can achieve in Scientology.
12. This challenge, of course, is not unique to Scientology—for example, Islam forbids the translation of its core text and evangelical Christians consider the Bible the “unalterable” word of God. But because of the relative chronological and textual immediacy of the founder, the idea of “unalterable” is different in Scientology than, for example, in evangelical Christianity, which accepts myriad versions of the Bible.
13. Scientology pursues a strategy of buying and renovating existing buildings rather than building new ones.

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