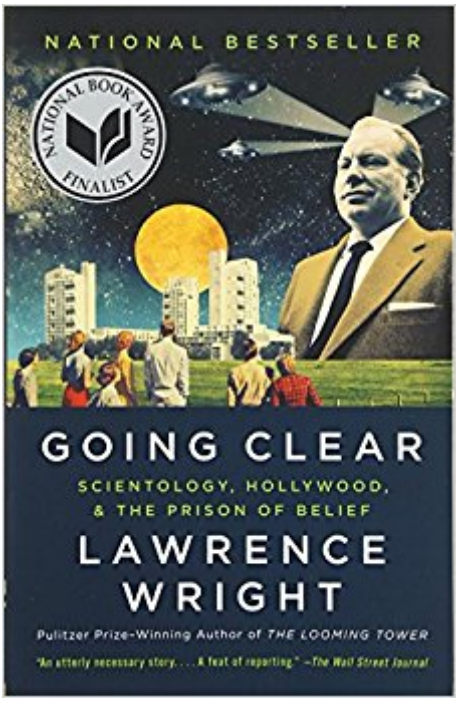
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Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, And The Prison Of Belief



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Synopsis

The Basis For The New HBO Documentary. A National Book Award and National Book Critics Circle Award Finalist. Ã Â Scientology presents itself as a scientific approach to spiritual enlightenment, but its practices have long been shrouded in mystery. Now Lawrence WrightÃ¢â ¬â •armed with his investigative talents, years of archival research, and more than two hundred personal interviews with current and former ScientologistsÃ¢â ¬â •uncovers the inner workings of the church. We meet founder L. Ron Hubbard, the highly imaginative but mentally troubled science-fiction writer, and his tough, driven successor, David Miscavige. We go inside their specialized cosmology and language. We learn about the churchÃ¢â ¬â„¢s legal attacks on the IRS, its vindictive treatment of critics, and its phenomenal wealth. We see the church court celebrities such as Tom Cruise while consigning its clergy to hard labor under billion-year contracts. Through it all, Wright asks what fundamentally comprises a religion, and if Scientology in fact merits this Constitutionally-protected label. Brilliantly researched, compellingly written,Ã Â Going ClearÃ Â pulls back the curtain on one of the most secretive organizations at work today. AÃ Â New York TimesÃ Â Notable Book A Best Book of the Year:Ã Â The Washington Post,Ã Â The Boston Globe,Ã Â New YorkÃ Â magazine,Slate,Ã Â Chicago Tribune,Ã Â Huffington Post,Ã Â Newsday,Ã Â Entertainment Weekly,Ã Â People,Ã Â The Week,Ã Â Publishers Weekly, Kirkus Reviews A GoodReads Reader’s Choice

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review Immersed in this book, the reader is drawn along by tantalizing revelations while simultaneously exhausted, longing for escape from its cloistered worldÃ¢â ¬â •mirroring the accounts of many former Scientologists on the record, here. In efficient, unemotional prose, Wright begins with the biography of founder L. Ron Hubbard: his days as a prodigiously prolific writer of pulp fiction, his odd military career, the publication of his breakthrough self-help book Dianetics (1950), and the influence, riches, and controversy that have followed since he founded the Church of Scientology in 1954. For those aware of Scientology through its celebrity adherents (Tom Cruise and John Travolta are the best known) rather than its works, the sheer scope of the churchÃ¢â ¬â„¢s influence and activities will prove jaw-dropping. Wright paints a picture of organizational chaos and a leader, David Miscavige, who rules by violence and intimidation; of file-gathering paranoia and vengefulness toward apostates and critics; of victories over perceived enemies, including the U.S. government, won through persuasion, ruthless litigation, and dirty tricks. Even more shocking may be the portrayal of the Sea Org, a cadre of true believers whose members sign contracts for a billion years of service, and toil in conditions of indentured servitude, punished mercilessly for inadvertent psychic offenses. Their treatment is a far cry from the coddling afforded to the much-courted celebrities. (Wright does point out that, for whatever reason, most Sea Org members remain in service voluntarily.) Page after page of damaging testimony, often from formerly high-ranking officers, is footnoted with blanket denials from the church and other parties (e.g., Ã¢â ¬Å“The church categorically denies all charges of MiscavigeÃ¢â ¬â„¢s abuseÃ¢â ¬Â• and Ã¢â ¬Å“Cruise, through his attorney, denies that he ever retreated from his commitment to ScientologyÃ¢â ¬Â•). Readers will have to decide whether to believe the Pulitzer-winning authorÃ¢â ¬â„¢s carefully sourced reporting, or the churchÃ¢â ¬â„¢s rebuttals. But, quoting Paul Haggis, the Academy AwardÃ¢â ¬â œwinning film director and former Scientologist whom Wright first profiled in the New Yorker: Ã¢â ¬Å“if only a fraction of these accusations are true, we are talking about serious, indefensible human and civil rights violations.Ã¢â ¬Â• Going Clear offers a fascinating look behind the curtain of an organization whose ambition and influence are often at odds with its secretive ways. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: The publisherÃ¢â ¬â„¢s announced first printing of 150,000 seems right on the money. Wright will be promoting the book on a seven-city tour, but its reputation precedes him. --Keir Graff --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Ã¢â ¬Å“An utterly necessary story. . . . A feat of reporting.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The Wall Street JournalÃ¢â ¬Å“Brings a clear-eyed, investigative fearlessness to Scientology . . . a rollicking, if deeply creepy, narrative ride, evidence that truth can be stranger even than science fiction."

Ã¢â ¬â •The Washington PostÃ¢â ¬Å“A hotly compelling read. ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s a minutiae-packed book full of wild stories.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The New York Times Ã¢â ¬Å“Courageous. . . . Devastating . . . will come as news even to hardened Scientology buffs who follow the ChurchÃ¢â ¬â„¢s every twist and turn.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The Daily BeastÃ¢â ¬Å“Essential reading. . . . Lawrence Wright bend[s] over backward to be fair to Scientology. . . . This makes the bookÃ¢â ¬â„¢s indictment that much more powerful.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The New York Times Book Review Ã¢â ¬Å“Not to be read home alone on a stormy night: Going Clear, Lawrence Wright's scary book about Scientology and its influence. . . . ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s a true horror story, the most comprehensive among a number of books published on the subject in the past few years, many of them personal accounts by people who have managed to escape or were evicted from the clutches of a group they came to feel was destroying them. . . . WrightÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book is a tribute to fact-checkers as well as to his personal courage.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The New York Review of Books Ã¢â ¬Å“Insightful, gripping, and ultimately tragic.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The Boston Globe Ã¢â ¬Å“A fearless, compelling, exhaustive work of muckraking journalism and a masterpiece of storytelling. . . . A ripping yarn about ego, money, abuse, faith, and the corrupting nature of power when wielded by the wrong people. ItÃ¢â ¬â„¢s as lurid, pulpy, and preposterous-seeming as anything Hubbard or Haggis ever wrote, but itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s much better, because it has the benefit of being true.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The A.V. Club Ã¢â ¬Å“Invaluable. . . . Completely and conclusively damning.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Salon Ã¢â ¬Å“WhoÃ¢â ¬â„¢d have thought a history of religion would offer so many guilty pleasures? Lawrence WrightÃ¢â ¬â„¢s enthralling account of ScientologyÃ¢â ¬â„¢s rise brims with celebrity scandal. To anyone who gets a sugar rush from Hollywood gossip, the chapters on Tom Cruise and John Travolta will feel like eating a case of Ding Dongs.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Los Angeles Times Ã¢â ¬Å“Admirably judicious and thoroughly researched. . . . Being Clear is an inducement to darkness and disarray. You may laugh at it at first, but get ready to weep.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The Guardian (London) Ã¢â ¬Å“Not only a titillating exposÃƒÂ© on the reported Ã¢â ¬Ëœyou Ã¢â ¬â„¢re kidding me Ã¢â ¬â„¢ aspects of the religion, but a powerful examination of belief itself.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Entertainment Weekly Ã¢â ¬Å“A fascinating read, and a chilling one. . . . The power in WrightÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book lies as much in his meticulous investigative reporting as in his evenhanded approach.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Minneapolis Star-Tribune Ã¢â ¬Å“Absorbing and important. . . . Scrupulous parsing is vintage Wright; his footnotes are as vital as those of any nonfiction writer alive.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The Plain Dealer Ã¢â ¬Å“Mr. WrightÃ¢â ¬â„¢s reportorial techniques seem impeccable. . . . Lawrence Wright shines a light on a world that prefers to keep its players off stage, and the public in the dark.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Ã¢â ¬Å“A

powerful piece of reportage. . . . Detailed, intense and at times shocking.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The Miami Herald Ã¢â ¬Å“Wholly engrossing stuff.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •The Austin Chronicle Ã¢â ¬Å“WrightÃ¢â ¬â„¢s brave reporting offers an essential reality test. . . . Poses larger questions about the nature of belief.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Publishers Weekly Ã¢â ¬Å“Devastating. . . . Wholly compelling. . . . Each page delivers startling facts that need no elaboration.Ã¢â ¬Â• Ã¢â ¬â •Kirkus Reviews (starred) Ã¢â ¬Å“Jaw-dropping. . . . A fascinating look behind the curtain of an organization whose ambition and influence are often at odds with its secretive ways.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã¢â ¬â •Booklist

Imagine if you were reading a novel that included a character who wrote sci-fi novels, was obsessed with wealth and status symbols, was paranoid about the government, treated others badly, and yet started a religion as a business venture that attracted thousands of devoted followers. You'd probably say, "yeah, right; a nice allegory for an aspect of the American psyche, but I don't think so." Although, if you were familiar with Scientology, you might not be so surprised.Many aren't familiar with Scientology, in part because the Scientologists have been relentless and devoted to stamping out dissent and negative portrayals of their religion (previous books on L. Ron Hubbard, Scientology's founder ended up with the publisher abandoning the project due to law suits and the British publisher of this book, dropped it for fear of libel law suits [which are easier to win in the UK]). New Yorker writer Lawrence Wright, who is known as one of our great investigative journalists, has prepared himself by doing an incredible amount of due diligence and fact checking (apparently the fact checkers at the New Yorker, which first published an article on Scientology by Wright, made herculean efforts to make sure they got the facts right).Scientology does not come off well in Going Clear. Wright portrays Scientology as in large part an expression of L. Ron Hubbard's whimsy: "Even as Hubbard was inventing the doctrine, each of his decisions and actions would become enshrined in Scientology lore as something to be emulated -- his cigarette smoking, for instance, which is still a feature of the church's culture at the upper levels, as are his 1950s habits of speech, his casual misogyny, his aversion to perfume and scented deodorants, and his love of cars and motorcycles and Rolex watches. More significant is the legacy of his belittling behavior toward subordinates and his paranoia about the government. Such traits stamped the religion as an extremely secretive and sometimes hostile organization that saw enemies on every corner."Wright, however, does not create a simple portrayal of Hubbard and Scientology. He grants him greater complexity than a simple con man. It seems Hubbard, who had a fertile imagination and intelligence (amazingly, he wrote 1,000 books--no small feat even if you were just the typist), believed in his own

ideas. Obviously, there was something powerfully charismatic about him, but as someone who tends to gloss over at Hubbard’s cosmology and "discoveries," it’s hard to understand (and watching an interview of him online didn’t shed any light for me on his appeal). It seemed that Hubbard was a congenital fibber--one of those people for whom reality just wasn’t good enough so he had to embellish it and ultimately couldn’t himself separate out his fantasies from reality. What’s whacky and fascinating is that he got others to deeply believe in his ideas too. Why though? It was that part of this overall incredibly researched book that I found a bit lacking.The big picture how he did it is that Hubbard parlayed the success of Dianetics, his self-help bestseller, into a religion. In a way Scientology is a truly modern religion in that it mixes a faux-scientific veneer (it’s founder after all was a sci-fi writer) with a belief system and psycho-spiritual approaches. What I wanted was a better understanding of how that self-help book>religion initial transition actually worked. Not what are Hubbard’s beliefs, but how he created believers. Hubbard seemed oblivious, even allergic, to practical details. It seems his third/ish wife (his marriage to his second wife wasn’t legally sanctioned) Mary Sue, was the real organizer, but I still was left scratching my head about that leap from self-help and sci-fi writer to guru. It was clear what was in it for Hubbard; he became fabulously wealthy and revered. But what was in it for the followers, especially the initial ones who didn’t have legions of fellow believers to bolster Hubbard’s saintly status?Going Clear, however, is not just about L. Ron Hubbard. Wright covers the violent and tight-shipped rule of David Miscaviage. Miscaviage comes off as a classic tyrant (the purges and public community confessions reminded me of Mao’s China) who needs to be deposed, yet he seems to have built an impregnable fort around him. As an outsider, one is mystified as to why Scientologists would accept such abuse. But by the time Miscaviage’s associates get to his inner circle they have invested years in the religion and all their friends and often family are believers. Being cast aside comes with a very heavy cost.Overall, this is a very worthwhile book. It reads well and raises interesting questions about what is a scam and what is a religion (for example, we mostly accept belief in a virgin births or parting seas as part of legitimate religions, but balk at Hubbard’s visions of outer space theology). There are no easy answers, but one is left by a very uneasy feeling about Hubbard’s legacy.

I may not be "neutral" towards the scientology organisation.But, Lawrence Wright has written a scrupulously fair book which starts with the background of the founder and takes us right up to events shortly before its publication.The book is the much longer version of an article which was famously carefully fact checked, and it shows. The most crucial allegations in this book have been made in print, before, and not been the subject of anything more threatening than letters from

expensive lawyers expressing outrage. Throughout the book, footnotes point out that denials have been received from the scientology organisation and some of the individuals named. This almost goes without saying (although it’s fascinating that the "musical chairs" incident has not been denied).(I have to note, however, that my favourite denial from the organisation is in John Sweeney’sÃ Â The Church of Fear: Inside The Weird World of ScientologyÃ Â where he carefully notes that the organisation denies that David Miscavige is insane...)While the personal touch is well served, with detailed and compelling stories of how former scientologists came to break with the organisation, I would add that if you were to buy only TWO books, that at the moment I believe that the best second book would be the recent book by Jenna Miscavige Hill (whose uncle is the leader, David Miscavige)Ã Â Beyond Belief: My Secret Life Inside Scientology and My Harrowing EscapeÃ Â .

I’ve read another summary of Scientology - Wright’s is far superior, and I especially like his detailing of the church’s beliefs. He traces Scientology from its origin in the imagination of science-fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, its struggle to become accepted as a legitimate (and tax-exempt) religion, efforts to infiltrate governments (placed up to 5,000 Scientologists as spies in government agencies around the world, charging them with finding officials files on the church to help generate intimidating lawsuits,’ vindictive treatment of critics (favorite weapon - lawsuits intended to bury the defendant in legal costs) and many who leave its ranks (often incarcerated in deplorable conditions for years and further punished if they tried to escape), and its impressive wealth. The objective, per Wright, of Scientologists, is to climb up the Bridge to Total Freedom’s innumerable steps and then achieve eternal life. The organization’s major goal is recruiting new members, increasingly achieved via exploiting celebrities such as Tom Cruise, John Travolta - he credits Scientology with putting his career into high-gear), and enlisting young members into its Sea Organization clergy - often as young 10 - 12 year-old children signing up for billion-year contracts and work under poor conditions for little/no payment (eg. 90-hour weeks for $50/week, with one day off for schooling) and pressured to undergo abortions if they became pregnant. (A billion years is but a temporary job in Scientology - they contend the world is already four quadrillion years old, and attaining immortality should certainly extend beyond one billion more years.)Scientology informally claims to have 8 million members (based on the number who have contributed members) and welcomes another 4.4 million new people every year. (Obviously, something is suspect about the numbers, unless Scientology has an incredibly high and fast dropout rate.) More credible is the estimate of a former high-level publicity person for the group - he estimated it only has 30,000 members, while the Statistical

Abstract of the United States puts the number at 25,000. The church is believed to hold about $1 billion in liquid assets and 12 million square-feet of property, including 26 properties in Hollywood valued at $400 million and 68 more in Clearwater, Florida, valued at another $168 million. Besides donations from members, Scientology also obtains the revenues from 1,000+ books written by Hubbard. (Hubbard's 'Dianetics' book sold 18 million copies, per the church.) David Touretzky, computer-science professor at Carnegie Mellon estimates that all the coursework costs nearly $300,000, and the additional auditing (including 'repair auditing') and contributions expected of upper-level members may run the total to over half a million dollars.There are three levels of Scientologists. 'Public Scientologists' constitute the vast majority, many of these first solicited onto it in shopping malls or transit venues. They're first led to a Scientology location where they're given 'stress tests' with a quasi lie-detector (E-meter - again, adding to the 'science' label) or personality inventories that entice them into paying for courses or auditing therapies that address problems most on their minds. The second level is constantly pursued to boost its recruitment appeal and advance its causes such as attacks on psychiatry and the pharmaceutical industry for their having spoken out against Scientology, and promotion of its theories of education and drug rehabilitation. Anne Archer, Ted Danson, Michelle Pfeiffer, George Clooney, and Greta Van Susteren have been involved. The third level is that of its clergy, the Sea Organization, estimated to number about 4,000, concentrated in L.A. and Clearwater.Scientologists believe Hubbard discovered the existential truths of their doctrine through extensive research (hence, 'science') into the writings of Freud and others; he was not visited by an angel (eg. Mormonism) or divine (eg. Jesus), though he also states that his first insights came in a dentist's office while under sedation. Hubbard then 'realized' that 75 million years ago an evil overlord named Xenu sent human thetans to Earth in space vehicles resembling DC-8s. Supposedly Hubbard also healed himself of crippling war injuries; no injuries or combat service is documented in U.S. Navy records - supposedly because Hubbard was in secret intelligence work. He defined Scientology's goals as creating a civilization without insanity, criminals, or war, where Man is free to rise to greater heights - this idealism appeals to the young. Another fertile recruiting ground - drug users who have become open to the idea of alternative realities.Therapy and evaluation (sometimes involving hypnosis) sessions focus on areas of supposed stress that cause the E-meter to jump, eventually to cleanse the mind of obsessions, fears, and irrational urges, thereby allowing the subject to 'Go Clear.' Often the process has led participants to recall past lives. Hubbard contended we are thetens, immortal spiritual beings incarnated in numerous lifetimes. (However, per Hubbard, when a thetan discovers that he is dead, he should report to Mars for a 'forgetter implant.' The ultimate goals of evaluating is to not just

liberate one from destructive mental phenomena, but also from the laws of matter, energy, space, and time. Once free of these limitations, the theten can roam the universe or even create new ones. Supposedly one who is Clear has flawless memory and the ability to perform mental tasks at great speed, as well as being less susceptible to disease. No credible examples, however, have been found, per Wright's research. Hubbard also reportedly cured 49er quarterback John Brodie's arm injury.Film director Paul Haggis (Oscar-winning, with an extensive Hollywood background) is a major figure in 'Going Clear,' with Wright documenting his story of indoctrination into the church and leaving 34 years later because he was ashamed of its support for California's gay-marriage ban ballot proposition and its is smearing of ex-members, and calling it a cult.One has to wonder why those imprisoned by Scientology didn't walk out and call police. One explanation is the 'Stockholm syndrome,' lack of external friends is another, and a third is that they were told they would have to pay back eg. $100,000 for Scientology classes they had taken.Wright also reports that Hubbard beat his second wife (married in a bigamous relationship, unknown to her), then tortured her with sleep deprivation, strangulations, and 'scientific torture experiments,' kidnapped their daughter, reported her to the FBI as a Communist, and suggested that she kill herself so he didn't have to incur the stigma of a divorce. She (Sara) declined, and after the divorce ran from him with her child as fast as she could.The 'bad news' is that Hubbard has been replaced by a reportedly authoritarian and violent David Miscavige. Scientologists now are encouraged to sever relations with non-believing relatives, and some marrieds are forced to divorce.Could such an obnoxious person who made things up science-fiction style as he went along also serve as a credible founder of a 'real' religion, and would a 'real' religion treat members such as Scientology has? Read Wright's excellent 'Going Clear' and decide for yourself.P.S.: Tom Cruise doesn't come out unscathed either. Wright tells us the church sent several young women to live with him, and that he received a considerable amount of free labor from young church adherents as part of their 'service.'

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