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Descriptive Life Stories of Hungarian Scientologists



ABSTRACT

In this article we explore the religious life of Hungarian Scientologists. The research includes various interviews and some historical background that are needed to understand as to how the Church of Scientology has operated in Hungary and as to how church members recount their history with the Church. Among the interviewees are active members, high-ranking members and ex-Scientologists as well. A key element of sociology of religion is to try and understand individuals, institutions and of course social connections among these actors. Our aim is to reveal the complexities of Scientology and most importantly to provide a better understanding of church members as individuals.

KEYWORDS

Atheism, Communism, Transition, Scientology; Hungary, L. Ron Hubbard

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INTRODUCTION

In this study, we have collected more than 20 special interviews partly with the leading members of Scientology from Hungary, and partly with members who left the organization previously being highly committed to it. The president of the Hungarian Church of Scientology helped us in the selection procedure of the interview subjects. We made interviews with most of the Scientology organization leaders operating in Hungary, and with leading members of the Hungarian Church of Scientology she recommended. In regard to the members, we interviewed 14 men and 7 women, the average age being 42.5, regarding education 15 subjects were postgraduates, 4 had vocational schools, and one of them had a high school degree. The majority of the interviewees lived in Budapest, half of them were born in the countryside, half of them in the capital. Their marital statuses mostly were divorced. They lived in their own apartment, were active workers, 40% of them were middle income individuals, the other 40% were in the high income group, and 20% lived on minimum wage.

The 40–60 minutes long semi-structured interviews – as the profession calls it – allowed us to recognize the human side of the organization that we have known previously from the books, articles, and statistical data.

On the other hand we managed to understand what it means for a person to be connected to Scientology, and what are the expectations and promises that keep attracting these people further to Scientology after the first encounter. Through the interviews we developed an understanding of the “*secret*” of Scientology, the language,¹ the operating principle, and practice which expressly characterizes the organization.

The researchers of Scientology generally accept that the ideology of the organization is strict and dogmatic which has no toleration for individual interpretations, and does not guarantee the right for the members to further develop its doctrines. On the contrary, even minimal difference from the teachings is considered as a learning mistake, that needs to be corrected with the appropriate method.

Based on the interviews we can declare that we encountered many instances among the interviewee’s statements, that could be the signs of internalized doctrines and principles. However this acquired logical and theoretical value structure had not stopped them from assessing their own life in a much more sophisticated way. Dorthe Refslund Christensen made the same recognition while she examined the representation of Scientologists. She found that an organization with rigid soteriology does not automatically lead to a uniformized interpretation, even among the deeply connected members.²

These conversations were not created to serve as a basis of some kind of statistical distribution, but to highlight the dimensions and options that can characterize the community. Our interviewees were chosen from the most influential members of the Hungarian Church of Scientology. Due to this, it is obvious that the organization, and its principles mean a lot to them. It is also natural that

¹ The subject how Hubbard developed the organization’s inner communication system for total standardization would deserve an own research. The founder transferred the basic language of the organization from English, to a special language which connects special meaning to ordinary words, on the other hand it applies a wide range of acronyms and abbreviations. That is a further research question, how the members acquire the doctrines that could be only understand in this unique Scientologist language, and what are the consequences of this own language for the internal, and external relations of the members. The linguistic analysis of this issue in connection with the Hungarian language would be extremely interesting.

² CHRISTENSEN 2009. 103.

among those who are not committed to the organization at this high level, we could encounter these views in a much less intensive way and coherence. The aim of this chapter is to frame the many point of views, along a wide range, and complexity of this community based on the reports or statements from the insiders. The variety of benefits, the members acquired during their everyday lives while they were connected to the organization.³

Our conversation partners, or interview partners were selected by two different methods. The representatives of the Hungarian Scientology were selected based on our parameters by the Church of Scientology. We wanted to meet those, who were nominated by the Scientology Church as the most important members in their aspect. Our aim was to interview those who were in charge of the different Scientologist projects, and those who played the most relevant role in the history and present of the Hungarian organization. The members of those who quitted the organization were selected by the well-known and often applied sociological method called the snowball method. We met the first former member by accident, then each one we met, suggested another.

Henceforth we will make a portrayal of what we got from the interviews, without focusing on individual interviews. We executed a deep analyses of the interviews and interpreted the data relying on existing theories. The summary of this can be found in the assessment section of the paper. We of course promised the interviewed respondents absolute discretion, that we intend to keep. We will not publish the names, and the recorded statements about to be listed – even if they contradict each other –, and we will not expose anyone’s identity. These interviews can primarily be described as life stories, authenticated by the speakers themselves. The quoted statements are individual stories and opinions and as such we do not intend to address or label them.

METHODOLOGY

In the qualitative research we applied semi-structured narrative interviews among the core members of the Hungarian Scientology. In the editing process of the interviews applied the theory of faith development (FDT) and its research methods. Afterwards we applied qualitative material analysis of the recorded interviews using explorative method.

The qualitative material analysis allows us to systematically examine the original interview texts. In the process we determine the basic unit of the analysis – in this case the answers to our previously asked questions. We rephrased the original answers to a unified form, which is appropriate for analysis. We summarize each answer’s key elements. Then we decrypt the text created by the method by the original interview text.⁴

In 1995, James Fowler published his monograph called *The stages of Faith*. In his work he created the main stages of the development of personal faith considering the theory of personality development. These stages are the following: Intuitive-Protective, Mythic-Literal, Synthetic-Conventional, Individual-Reflective, Conjunctive, Universalizing. These phases are not following each other by a strict order, and they are not clearly separated from each.⁵

³ Let us refer to a methodological note from William James, which stated that the main attributes of religion, can be identified the best at the level of “*religious geniuses*” and not in the level of the insane. (JAMES 2004; MÁTÉ-TÓTH 2010)

⁴ MAYRING – BRUNNER 2009.

⁵ FOWLER 1995.

To examine the stages of faith, Keller and others developed a standardized interview guideline based on Fowler's work. We applied this method in our research along with our advanced knowledge of Scientology. The main subjects: Retrospective glance to the most important stages of life, its positive and negative events, most relevant relationships, values and commitments, religion and ideology.⁶ We created our hypotheses according to these subjects, based on the Scientologist literature.

HYPOTHESES

Stark and Bainbridge proved that in the recruitment of religious communities, personal connections, personal networks play an important role. This connection applies not only in the cases of cult communities and sects but in the traditional denominations of the world as well. On the other hand qualitative and quantitative researches proved that in cases of some religious community's members the role of this personal and network component is significantly smaller during the process of the integration into the community.⁷

In his early work Roy Wallis had pointed out, that in the members of new religious communities (cults and sects) two epistemologies decisively determine what characterizes the bond to the community. The first one is the acquiring of the ideology offered by the community (epistemological individualism), the second one is the almost unconditional acceptance of the community leader's authority (epistemological authoritarianism). Wallis proves the process of these two epistemologies, through the example of Scientology, as the transfer from healing cult to religious cult.⁸

John A. Saliba published his first monograph in 1995, about the understanding of new religious communities, which was revised in some points and republished in 2003. However the author wrote his book as a Christian to Christians, firmly standing up against the attitude of the anti-cult movements.

He didn't think that cults would be inherently dangerous, on the other hand he evaluated the psychological gains and losses of belonging to a cult from several aspects. He refers to Aldridge, stating the four benefits of belonging to a mainstream religious or non-religious community are: (a) legal protection, (b) tax returns, (c) stable connection to an ethical community, (d) recognition. On the other hand in the cases of non-mainstream communities we can identify these disadvantages: legal attacks, contempt of the main religious communities, being labelled as a cult. Specifically in the case of Scientology, he shows that belonging to the community can be advantageous, against the ordinary psycho-therapeutic procedures, and by handling the possible threats well, this could mean personal stability, balanced ideology, and temporary network for these, and similar community's members.⁹

According to Christensen¹⁰ L. Ron Hubbard coordinated and defined the Dianetics, which was founded by him, and Scientology as well. Until his death in 1986, he was the unquestionable religious leader, mentor, and coordinator of the organization. "*And he is till nowadays*" – says the author.¹¹ The religious leader position of Hubbard is the fundamental, legitimate basis

⁶ KELLER – KLEIN – STREIB 2013.

⁷ BAINBRIDGE – STARK 1980.

⁸ WALLIS 1975.

⁹ SALIBA 2003. 130–133.

¹⁰ CHRISTENSEN 2005.

¹¹ CHRISTENSEN 2005. 227.

of the organization teaching, and its inner process. Christensen highlights in her work the efforts of the organization which is not only maintains the living memory of Hubbard, but consider him as a living, and creating person. This hagiographic effort, and the presence of Hubbard in the organization daily basis can be identified in other religions as well. The organization worked out Hubbard's exceptional life story, putting him in the role of an extraordinary Scientist, a "saviour". It deepens the application of the technology created by him, and requires its practice. For the organization Hubbard is an ordinary person and a superhuman at once, with special, above average skills. The only guarantee of "salvation".¹²

According to these we focused in the following topics in our semi-structured interviews: the most important stages of life, the most relevant persons, – the incentives, and motivations of joining Scientology, – the meaning of Scientology in a person's life, – the most important values of the Scientology for the individual, and for the society, and at last, but not least, – the personal connection to Hubbard.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Encounter with Scientology

Two main options as to how one encountered Scientology were recounted by our interview partners. The first one is the participation in some kind of presentation where the auditor spoke in a very convincing way about topics that caught the attention of the members participating the audition. The second important moment of the process is reading the book Dianetics, which means a great deal to people who enjoy thinking about how the brain works, the background of decisions, or the elements of self-knowledge.

Scientology first started to appear in Hungary during the '90-s, along with other spiritual-movements that perceived man, society, and culture in an alternative way than the ideology of the previous era. There were powerful civic and social activities in those days around the country, especially in bigger cities. It was a fashionable thing to go to meetings, sessions, and the young intellectuals were roaming in the open market of views and spiritualities as the first tourists in the streets of Vienna's and London's shopping districts for the first time they got a chance to go West.

"A lot of things had come from the West before, which was not like the socialist man ideal should be this or that, and he should be a member of the KISZ (Association of Young Communists), or be a militiaman, or whatever; but it was when the structure started to soften and a lot of thing were allowed or weren't prohibited. These were the times back then. This wasn't out of the blue for us, it had a prelude along with double nominations, and recalls in '85 which was a new thing. A bunch of new things started then, and we looked at it as intellectuals, so there were a lot of things we could have got, but we didn't know it. But now if it is already in the shop- window, we should take a look at it."

The previously half-legally operating groups started to gain attention among great Christian churches. Plenty Buddhist spiritual schools or some other Oriental spiritual groups widened the civic society religious options. Meanwhile artistic, philosophical, and political groups invited the youth into movements, initiatives, and conversations in massive numbers. The fundamental

¹² CHRISTENSEN 2005. 227–258.

phenomenon of these meetings, and ideological gatherings were their daydreams: something much more different than what they were told before.

“Something is not the way as they told us, something here is different, and then I started reading about how things are. And I was a young kid back then interested in, aeroplanes, spaceships, are there aliens, or are there not. It started to spread back then, this are there UFO-s or aren't. These things started to interest me, right.”

The exploration of new ideologies enthused this social movement, that had no general organizations, showing the same patterns during their operations. Someone stood out from the unknown, and started to speak honestly about new things, then slowly those who were interested seriously, started to be sorted out from the wider audience, the movement started to operate in a low level, and if an international bigger organization was in the background, the new cell joined its circulation. If we look back from 20 years later, we can't see this early '90-s bustle, but many of the members who have joined to the organizations they found suiting themselves back then, many are now in key positions – in our case in Scientology.

Another typical aspect of the encounter with Scientology was the reading of Dianetics and its influence to the reader. Especially for those who have never read a book about the brain, the mind, the spirit, and other non-material stuff, this work opened a new world. As in the cases of other similar books to different people in differing life situations the book had not just granted serious spiritual experience but offered the solution of the most important questions in life.

“I'd bought the book, Dianetics, I went home and started it immediately. I loved reading, a book like this was no big deal for me, I can start anytime, no problem. I was reading it for five hours that day, did not finish it, but I read quite a significant amount, and in the meantime I figured out many things about my life, and it was super good. I want this! I've told my parents about it, called my boyfriend I've lived together with back then. . »Listen I've found something that is going to change our lives, and then I went back and said this is a great book, what else is there.«”

About the personal importance of the book many emphasized the fact that there were not just abstract theories in there, that were hard to obtain first and required continuous effort to understand, but theories that actually proved to be useful right from the moment they applied it. Meaning they had real exact solution to a given problem they encountered during their lives. For example it could help them understand inner processes and surpass serious traumas.

“I had been recovered from my trauma maybe because of this thing. I've never read these kinds of books before so I didn't really believe that Dianetics is about passing. I didn't know what to expect. However it explained a lot of questions I had in me, that what chased these things that I sat in my office working and all of a sudden I had to get up, or go out, or cry, or I had a diarrhoea. It was so irrational, and wasn't concrete, or explainable that why in one moment I am ok, and in the other I am not. What happened in one minute? And then you got an answer from Dianetics, about what triggered. The first two chapters of Dianetics was about what state one could be in if one clears his mind. So, to put it this way be clear, a clean state of mind. I don't know what to do for this but I want it. So If someone would say I should jump on one leg, and it is going to take for a half year, then I would have started it. It was so attractive for me, the state itself, and they wrote down, and then I had this advantage that I've never heard about Hubbard or Dianetics before. I had absolutely no false information, and I'm pretty sure that I had luck when I met with the people who could give the book to me in my reality, that I should just read it, and then I said ok, what is the next step.”

The intensity and depth of applying the approach and the practice could be so strong that even the word ‘conversion’ wouldn’t be an exaggeration. The conversion is a sudden or gradual turn, that significantly affects the person’s self-evaluation, and helps the critical reinterpretation of life events that has happened so far. It is a radical set of connections of the events that had happened before, and those that were about to come to pass – also present in the case of selecting values and social networks. Our interview subjects reported the same radical turn of events, however they did not call it conversion. We publish two examples of this below.

“It is definitely a change, but it is not like bang, it’s a change while you go in your way. In a fortunate way someone knows where is he heading, know his way, and where he wants to be. I say in a fortunate way because I’ve been working with people for a long time, and eight out of ten have absolutely no idea where is he going. So I’ve always felt that I have a role, and its going somewhere.

My friend their took me to a lecture, held by a doctor who read from Hubbard’s works. And the first lecture I’ve visited was exactly about the social and antisocial person’s behaviour. Hubbard had a lecture about this, and he read that. He read in English, and read one sentence and then he translated it to Hungarian. And when he read about the antisocial behaviour I’ve recognized myself so much. And I was broken, practically my whole body shaken, and I said , Oh my God, It can’t be, I can’t. That someone could saw into my soul this much, and he saw what I’ve taught, and this can’t be, I am awful and terrible and an enemy of the world, and this is not good. And then a chapter fallows explaining that every person has these patterns, the question is that if it’s continuous or just occasionally happening. If someone is behaving antisocially because of a bad experience it doesn’t have to be permanent. But if you recognized yourself while you have reading this, I can assure you, you are not antisocial, cause self-criticism is a luxury for the true antisocial which he cannot afford. I’ve had a feeling that if someone could broke me into pieces and rebuilt me in 15 minutes, then that man must know something.”

The science of Dianetics could be defined as an applied philosophy. Scientology applies personally customized practice through the method of audition. The functionality of Dianetics, or its efficiency were experienced by many, through the results of the auditions. This positive experience justifies the theory written in the paper, and in addition encourages people to apply these practices more and explore the depths of Scientological knowledge and practices.

“After a regular sitting, I was scared that that’s how it works, oh my God. And the person had a profit from it for a lifetime. His problem was, you know, he sat there in a room, and felt bad, you know it was always like this. And there in an audition the person had so great success that, he stopped crying and it dried off, and he said I’ve never felt so good in my life. And this touched me so much, that this how it works. I finished the course, and this is a good thing, I apply it every day since.”

So the first encounter strengthens the group feeling to a degree, and to a degree brings closer to knowing Dianetics and experiencing its effects. These experiences motivated further immersion. For those who require these services, and become high-ranking members in the organization, human relationships, and acquired knowledge becomes more and more important and becomes an integral part of their way of thinking.

As to the experiences they had in the organization, they kept in touch more likely with someone who also lived through these experiences, and knew these appropriately and communicated with them in an individual interpretation of Hubbard, and with an individual logic and vocabulary.

Important Norms

During our conversations with leading Scientologist members, it became clear to us what benefits they received in the organization, and what are those things that could significantly contribute to further cooperation, taking responsibilities creating and enlisting services from it. According to the theory of social exchange, fitting into a certain community can be divided in four steps. The first one is the examination of costs and rewards, the second one is the deal about their rate, the third one is commitment, when we accept the cost-reward rate, and we more likely concentrate on the community itself, the last one is the institutional acceptance of the connection, where we officially accept the community's norms and declare them mandatory for ourselves.¹³ After the interviews with leading Scientologists, we could clearly identify the areas, where the commitment realized for them.

When the members got into the organization, they found themselves in the middle of a serious learning and self-knowing process. During this they will acquire a coherent view in a way that surpass everything before it, which has an explanation for every aspect of their personal and social lives. Their self-knowledge will enrich as a result. In the cases of audition, their hidden memories and their deep injuries are revealed, and they recognize what drives them, and what helps them achieve a balanced behaviour and what had obstructed it from them. This continuously deepening self-knowledge is the fundamental basis of the conscious lifestyle. The trainings were called assistances and technologies. Their practices were typical problem solving techniques with the members and participants. These techniques first strengthen the consciousness, so they could fight the small, and bigger obstacles of life, and at the same time they strengthen the value of the organization, as they learn these skills and knowledge from there.

“Thinking of myself that I was before 1993, I didn’t consider myself as blunt or a person with any less abilities, however; at those times I could float in life so much easier than today. There were less handhold in life and today I can in full thank for the kind of stability, power, elemental stability, if you say so, that I believe I’ve got today to Scientology. It gave me a very stable point in life and very important useful religious tools to live accordingly. Based on common sense, based on rationality. But possibly many people think the same way as I did long time ago that religion and common sense only have a bowing acquaintance.”

People who have already required a numbers of services, and even have been committed members of the organization for many years, can appreciate the community the more they get involved in it, where they can find the previously mentioned values, that provides them partially with preservative setting, partially a place satisfying their social needs. Most of the time during these processes the previous network undergoes a transformation in its entirety or to a high degree into a network of the members of this organization, into a kind of strong buzzing community and unity. This cohesion is only strengthened by any negative discussion about the organization that can also be handled by adequate methods that are major parts of the trainings.

The advantages of the membership are apparent not just in private life, but also in the workplace. Development, marketing, management, communication are training areas of high priority. Technologies used in corporate governance provide companies employing them with more conscious leadership skills, more sophisticated labour sharing methods, more structured accountability. The novelty greatly affects those who have not yet met or started to utilize more modern organizational developmental technics. They can experience in a unique way as to how Hubbard methods affect

¹³ THIBAUT – KELLEY 1959.

the companies positively. Not to mention the above-the-average trust Scientologist companies have towards each other that brings many serious advantages in the competitive market economy.

“We started to use this administrative technology, as it is called officially. At that point the consultant promised to me, if I started using it, the work schedule of 12–14–16 hours would stop and we might get the job done within 8 hours. Well, this is totally impossible, but if it went down by 2 hours, that would be already worth it! We started doing it and in fact, after half a year we got to that point that one day I went home already at 8 in the evening. My wife said father, let’s try to keep you home. So we started using that type of responsible technology, job description and organizational sheet. And then again we started using it, and I went to work at 8 in the morning and I was back home at 5 in the afternoon.”

Partially, parallelly to the involvement’s depth the extent of accountability also grows in regard to the organization. The members undertake different functions: from the function of a voluntary colleague for a few hours to a colleague living their complete lives within the organization. To many of them helping is kind of a natural thing that they want to offer and make accessible to others.

Our interviewees also reported exceptional stories beyond the usual increments of the regular self-reflection and more conscious lifestyle, other religions refer to as miracles. Recovery takes place, even from sickness diagnosed as incurable. Some get rid of severe psychiatric pressure; some solve family conflicts beyond hope or experience balance.

The theories, practices and community of the organization offer and ensure opportunities and fulfillment of a more thorough life according to the asked key Scientologist figures. They appreciate it even as much as they say: *“Scientology is my life”*.

“For me Scientology is, we can say that it means to me my life, everything. But it doesn’t mean it, of course, because then we could think that I live for church. It’s not like that, I’ve got a family, I haven’t become a Sea Org member, it’s good like this for me, I like it this way that I live out there in the world...”

Based on the above it’s obvious that after the initial interest and first positive experience the stage of commitment and involvement follows while it’s beneficial for the members, in other words it’s worth taking and fulfilling responsibilities and paying the price of membership and services related to it. It is typical of Scientology auditing practices and control techniques that they occur parallelly at all levels with trainings and the acquiring of technologies, in other word the degree of the personal interest’s fulfillment is directly proportional to the degree of acceptance of organizational interest.

RON

L. Ron Hubbard referred to as ‘LRH’ or simply Ron or even more intimately *“the old one”* among Scientologists has been the founder, a regularly mentioned and celebrated and the most important person of the organization. The author and introducer of fundamental writings used in Scientology, an emblematic figure of the organization whose picture can be seen in every Scientology church. A speaker thanking for some of his success to Hubbard, showing his picture or even turning to him, and then the members joining the speaker to express their gratefulness by standing up and clapping enthusiastically is a regularly repeated ritual on every Scientologist ceremony. Each organization maintains an office for him, as if he was present and still working there even today. We asked our interviewees what Hubbard personally means to them.

The Scientologists universally consider Hubbard as a renaissance man, a greatly knowledgeable brilliant person who created something unique and unsurpassable in an innovative exploration of the mind's functioning as well as in establishing pragmatic methods. They talk about his writings being diversified and embracing many fields of knowledge like a magical spell, they look up to him as a real Scientist. *"To Scientology he is what Albert Einstein is to physics"* – a Scientologist says. Hubbard created something everlasting by collecting the content, over-viewing, systemizing and enhancing the most important cultures of the world. Besides his knowledge and philosophical work he created a functional system that is able to introduce and transmit this knowledge. We need to stick fully to Hubbard's doctrines and techniques because only that way can we ensure their effectiveness positively regardless of character types and cultures. Guarding the doctrines and controlling their fair use are duties of the main Scientology organization, the Religious Technology Center (RTC) that strives to be institutionally represented in every country. For the interviewees Hubbard's person, his doctrines, his elaborated organization and their mutual and universal impact frame a kind of an inseparable unit where the person is in focus.

Hubbard has not gotten any titles in the organization, he is considered to be the founder of the Scientology, but at the same time also many other titles are in use when he is mentioned. *"He is a philosopher, a Scientist, a religion constituter for me who observed regularities that move our everyday, our life as perfectly as his composition is trustworthy. However, I'm saying it again that I've experienced some more times again and again that he gives trustworthy presentment about life's regularities"* – a medical Scientist says. Being a philosopher and Scientist – explorer, writer, photographer, composer, shipping expert, organization developer – is joined by the description of 'religion founder' who introduces us to a new dimension. The religion founders are the gods themselves in large religions of the world, or at least more than a mere mortal. For Scientologists Hubbard is not a god, but a highly respected great person to whom they are personally thankful for the gifts that stem from – and can be attributed to – him, and who also means a great treasure in the Scientologists' lives and even beyond these in regards to the world's salvation.

"He dedicated his entire life, in my opinion even a lot more to drive people or rather mental beings to a better direction. And in his entire life he has been sleeping 3–4 hours a day in order for him to write enough and provide us with the methods and opportunities that I'm not saying he explored, but observed. I haven't seen this degree of self-devotion ever before, maybe not even self-devotion that I think of, I can't find the right word. This is not human for me, this is a kind of attitude to mankind that I really feel I personally will owe him forever. Well, it's difficult to return, it's also a little burden that we can't return it, but how could we.

Shortly put, I would again say that he has been a stable point. While I think it's not as much different from other religions since also there the religion constituter likely plays an important role in the believers' lives. From this respect there is more likely no difference. For me he is a person that I think of with tremendous gratitude. And again just from practical point of view for that I was given something that is very difficult to return, very difficult to accept for me."

Hubbard is an outstanding person, an ideal and recognizer of the world's problems and a savior of sort. None of the interviewees considered him to be godlike though, however, he does represent a prophet of sort. In Scientology human-beings have eternal life, humans are just clothes of the immortal substance in his actual appearance. Scientologists don't think of Hubbard's presence up to date in this regard though, but as an effective reminder.

„Well, what should I say, I think of him with the type of love as a family member. As much as I love my parents my heart encompassed Hubbard. I could say that he is my best friend, but unfortunately, I have never met him, so it's just the respect for him that keeps on going."

Hubbard's work which many of the interviewees benefited from, is the source of love and respect. Depending on the interviewees' characters there were some that took Ron's closeness rather emotionally, some were like under a spell because of his knowledge, and again some others were appalled even at the sight of the verification of his theories again and again. While his writings are regularly used beyond official trainings as a handbook or instruction manual for life, for many people the author is pretty much alive within the texts.

„Usually we say that he is the best friend of mankind. For me Ron is my best friend personally. Of course, not literally meant. Knowing his work one can simply imagine how he would have solved certain situations, what he would do. He is a mentor, a fatherly good friend. When I open a writing of him, I always will get a guidance for sure, but it is not the type of guidance as a parable in the bible.“

Based on our experience the interviewees' view of Hubbard's were coherent in their nature. This picture is also surrounded by the respect for his selfless helpfulness, next to mentioning his unsurpassable abilities. In the decade following the Second World War Hubbard established the main ideas of his writings that which he offered to numerous significant American organizations which did not appreciate this offer, tried to abuse it, or straight up recognised it as a risk to themselves and therefore they became enemies. Hubbard kept on trying, couldn't be broken, and with a new approach by creating an organization, he tried to find supporters of his writings and findings, successfully. Hubbard not sparing himself lived his enduring and selfless life. He deeply respected people, trusted them and he was interested in nothing else but letting everybody find their own internal energy sources, get rid of any difficulties that limit their personalities. He is not considered a Saviour because the Saviour accomplishes salvation without the people's cooperation, however Ron has helped people by examples and developments regarding one's self-saving abilities. *“And Hubbard asked on a congress, – even though I always read his writings that he wrote himself, – why were you accepting what I say. And well, because you are saying them. Don't accept them just because I'm saying them. Accept them because you have checked and they are right for you.“* – one of our interviewees said.

This knowledge, this portrayal is the Scientologists' LRH-picture, and this shows how there is an unailing harmony between them.

The most important value

We can also call Scientology a life philosophy. In the centre of it there is a well confinable and – on every day's basis – a simply worded substance that has been analysed in details by Hubbard in many of his assessments and that can be acquired during trainings and practices. Those who have been members of the organization for a long time or even take a major role in there have adapted the central thesis of Hubbard's life philosophy. It might not be an exaggeration that their own thinking is driven even more and more by this thesis, they think according to its principles, use its idioms, deal with its internal and external trading.

We asked our interviewees what is the most important suggestion that they would like to phrase as a spiritual heritage for their loved ones. They should mention something – we asked them, – that they would like the ones they love never to forget. We were hoping to gain very personal statements to this question. We purposefully didn't ask this question on a theoretical basis. We did not ask it this way: *“what do you consider to be the most important thesis of Scientology's life philosophy“* or this way either: *“what do you consider to be the central value of Scientology's*

philosophy". Through these type of questions the conversation is taken to a rather theoretical, impersonal level. But on the contrary, we were interested to know what core tenets have they internalized.

The majority of the respondents really talked in a very unique way about this topic. Some of them got surprised at first. "Good question", "I've never thought of that", – that's how they started to tell what they think the most important thing to be. Only a few did not mention a concrete value, but talked in general: "read the Dianetics" or "become a Scientologist". These answers show that people who reply like these primarily trust in the organization and in its conceptual system. The general power of theory and organization is what provides them with discovery and fulfillment of values.

„There are people who will have to go a long way to figure out the truth. And I'm saying, yes, Scientology is the only one functioning that will help people find the truth."

The majority of people mentioned self-understanding, loyalty to ourselves as central values. "Be yourself!" – they said many times. Keep your identity, personal integrity and stick to them even if numerous difficulties occurred along the way. The be-loyal-to-yourself is a well known expression from Eric Knight, it means a basic strive to become identical with yourself through maintaining certain theories consistently even if conflicting power might have an effect on one. According to Hubbard's philosophy one can survive – this is what we tried to imply with this question – destructive powers and burdens. So understanding of freedom is that one should keep in mind and decide independently, not listening to anybody else, and make the choices and be loyal to that decision up to the bitter end. The "be yourself" expression can also mean live and let live. In this regard it does not only mean self-centeredness, but also turning towards as per "let them be themselves". These respondents in the latter category would also leave behind the safe-keeping of mental integrity to their descendants as their heritage. What does this integrity mean? To have power to hold on to one's set goals regardless of defeat or without opportunism. Not to allow others to distract him following his set ways, not to give up his dreams, to be purposeful. So in this regard, mental integrity means tendentiousness and persistence.

Besides self-understanding and loyalty towards ourselves altruism was also present in the answers, the area of solidarity that is. Show good examples, and in many areas of life be demanding to yourself, be a good example to your family and community. Community is an enterprise in this case, the community that one works for. Over and above: "show some responsibilities for other people".

„I regularly tell to my daughter that she can allow herself everything that she could stand, if we did it to her, and she should not allow anything to herself that she couldn't bear, if we did it to her."

In this response we hear the golden rule that may be familiar from the noble religious tradition. This golden rule is used in "The way to happiness" by Hubbard. In the replies the dimension of furtherance comes up which in Scientology is the guiding principle of relationships to each other. One of the respondents quoted a slogan from the voluntary pastors: "something can always be done". Furtherance seems to be a consequence, the consequence of self-understanding and loyalty to ourselves. It is clearly outlined in the replies that you can reach proper self-understanding through auditing and trainings. In this learning process you can get to know the functioning of the human mind as well as the extensive world interpretation unique to this organization.

Our respondents often used, of course, special Scientology technical terms. One of these key terms is "dynamics".

"Considering the different dynamics and pushing them all forward. And in my opinion if everyone did this, then we would live in a whole different world, so then not in a caduceus, mostly materialistic world, but a much more intellectual, much more constructive world. I would rather give this everyone in my will."

Hubbard's work differentiates eight dynamics altogether, and we can notice four of them in the responses. According to the Scientology aspect the dynamics are incentives for survival towards ourselves, our family, our team and humanity.¹⁴ Life's "*optimal solving equation*" exists – according to Dianetics – if the solution could prevail in all four areas at a maximum level. Otherwise, anybody could achieve success in life, if she concentrated on her own benefits. In the above response one of the most important target of Scientology is identified. In another formulation we will find the same first four dynamics: "*we are safe, if the neighbours are safe too, our parents are safe too, our colleagues are safe too, and the neighbour countries are fine too*".

All the respondents replied, with or without direct references, by referring to some of Hubbard's writings, and that mostly quoted the "*Dianetics*", respectively "*The way to happiness*". In some responses there were only some of Hubbard's surface theses that were barely traceable, the majority of people rather quoted literally from the above mentioned books. We can take it self-explanatory that for the majority of insider Scientologists the wordings are the most important lessons of the life philosophy ingrained in to their way of thinking as far as they are able to quote the chain of their thoughts and even key sentences without any difficulties. The most important objective value in this thesis becomes the most important personal value in the members' life in the course of years.

Religion, religiosity

Usually kids of religious parents are more religious than the ones of non-religious parents. Per terminology, the first stage of religious socialization occurs in the family. Kids experience their parents' religiosity through family's customs, manner of speech, subjects, short stories. Merely the parents' religious affiliation, whether they are baptised or registered in to any religious community, is of no interest in regard to their kids' religious education. In the more traditional societies the religious affiliation walked hand in hand along with practicing religion that, beyond fulfilment of religious responsibilities, also meant a religious interpretation in many areas of life. Regular participation during religious ceremonies (i.e.: Sundays or Saturdays) doesn't purely mean fulfilment of responsibilities, but also meant acquiring and transmitting certain aspects. In modern life religious affiliation and religious conviction and practice broke apart. "*Belonging without believing*"¹⁵ – with this expression described Grace Davie, one of the most remarkable contemporary sociologist in the book "*Religion in Britain after 1945*". This characteristic sign is noticeable also in other European countries, so is it in Hungary. In addition to the Hungarian situation, in the decades after 1950 the political danger of any relationships to officially functioning religious communities¹⁶ as well as the church's contribution (Compare: ^{17,18}) had a great influence on the socialization of the believers. In general this kind of "*unreligious religiosity*" characterises the parents of the questioned Scientologists. The consequence of this was that kids raised in such families could not pick up the religious aspects, religious practice in any influential way. Therefore, their religious socialization could only remain at a low level.

¹⁴ HUBBARD 2007. 43.

¹⁵ DAVIE 1994.

¹⁶ TOMKA 1997.

¹⁷ KAMARÁS 1992.

¹⁸ MÁTÉ-TÓTH 1996.

The lack of socialization in regard to religion has got two consequences in general in any case: one is the lack of understanding and proper handling of community and culture in regard to religious dimensions, and the second, “*the first ingeniousness*” is shaping an own religious conviction at the starting time of adulthood.¹⁹ People who couldn’t experience the objective knowledge and especially the aspects of the parents which would ensure the understanding of religious dimension, are partially left behind in the community uncomprehendingly when they first bump into religion and religiosity, and partially with a kind of naivety that could compare the new experiences with the previously learned ones.

„My parents have been baptised at that time officially, but they are no Christians. They are Catholics, but they have never practiced any religion. [Have you been baptised?] No, I haven’t. I’ve always said that I’m an infidel. I only had an eponymy celebration, so I haven’t gotten any religion.”

“I’ve received my baptism certificate from my mom to my 50th birthday, that’s how I learnt that I was baptised as a Lutheran. In my childhood I had to call two childless aunts Godmother, but they did not take me to church either.”

The religious background of the interviewed people is not as obvious of course, the previously quoted text is an example for complete irreligiosity. There are families where the parents as well as the children got baptised, they even practiced religion some time, especially in the form of church visit on large holidays, but the family wasn’t at all convinced about religion and religious aspects. And finally we can also find those who practiced religion in their childhood and also those who were impressed by the church’s “*blessed*” spot.

“I can remember that with my grandma at her house at nights we prayed and also went to church. She regularly took us to church. I loved it, I still love it till today. There are beautiful paintings.”

The characteristic of the parents’ religiosity is connected with the basic supposition related to the religious nature of Scientology. In our interview we purposefully have not asked, if they considered Scientology a religion. This question would focus on the official status of the organization, especially to those who have been members for a long time, and therefore are also embedded. Those who found this important however, covered this subject. If someone had been specifically raised as an atheist, it would be irritating for them to hear that Scientology is considered a religion, for the first time. If someone had been raised in a family that had gotten some level of religious conviction, they felt an “*ideological*” stress between Scientology as religion and the family’s religion.

Many of the interviewees mentioned the political persecution of religion during the Kadar-era in regard to questions about their parents’ religiosity. They mentioned the difference between the existence of religiosity and the lack of religious practice in this political era. Many of the parents were members of the Hungarian Socialistic Labour Party, the only party at that time. The concord of Marxism, the party’s ideological basics did not really motivate the members, rather it was membership, which was an indispensable criteria to fill up certain jobs or manager positions at even lower levels.

“My dad was a medium level manager in [...] city and [...] factory. In his heyday of course it was all about the socialism, the party government. Well, he is not as much religious, not sure, if I can say that he was of average interest. His parents baptised him and at Easter they went to church or also at Christmas when they thought of that. However, they have not been going to church on a regular basis, maybe that’s how I should say this. So my parents were not religious, my dad – I’m rather saying it this way – was a member of the party out of interest, but in my opinion it was a little more than that because he also went to give talks. Deep in his heart he didn’t like

¹⁹ RICCEUR 1967.

it though. I can remember that too. So they were not religious as much. When Scientology reached families, that's of course a very prickly topic."

In this interview the previously mentioned dimensions are clearly visible. The relation of politics and religion, the connection between party membership and position-taking, the complex personal area of interest and personal conviction, the level of religious conviction and the arrival of Scientology in such a multifunctional family.

Considering the religious socialization where we might see certain cases of continuous drops per generation which doesn't show as a clear picture as the statistic indicators. The grandparents of our interviewees grew up in a social era when religiosity was self-explanatory, at least on the level of formal religious practice. They baptised their children – meaning the parents of our conversational partners of Scientology – but their youth and adulthood were characterised by strong atheism or at a later stage agnosticism. Many of them were even forced to join the party willingly or inadvertently. Even though some of them still baptised their children or the grandparents did it for them, they have not practiced religion in the family, many of them turned even secularists or atheists based on the Scientific ideology. The parents are usually baptised, but the families don't practice any religion. People can get involved with Scientology because the influence of the family's religion doesn't hold him/her back. Regardless of their children's beliefs, their parents still keep in touch with them.

We can explain this process with a metaphor of a boat representing the person's religiosity, which is tied down by many anchors on the culture's sea, beneath them the anchor of formal bonding and the spirituality. In the grandparents' generation these anchors are still left down. In the parents' generation they anchor up already spiritually and the children's even formally. The boat gets loose and might be floated to alternative spirituality. The acquiescence of Scientology's religious nature doesn't belong to any initial evidences for the members recognising the organization's ideology more and more. On the contrary, initially there is no relation between studying lectures and books and religions and religiosity. Many of them mentioned that when the first time they heard about Scientology being a religion, they found the information shocking and displeasing. They needed to contemplate about it, time to understand what religion is and what it would mean in the case of Scientology as a religion.

"So that was it, and when it was about Dianetics and it was about Scientology, I was wondering what they were, and for a long time I handled it with some distance and this led me to accept this is a religion and through this I became religious. Indeed, I needed to understand what religion was, what it can give one and where and which role it has got and where it is placed in one's life. And what is the practical use of it, maybe that's the most important part."

However, out of the responses no clear, profound or concrete portrayal was received about what Scientology's live thesis was about religion and in what sense does it consider itself a religion. But there are also the individual aspects and interpretations of the members about certain technologies and practices.

Half of our interviewees list Scientology in to the category of religion. An important positive argument for them that religions consider human beings with spiritual nature. Religions are somewhere facing the materialistic world, more properly, they propagate independent dimensions and are ideological and institutional systems teaching this. They are able to give a handhold to people and able to motivate them to help and be selfless, therefore, we need to look up also to their representatives with respect.

Scientologists don't consider Dianetics writings of religious nature because it takes up the topic of mind. It has hugely influenced many people because they learnt it as a Scientific theory written with engineering and medical precision. Scientology constantly underlines based on Hubbard's

writings that its thesis, dialectics and technics should not be approached from the religious point of view, and either based on some trust on human respect, but it has to be given credit based on its usefulness and conviction about its functionality. In this position rationality and religious aspects are rather confronting to each other.

The influence of atheist-communist era can be seen in certain aspects. This aspect did not only confront science and religion, but also considered the spirituality and religion meaningless and damaging, and it withheld practicing religion. Though the interviewee's father was a KISZ member, he still baptised his son. The grandparents from mother's side took him to church where he was touched by the majesty of that sacred place. At the same time he describes his relationship to materialism at that time this way: "*I believed in materialism*".

In Scientology there is no god like in other belief based religions, and there is no Messiah either, but many other religions lack such figures as well. Even though many people consider the founder the religion's founder, but they certainly do not consider the founder a Messiah or a god. In this regard an interviewee pointed to Buddhism, to similarities between Scientology and Buddhist aspects. Scientology is a practical religion, it's not built on god or on belief in a god, but knowledge.

According to Hubbard's message nobody has to leave his/her own religion in order to become a Scientologist. Scientology is a "*full confessional religion*" that can also be joined by people who are not religious at all – a member pointed out. At the same time – he claimed – it's the very last one of the dynamics, the eighth one is its endless dynamic where also God originates from. Religions start at this point while it's the end point for Scientology, and this end point is only understandable, if the first two dynamics had been already understood.

It is clear of the above that Scientologists belong to a wide range of belief systems in Hungary or even got into some loose institutional kind of relationship to certain large Christian sects, but generally they don't practice their religion, it's message doesn't have any influence on their thinking and behaviour. To the committed insider Scientologists Christianity or belonging to church doesn't mean – even if relevant – as much as it meant to their parents. In its traditional meaning Scientology is not considered a religion, it is often compared to Buddhism. It is the spiritual portrayal of humanity that they consider to be the religious dimension of Scientology. In this regard there are some who found Scientology through an active spiritual search considering its religious messages.

Our research did not aim to delve into the health or mental health of the leading key Scientologists. We have not used any special questions in this regard and our professional competence would have not qualified us for this type of inquiry. We still would like note in all fairness that all of our conversational partners conveyed the impression of a well-balanced, self-conscious, well-situated person striving values.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on our interviews, we can verify the notion of Wallis presented in the hypotheses section of our paper. We found that Hungarian Scientologists are extremely committed to the teachings of the Church of Scientology, they aimed to for the best, and it covers diverse areas of their lives. We also found, that L. Ron Hubbard is a subject of partly religious, partly secular reverence among them. His authority remains unquestioned. As the most interviewed members are first generation Scientologists, their joining to the organization happened in diverse settings, Stark's and Bainbridge's idea about the importance of personal networks is less important in the case of key figures of Hungarian Scientology.

In conclusion, we will sum up with a quote what we also experienced during the interviews and what we've partially referred to already above. Christensen concludes his experiences based on many conventional and informal mutual activities the following way:

*“Scientologists are, of course, Scientologists, but they are, more important, people in the community, in society, in the world: citizens, lovers, parents, friends, employees and so on. Second, their representations do not follow a simple pattern of deduction from, for example, the writings of Hubbard (the systemic or theological level of Scientology) to their own lives. Not all the teachings of Hubbard are actual factors in the individual lives of these people. Third, the ideas produced by these individuals seem to be produced to meet the overall cultural challenges of Western, modern culture. And, fourth, even though these people represent things differently, it is possible to point certain key representations that are – implicitly or explicitly – present in their ideas with regard to the being Scientologists.”*²⁰

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²⁰ CHRISTENSEN 2009. 107.

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