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**Review:** J. Gordon Melton is a well-known expert on the smaller religious denominations and groups in the USA. His reference works (such as the famous "Encyclopedia of American Religions") form a good starting point for any kind of research into religious pluralism, and are useful tools even in Germany for looking into the background of groups which are active also in the USA. (For an overview of some of his more recent publications with extensive critical commentary see my study "Lebende Religion dokumentieren: ein lexikographisches Gespräch mit J. Gordon Melton", *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 125, 2000, pp. 695-712). Now Melton has written a short introduction to the Church of Scientology which is available as a separate booklet. As his major reference books are quite expensive, this smaller item forming part of a new series of similar introductions is welcome indeed. Melton's approach is strictly non-apologetic and non-polemical, endeavouring to give a portrait of Scientology that active Scientologists would not have to consider unfair and biased. He has chapters on the birth of Scientology as a new religion, on Dianetics and Scientology as "religious technologies", on the organization of the Church of Scientology, and on the much-discussed question "But is it a religion?". 64 pages of text, some notes, some illustrations (mostly of buildings and not very useful) and a perhaps unduly select bibliography taken together give a first overview of what Scientology is about. To be read in less than two hours or so, the book is not aimed at the professional scholar of religion but at interested general readers without much prior former knowledge of the subject.

Melton is reasonably well-informed about the situation in Germany which he discusses at some length. As might be expected, he strongly criticizes official German policy. On the other hand he has much to tell about the large-scale social betterment programs of Scientology like Narconon, Criminon, Applied Scholastics and "The Way to Happiness Foundation". These are virtually unknown in Germany though they try to be active here also.

When giving attention to the critics of Scientology Melton tends to point out comparable experiences and beliefs in other religions. This is sometimes helpful, and sometimes not. What does

the reader learn, for example, from the following sentences: "Critics of Scientology have attacked the OT levels as an unbelievable myth which no rational, thinking person can believe. A similar attack has been made during the last two centuries by critics of Christianity upon the biblical accounts of the Garden of Eden, the flood, and miracles. To the unbeliever, it is almost always the case that the mythical elements of various religions appear irrational and ridiculous. It is also the case that many people have examined the criticisms leveled at their faith and continue to find meaning and value in its mythological underpinnings" (72 n. 10)? These observations are certainly true, but also trivial. The important question would be: "How does Scientology interact with rational discussions about its mythological aspects? Does it have a hermeneutics of mythology?" (The answer is that it doesn't have.)

There are other shortcomings. "The changes in the early 1980s, however, have not lessened the church's reputation for aggressively countering those perceived as its enemies" (36). This is about the maximum the reader hears about the more problematical aspects of Scientology's pattern of going to court, and every reader will expect to be provided with more facts here.

In Germany books on Scientology rarely show any kind of balanced approach avoiding caricature and stereotype. Easily the best recent publication is Thomas Kruchem's, *Staatsfeind Scientology?*, München (Koehler & Amelang) 1999 (i.e. "Scientology: Enemy of the State?"), which gives a combination of solid facts and lengthy interviews both with active Scientologists and with experts in new religious movements, politicians, lawyers, and others persons directly involved in the public discussion about the "Church". It is my pleasure to recommend this book and I wished we had more similar titles. In diversity of viewpoints and richness of documentation it is unsurpassed by anything on the German market.

On the other hand the bookstores still abound with items just seeking to expose Scientology without taking the trouble of undertaking anything deserving the name of research. The most recent title in Germany in this vein is Ilse Hruby, *Meine Ehe mit einem Scientologen*, Gütersloh (Gütersloher Verlagshaus) 2000 (I.e. "My Marriage to a Scientologist"). This tells a rather sad sorry of marital troubles most of which do not have a clear-cut relation to the practices and beliefs of Scientology. About Scientology the reader learns next to nothing, though the book has an introduction by the journalist El Awadalla and the former Scientologist Maria Susanne Klar purporting to convey such information. I certainly do not see debunking as an illegitimate approach, but when giving only banalities and obviously aiming at a market that *merely* wants to be entertained by "strange groups and stranger destinies" it becomes embarrassing.

To give a more scientific example of an approach directly opposed to that taken by Melton: the new *Handbuch Religiöse Gemeinschaften und Weltanschauungen* ed. by Horst Reller and others, 5th ed., Gütersloh (Gütersloher Verlagshaus) 2000 of course also has a lengthy chapter on Scientology. This 25-page essay (pp. 978-1003) is strictly Christian apologetics, and not very good at that. The number of statements which are plainly wrong is rather high. We even read of "Das Fehlen von Begriffen wie Schuld, Verantwortung, Befreiung, Vergebung usw. in der Ethik von Scientology..." (p. 1003) - which is simply nonsense The "Handbuch" as a whole is nevertheless useful and should be in every public library, as we do not have another up-to-date German language publication

covering at some length a comparable number of movements and groups.

To give one last recommendation: those interested in the dubious and difficult question of Hubbard's involvement in the "magickal" Agape lodge in 1945/46, will find much material for meditation in the recent book *Sex and Rockets. The Occult World of Jack Parsons* by John Carter (a *nom de plume*), introduction by Robert Anton Wilson, Venice (CA: Feral House) 1999. Both the "official" statement by the Church of Scientology (Hubbard was only involved to destroy "magick" in America) and the discussions by critics of Scientology (as by Jon Atack) are far from satisfying. We simply know too much to leave it at that.

With all this in mind books like Melton's on Scientology which try very hard to be fair are important contributions to the public discussion. Nevertheless in this case the reader might well be disappointed. To be quite frank, whereas most German publications err on the side of caricature and apologetics, Melton seems to me to err on the side of too much politeness and hesitation when discussing critical questions posed by the public about Scientology. He almost completely takes over the "official" picture which the Church gives of its history. But we do know much more than that official picture, and cannot in serious research pass over the many facets of Hubbard as a founder personality and of the history of Scientology that do not form a part of that official picture. There are pitfalls both in apologetics and polemics, legitimate as these can be in themselves, and in avoiding apologetics and polemics.

Still needed therefore are studies on a higher level of research which do not aim at a general readership. Such studies might not have an immediate practical purpose, but they could discuss the metamorphoses of religious tradition and practice in a movement like Scientology, the exact relation of its teachings and practices to its American background, its dynamics (not in the Scientological sense of that word!) as a missionary movement, and its arcane mythology and technological pathos as an expression of a very special Western response to religious fundamentals. The many small overviews about Scientology, whether merely polemical like most of those on the German market, or trying to be fair like Melton's, cannot contribute much to such research. Nevertheless books like Melton's would be useful on the German book market, if only to make it understandable why many Americans who are in no way affiliated to Scientology nevertheless see it in a different light than the German public. Meanwhile, the general reader will be well advised to get his information from all sides. Melton's book is important, but research has just begun.

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