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## **The International Association of Scientologists' 39<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and a protest that failed**

***One week before the three-day event attended by about 7000 Scientologists, opponents and the media announced a mass anti-Scientology demonstration. Only 46 showed up.***

*by Willy Fautré*

[Bitter Winter](#) (28.11.2023) In early November, the International Association of Scientologists (IAS) celebrated its 39<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Saint Hill, East Grinstead (West Sussex), about 20 km from Gatwick airport. Three days were devoted to this event, which after four years of interruption due to the COVID was attended by about 7000 people coming from all continents, including representatives of different other religions such as Orthodox Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Catholics, Jews, and Muslims.

On the first day, they presented their humanitarian projects and achievements as well as the results of their campaigns in the last four years. Three winners of the IAS freedom medals were honored for their humanitarian campaigns in three specific sectors:

-A Mexican couple, Salomón and Lucy Dabbah, carrying out drug prevention campaigns all over the country in schools, countries, associations, law enforcement and government agencies;

-Yuzuro Ogura from Japan for exposing human rights abuses in psychiatric hospitals while achieving national laws to protect whistleblowers of such abuses;

-And a final one, Giselle Lima from Panama, promoting with the police and the government a non-religious moral code as described in their brochure "The Way to Happiness." Moreover, she helped sanitizing other religious places of worship during the pandemic, gaining religious recognition in the country and forming the Religious Freedom RoundTable in Panama.

The second day was devoted to the Patrons' Ball Dinner. During the ceremony, it was announced that there were thousands of individual donors from all continents who over

the years had made donations ranging from USD 50,000 to USD 1 million and more. These were people who were successful in their professional life. More than 500 were present and were called to the stage by groups to be publicly thanked for their generosity. More than 1500 people attended the dinner followed by a concert and a ball.

On the third day, the IAS along with the Church of Scientology /UK hosted a Saint Hill Gala Charity Concert attended by about 2000 people meant to finance several local projects unrelated to the Church.

A cheque of £ 50,000 was shared between several local institutions whose representatives detailed the projects to be implemented. The charities selected this year were:

-the East Grinstead & District Lions Club,

-the AGE UK East Grinstead, focusing on assistance to elderly people,

-the Queen Victoria Hospital Charity for reconstructive surgery or burns,

-the Friends of the Crowborough Hospital, and

-Access2Adventure, an entity helping people "get out of their comfort zone to grow resilience, confidence and self-esteem."

The mayor, a local member of the British Parliament, and other local authorities were present. Among the artists participating in the concert:

- The Jive Aces, the UK's No.1 Jive and Swing Band performing over 300 shows a year in over 40 countries;
- Mark Isham, an electronic music innovator, jazz artist and prolific film composer;
- Rodney Earl Clark, a celebrated baritone singer and West End star;
- Alberto Plaza, who performed over 1500 concerts in Latin America, earned multiple gold and platinum records;
- Chill E.B., a pro-survival rap artist, a jingle writer and screen actor;
- Michele Anderson, an international vocalist and Goodwill Ambassador to her native island of Dominica.

Tom Cruise was discreetly present during the three-day events.

### **The International Association of Scientologists**

The International Association of Scientologists (IAS), a fundraising and membership organization run by the Church of Scientology, is an unincorporated membership organization open to all Scientologists from all countries. It is headquartered in England at Saint Hill Manor (East Grinstead, Sussex).

The IAS was created in 1984 by a number of delegates from Scientology Churches world over assembled at Saint Hill Manor (L. Ron Hubbard's home from 1959 to 1966).

To confirm their dedication toward the aims of Scientology, those first IAS delegates formulated and signed The Pledge to Mankind.

[The purpose of the IAS is](#): “To unite, advance, support and protect the Scientology religion and Scientologists in all parts of the world so as to achieve the [Aims of Scientology](#) as originated by L. Ron Hubbard.”

Lafayette Ron Hubbard (1911–1986) was an American prolific author of science fiction and fantasy novels in his early career. In 1950 he authored “Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health,” “the Bible” or building cornerstone of his belief system and established organizations to promote and practice Dianetics techniques. During WW II, L. Ron Hubbard was an officer in the Navy where he briefly commanded two ships.

The IAS was formed in 1984 to protect the Church of Scientology and its members against intolerance, persecution and discrimination, as well as to guarantee religious freedom for all. However, in the last two decades it has been able to focus its resources on funding numerous humanitarian projects.

The Church of Scientology is a belief association which is active and legally practiced in more than 150 countries, being legally registered in over 100 of them. It is protected by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights as it is confirmed by the jurisprudence of the European Court.

Few academic papers and books fairly cover the Church of Scientology but a recent paper by Donald Westbrook can be recommended for those who want to know more about this movement and its scholarly study and need a reliable compass: [Scientology Studies 2.0: Lessons learned and paths forward](#).

### **Press coverage of the event under the magnifying glass**

On 25 October, a huge anti-Scientology demonstration to be held by former disgruntled members was announced in “The Guardian” as “the biggest one since 2008 organized by members of the internet-based group Anonymous outside the church’s London HQ, which attracted more than 300 people.” It was then allegedly one of the ten most-read articles on that day, according to the anti-Scientology protestors who stressed that the newspaper’s website reached 110 million unique readers per month.

On the same day, “Newsweek” and “The Express” joined and amplified the same anti-Scientology campaign, also announcing the same “mass gathering” against the movement and/or their leaders, which never materialized.

The organizers also announced that the road to Saint Hill would be closed from 2pm until 10pm for their demonstration on 3 November but this never happened.

Moreover, there was no such big gathering: “46 protestors marched from East Grinstead and gathered at Scientology’s headquarters, making this the largest anti-Scientology’s protest since the Anonymous movement, 15 years ago,” according to the organizers themselves. Only 46 against the alleged over 300 demonstrators in 2008, which is seven times less... and they announced it as the biggest one for 15 years.

No such demonstration was ever visible or audible on the road to Saint Hill or near the entrance during the three-day event as the police kept them at distance.

None of these media outlets has afterwards reported on the failed demonstration in which less than 50 protestors participated but, in the meantime, they accepted to be their resonance box before their action and decided to keep silent afterwards about their spectacular flop.

Final score of "the match," 7000 against 46, but that is not the message that public opinion received from biased media. It is not surprising that unfounded and unjustified hostility against some religious, spiritual and belief minorities persists in Europe. A number of European states are not paragons of religious tolerance and are not in a moral position to teach lessons to other countries. They should first look at themselves for some introspection and self-criticism, and even look at some far away countries on other continents that have better practices in this regard.

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## **Building FORB through faith-and-belief friendly workplaces**



By [Jim Shannon MP](#), Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief

[APPG FoRB](#) (20.11.2023) - The Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is a touchstone human right. It enters every aspect of our lives, not only in religious practice. Whether in home life, the workplace, recreation, or any other setting, our belief systems, backgrounds, and identities travel with us. This [report](#) is a much-needed step in developing governmental thought on FoRB and business, showcasing the fantastic steps which businesses across the world, including many in the UK, are taking to promote "[covenantal pluralism](#)" in their workplaces.

The report is unique in that it provides a very practical toolkit for businesses to promote FoRB, thus improving employee experience and business output. The recommendations, tried and proven by top corporations, will prove valuable in promoting fundamental human rights in organic ways, through the "building method" of FoRB promotion.

When building, we seek to promote openness and acceptance of various religious and belief backgrounds, including those of no belief. In so doing, we feel free to express ourselves in a more authentic way, allowing for greater trust and cooperation among colleagues.

As a parliamentarian, I look forward to the combination of "building" and "advocacy" strategies playing out in the business world and in parliament. There is much we can learn in government from such positive methods. I look forward to applying the recommendations in my own work as an MP, with the hope that our diversity and celebration of FoRB will blossom, laying the foundation for FoRB policy innovations that may benefit millions."

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## **Church in Scotland silences 200-year-old bell following single noise complaint**

***Petition to resume 24-hour chime has garnered nearly 1,000 signatures***

By [Jon Brown](#), Christian Post Reporter



*The bell of Beith Parish Church in Ayrshire, Scotland, had rung every hour for 200 years, but the Church of Scotland recently decided to keep it quiet between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. following a single noise complaint. | Google Maps*

[The Christian Post](#) (17.11.2023) - Local residents in a Scottish town have started a petition after the bell at their local church was silenced at night following a single noise complaint.

The bell of Beith Parish Church in Ayrshire had rung every hour for 200 years, but the Church of Scotland recently decided to keep it quiet between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. after a resident claimed to local environmental authorities that it was disturbing their sleep, according to the [BBC](#).

The North Ayrshire Council urged the Church of Scotland to consider stopping the bell after the resident complained about the low-frequency noise, and a spokesperson for the Kirk Session said they were "empathetic" toward the complaint and "took Environmental Health's suggestion on board, embracing the Bible teaching of love thy neighbor as thyself."

The bell stopped ringing at night starting Oct. 11, according to [Sky News](#), which also reported that the complaint was filed by a new resident of the town.

Long-term residents have taken issue with the bell's silencing, such as Bryan McWilliams, who has lived near the church for 23 years. He started a petition to resume the hourly chime, which has reportedly garnered nearly 1,000 signatures.

McWilliams told the BBC that he has never heard of any complaints about the bell and that silencing it is disruptive to those who have become accustomed to its regularity.

"The chiming clock is more than just a timekeeper," McWilliams said. "It serves as an audible connection to our history and heritage and has been chiming for 200 years."

"Many townsfolk have shared stories about how they've relied on these chimes throughout their lives — from knowing when it was time to head home as children playing in the streets, to relying on them during power outages," he continued.

"We understand that everyone's comfort is important. However, we believe that one person's discomfort should not outweigh a tradition loved by many and ingrained in our community for generations," he added.

Built in 1810, Beith Parish Church received its bell from Beith native Robert Shedden in 1823. There were previous discussions regarding the bell's 24-hour schedule in the 1990s, though the town decided at the time to continue the tradition.

North Ayrshire Council noted that environmental health inspectors would take into consideration the fact that the bell's noise is because of long-standing cultural and religious reasons when determining its nuisance level.

The Church of Scotland has lost more than half of its members since 2000, and the average age of its attendees is 62, according to a [report](#) released earlier this year.

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## **Scientology churches are tax-exempt religious buildings, UK court says**

***While Mormon temples (open to Mormons only) had been denied exemptions for not offering "public religious worship," Scientology won its case.***

*by Massimo Introvigne*



*The Church of Scientology of London.*



[Bitter Winter](#) (18.01.2023) - Scientology won another case in its path to be recognized as a full-fledged religion when the London's Upper Tribunal (Lands Chamber) **ruled on January 5** on the case "Church of Scientology Religious Education College v. Andrew Ricketts, Valuation Officer."

As the court noted in its decision, the case was not about whether Scientology is a religion. The question had already been answered in the affirmative by the United Kingdom Supreme Court in 2013 in the case "**R. (Hodkin) v. Registrar General.**" The 2023 Upper Tribunal decision starts with the words "Scientology is a religion," and takes this point for granted.

What the Upper Tribunal had to decide was a different question, i.e., whether two buildings of the Church of Scientology of London should be considered tax-exempt because of their religious nature.

The decision moves from two important premises. First, it discusses the roles of chapels within Scientology churches. They are used for Sunday services, twice-weekly graduation and testimony ceremonies, weddings, funerals, naming ceremonies, and ordinations. The Upper Tribunal heard various testimonies, from which it concluded that services in the chapel occur regularly although in the life of a Scientologist they are somewhat less important than auditing and training based on the writings of the church's founder L. Ron Hubbard.

Then, the Upper Tribunal examined some precedents, which interpreted a peculiar British law that only exempts churches and other religious buildings from taxes if they offer a "public religious worship." Unlike in many other countries, it is not enough for a tax exemption that a building is used for religious worship. This worship should be public.

While in most countries of the world temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), popularly known as the Mormon Church, are regarded as quintessentially religious buildings, thus tax-exempt, two British decisions concluded that the "religious worship" they offer is not "public," and therefore they are taxable. In fact, only church members in good standing, identified as such by a document called "temple recommend," are admitted into the LDS temples, while everybody can visit a LDS chapel, which is not a temple and is regarded as tax-exempt in the UK.

Even in the case of the Plymouth Brethren Christian Church (PBCC), British courts, as the Upper Tribunal decision notes, concluded that worship is not "public" and denied the tax exemption. Unlike in LDS temples, PBCC services are open to non-members—when I was researching my book "**The Plymouth Brethren,**" which Oxford University Press published in 2018, I experienced no problems in attending services, and was only asked not to take pictures or videos. However, British judges objected that PBCC services are not "advertised," and introduced an "invitation test," stating that religious organizations should actively "invite" non-members to their services if they want them to be considered "public."

In the case of Scientology, the Valuation Tribunal for England (VTE) on June 10, 2021, had denied tax exemption to the Scientology premises in London, based on the argument that Sunday services were but a minor part of the activities of the church and were not advertised. However, the Upper Tribunal noted that when Mr. Jonathan Cooper of the Valuation Agency made an undercover Sunday visit with a colleague to the church, he

noticed, as he testified, "a large poster in one of the display windows advertising Sunday worship and another inviting people into the building.

When he returned closer to the time of the service two stands had been placed outside, one advertising the Sunday service, and the other offering free personality testing. When they entered the building, he and his colleague were offered information and the opportunity to take the test, but when they expressed interest in the Sunday service they were made welcome to it."



*The chapel in the Church of Scientology of London.*

Despite Cooper's experience, the Valuation Agency and the VTE insisted that Scientology "fails the 'invitation test' by making insufficient efforts to advertise its worship," as evidenced by the fact that not many non-members attend the Sunday service. The Upper Tribunal rejected the argument, noting that "it is not the public's response to an invitation extended by a church which marks a religious service out as public worship, it is the invitation itself and the openness of the church to admit any well-disposed persons who may choose to accept it." Since Scientology is clearly open to admit non-members to its services, and actively invites them to attend, including via social media, it offers a "public worship service."

The Valuation Agency's further objection that Scientology premises do not look like a church to passers-by was also dismissed. The Upper Tribunal stated that. "The building's imposing Portland stone façade features balconies and flagpoles which would not look out of place in the Vatican. Over the main entrance (which is fully glazed, affording a clear view of the interior) the words 'Church of Scientology – London' are prominently displayed in gold lettering. Emblazoned on a large white shield above the name is the eight-pointed Scientology emblem, a star superimposed on a cross. Six display windows at ground level feature posters, film terminals and other publicity material. This is not a building trying to conceal its use."

As a consequence, the Upper Tribunal restored the tax exemption not only to the chapel but to a majority of the rooms and floors in the Scientology buildings, noting that British

laws also exempt from taxes spaces “used in connection with a place of public religious worship and for the purposes of the organisation responsible for the conduct of public religious worship in that place.” Only for the L. Ron Hubbard Office (which Scientology maintains in all his churches as mark of respect for its founder) and some offices, the Upper Tribunal did not find a direct connection with religious worship and denied the exemption.

The Upper Tribunal decision is another in what is now a long sequel of decisions where courts in democratic countries adapt existing case law to a religion that is recognized as such but does not fit the traditional model of Christianity, Judaism, or Islam in its activities and churches. The decision should be applauded as a victory for religious liberty and a wise acknowledgement of contemporary religious pluralism.

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