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Scientology: Only program that's free is Sunday's service

By David Corvette
Staff Writer

The location of the Atlanta Church of Scientology in a shopping center seems appropriate, since much of what the church has to offer is for sale.

The only free thing is the Sunday service, which is "a very minor part of Scientology," said associate pastor Tom Davis. Only a handful of people attend.

"But if you come here on a weeknight, you would find the place buzzing with people taking courses," Davis said.

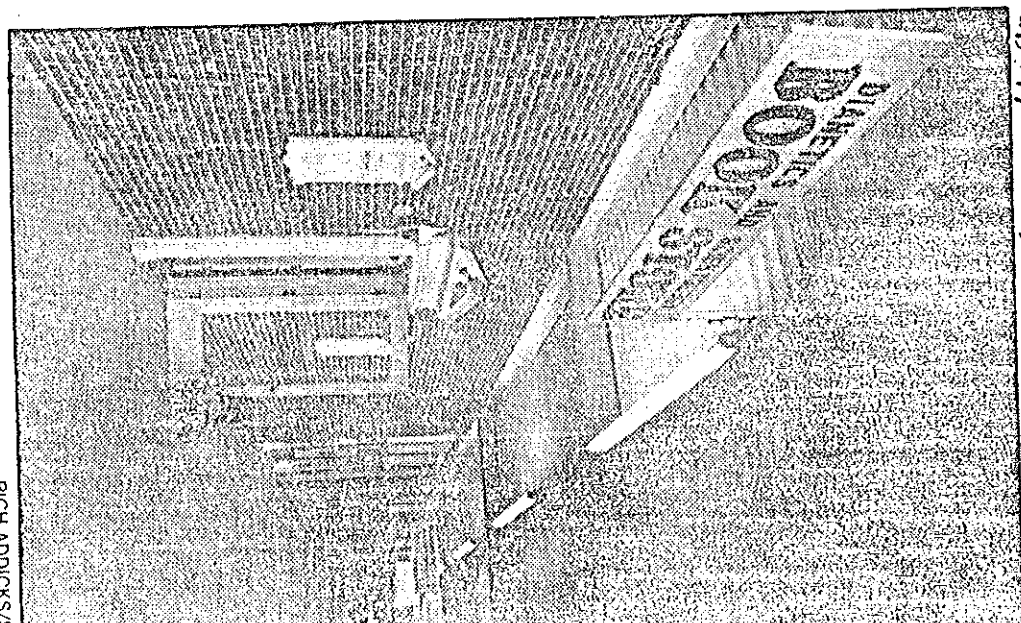
And spending money: the cost of most Scientology programs tops \$1,000 and the most expensive is \$2,055, according to a chart in the church bookstore. One \$1,000 service, called the "Purification Rundown," promises to rid your body of harmful drug traces, cure ailments and make you smarter in two weeks.

Or you can buy books, from Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard's 1950 best seller "Dianetics: The Modern Science of the Mind" for \$3.50, to a 12-volume hardback set of his "Technical Bulletins," for \$645.

The courses and the books play a very important role in Scientology, Davis said after Sunday night services at

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SCIENTOLOGY: Church at Embry Hills.

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the church in the Embury Hills Shopping Center.

In Scientology language, a series of courses makes up the "bridge" a person must cross to become a "clear." A clear is an optimum individual, freed of "engrams," or past mental scars, through "auditing," or spiritual counseling.

Hubbard's wife, Mary Sue, has described the Scientologist's beliefs:

"Scientology is a religion in the oldest sense of the word, a study of wisdom. Scientology is a study of man as a spirit, in his relationship to life and the physical universe.

"It is non-denominational. By that it is meant that Scientology is open to people of all religions and beliefs, and in no way tries to persuade a person from his religion, but assists him to better understand that he is a spiritual being. . . ."

Scientology claims 6.5 million followers worldwide and has estimated annual revenues of \$100 million.

It has run into trouble with the Internal Revenue Service in the United States, it has been denied church status in Australia, Hubbard has been found guilty of fraud in absentia in France, and his wife was sentenced to four years in prison for directing a plot to steal U.S. documents and

plant spies in various government agencies.

But perhaps the hottest trouble spot of all is that the 72-year-old Hubbard has not been seen publicly since mid-1980, and a group of dissidents led by his eldest son has petitioned the courts in California to appoint him trustee of his father's estate.

Davis estimated that about 1,000 people have used the services of the Atlanta mission in its eight years here, although less than a dozen showed up at the recent Sunday service.

The bulk of the cost of each program is for the E-meter, a type of galvanometer that measures skin responses. Participants must buy their own E-Meters. They range in cost from \$420 for the basic model to \$1,105 for the fanciest.

The person being counseled grasps two metal cans wired to the meter's magnetic needle. The counselor then monitors the person's reactions during auditing. An auditor can learn more about his pupil with the E-meter than a polygraph expert can with a lie detector, a "silly toy," Davis said.

But it is the E-meter that is silly, according to a 1963 lawsuit filed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration against the church. The FDA accused the church of falsely claiming that the device would improve intelligence and cure arthritis, tuberculosis, ulcers and other ailments.

In 1973, the court ordered Scientology to cease making medical claims for the E-meters. A handwritten note next to the E-meter for sale at the church bookstore

tells prospective buyers that the device is for auditing purposes only.

The FDA also has received consumer complaints about the Purification Rundown course and the medical benefits it claims. But Roger Kline, chief investigator for the FDA consumer affairs office in Atlanta, said a service like the Rundown would be difficult to construe as a product that the FDA can regulate.

The Rundown is basically a sauna, exercise and vitamin program. It supposedly prepares a person for auditing by sweating out "barriers" like traces of drugs taken long ago and physical afflictions.

According to Hubbard, as a person goes through the program he will re-experience the effect of the drug or ailment he is flushing out; these effects will diminish and eventually vanish when the program is completed.

A biochemist at Pathologists Service Professional Associates of Atlanta calls the claims "nonsense." Dr. Jim McHan

said that while former LSD users can experience flashbacks, Hubbard is "extrapolating to the point of ridiculousness" in claiming flashback and dissipation of physical disorders.

"He mixes enough truth in it to make it come out salable," McHan said, "but he's just selling water and calling it medicine."

Hubbard claims his program takes up where such programs as Narcotics Anonymous leave off.

Jim Delaney, a registered pharmacist and director of the state Alcohol and Drug Services, said, "After any drug detoxification program, stuff does accumulate in certain tissues, but that is not proven to be detrimental in sub-clinical doses.

"What the Scientology people and some other health fad people are saying is, 'yes, the substances can be found in trace amounts months later.' But they're harping on and over-dramatizing the point. If it's below a clinical dose, what's the use to even call it a drug?"

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