

Scientology Its Cosmology, Anthropology, System of Ethics
& Methodologies

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0. Introduction

The purpose of this consultation is to take stock of Scientology from a sociological viewpoint.

The question is: Is Scientology a religion and if so, which type of religion? We will try to provide elements of answers in this paper.

We will also describe some aspects of Scientology as it appears to us today. Our presentation is neither polemic nor apologetic.

i. Is Scientology a Religion?

i.i. What Do We Mean By Religion?

This consultation cannot give rise to a basic discussion on the definition of religion. We may nevertheless have an operational viewpoint and agree on a minimum number of characteristics found in most religions. We are aware that this view provisionally ignores the discussion on the definition of religion imposed by new forms of religion. With Bryan Wilson we can agree that a religion includes:

* A cosmology in which the universe takes on a meaning regarding one or more supernatural forces. The conception of Man exceeds the boundaries of his terrestrial existence. There is a before and an after. The finite character of Man is not accepted.

* A moral which stems from this cosmology. It supplies directives and guidelines in accordance with the suggested meaning of the universe.

* Tools which put human beings in contact with the supernatural principle: prayer, religious ceremonies, techniques of meditation.

* A community of followers, however small, which is capable of maintaining and reproducing the beliefs and of managing the benefits of salvation.

The combination of these elements makes it possible to distinguish religions:

(1) from deist philosophies, which provide a cosmology and a meaning for existence but which are not intended to link human beings with supernatural powers;

(2) from individual magic, intended to obtain empirical results through the use of empirical techniques;

(3) from deist organizations such as *Freemasonry*, which acknowledge the existence of the Grand Architect of the Universe but whose ceremonies are not directed to putting Man in relation with Him.

i.ii. The Contents of Scientology

Scientology contains a cosmology, an anthropology, ethics, religious ceremonies, an auditing method, a method for purifying the body, training methods, a theory of communication.

The Cosmology: The Supernatural in Scientology

The founder, L. Ron Hubbard (1911-86), renews the thesis of primordial spirits. He asserts that before the birth of the universe, spirits existed, which he calls *thetans*. They were non-material, massless beings without temporal limits, occupying no space, omniscient, omnipotent, indestructible, immortal and capable of creating anything. These intangible beings, along with the Supreme Being, created the universe. In doing so, they got caught in their own trap and got stuck in their creation – and especially in Man – i.e., in matter, energy, space and time (MEST, the physical universe), even forgetting that they were the creators. Thus they lost their power and omniscience and became vulnerable human beings. Since that time, they have returned, life after life, inhabiting different bodies. Today, thetans have forgotten their true spiritual identity and believe they are human bodies. Hence, Man has a spiritual origin: he is altogether a body, a mind and a thetan.

This is a gnostic version of the fall of perfect man into imperfection and a transposition of Greek drama, where the Gods interfere in human affairs and are trapped.

A liberation must put an end to the succession of lifetimes. Scientology wants to bring man close to the state of original thetan.

The Dynamics and Ethics

Scientology deals with the driving force of the universe and the meaning of existence.

The universe is motivated by a dynamic urge which is a force at the service of survival, the very principle of existence. It varies among individuals and races. It depends on physiology, environment and experience. It influences the persistence of Man towards life and the activity of intelligence considered as the ability of an individual, a group or a race to solve problems related to survival.

The morality of an individual is judged with regard to the actions which he accomplishes for survival. In such a perspective, goodness is what is constructive, badness what is against survival. One can see that Scientology ethics are not a set of recommendations (the Bergsonian idea of closed morals). They are the result of an understanding and interiorization of the meaning of life which acts as a personal compass. It would be an open moral system.

In Scientology as in spiritualist groups there is no "sin." There are mistakes which are destructive actions against Man, family, society, God. Part of ethics is to spot and repair faults.

The dynamic drive becomes more complex as the organism becomes more complex. In a "normal" (unaberrated) man, it breaks down into eight areas, corresponding to objectives:

(1) The dynamic of self consists in a dynamic urge to survive as an individual, to obtain pleasure and to avoid pain. It deals with food, clothing, housing, personal ambition and the general objectives of the individual.

(2) The sex dynamic guides procreation.

(3) The group dynamic governs social life. It stimulates the conduct intended to maintain the survival of the group to which the individual belongs.

(4) The dynamic of humanity encompasses the survival of the species.

(5) The dynamic of life pushes the person to work for life in itself—i.e., all living things, both plant and animal.

(6) The dynamic of the physical universe is the individual drive to increase survival of matter, energy, space and time.

(7) The dynamic of thought is the individual urge to survive as thought and spiritual beings.

(8) The dynamic of universal thought is the urge to survive for the creator or Supreme Being. The first four dynamics are connected with Dianetics. The others, added in the early 1950s, of metaphysical nature, are dealt with in Scientology (cf., difference below).

The follower is invited to be in accordance with all dynamics. Checklists of self-exploration enable him to take stock of his condition on each. With the help of a minister, he looks for means to remedy defective conditions.

The Anthropology of Scientology

L. Ron Hubbard's teachings include a concept of the individual in which the body and the mind are intimately linked.

Based on his research into the mind and human nature, L. Ron Hubbard wrote *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* in 1950 which became an immediate bestseller and resulted in the founding of Dianetics organizations. At that time Dianetics was addressed solely to the mind as a means of unburdening or releasing an individual from mental trauma. However, Mr. Hubbard continued his research and in the early 1950s entered the spiritual realm with the discovery that Man is an immortal spirit who has lived countless lives and transcends the physical dimension. The first Church of Scientology was founded in 1954.

In Scientology the mind may be likened to a computer with two main divisions: the analytical mind and the reactive mind.

The first would represent intelligence, an unfaulty faculty supposed to be the awareness center of the individual (the “I” or basic personality). This analyzer is analogous to a computer working with perceptions (stimuli from the outside world), the imagination and memories contained in the standard memory bank. This memory receives, from birth to death, whether awake or asleep, information transmitted by the various senses, which it stores in full, in chronological sequence, in various files (auditory, visual, tactile, etc.) which it keeps at the disposal of the analytical mind. This mind thinks permanently. It continually receives copies of stored facsimiles, evaluates them, compares them, in order to supply correct answers to the problems encountered by the individual. To accomplish routine tasks such as walking, typing, etc. without having useless information, it sets up ready-to-work circuits that regulate acquired functions. In principle, the analytical mind is a sort of rational, unfaulty computer which does not create psychic or psychosomatic disorders.

Aberrated conduct is due to the reactive mind, which is a deposit of engrams. The latter are not exactly memories. They are complete recordings in all details of all perceptions received by the individual during a moment of pain and total or partial unconsciousness, such as fainting or anesthesia.

a. Auditing

The primary Scientology religious practice is known as *auditing*. For Scientologists, auditing is a methodical spiritual path. What is it?

Auditing permits an individual to recover all events in this life as well as in past lives—on the time track. The most significant events found are the traumatizing events in which a quantity of energy has been alienated that reduces capacity by blocking action and rational thinking. The recall of these events and the running of them releases, by abreaction, the energy linked to the incidents, which is thus made available. This produces a feeling of well-being. Moreover, past incidents are considered sources of physical or psychic diseases. Their recognition and the work that the audited person does on them are supposed to erase them. For example, someone in pain may discover in auditing that he has been strangled in an earlier life. Running the traumatic incident, he releases the pain accompanying the past incident. This reminds one of the construction of a personal myth in the shamanic cure as discussed by Levi-Strauss in his book *Anthropologie structurale*.

In Hubbardian terminology, Scientology auditing uses the capacities of the analytical mind to empty the reactive mind of its damaging engrams, which hamper the ability to recover the power of the incarnated thetan.

Auditing produces two things: (1) through exploration of the past, it quickly shows the adept that he is an all-powerful incarnated spirit limited by his human condition; (2) the erasure of engrams leads to the state of "Clear."

The elimination of engrams helps to regenerate the being. It shows in an increase of the life force, with a greater capacity to survive, with a feeling of power and with better abilities which can be measured on a tone scale.

For Scientologists, auditing is a form of pastoral counseling. Bryan Wilson shares those views (in "Scientology," 1994) by considering that Scientology manifests the systematization of the relationships with spirituality, an orientation that one finds in "methodism." For us it is a form of rationalization of religious life.

To Scientologists, auditing is first and foremost a spiritual adventure which gives one access to the spiritual, immortal part of Man, as in oriental religions.

It is through auditing that the thetan becomes certain of its immortality and is able to grow spiritually. Through auditing, Man gains a greater understanding of his spirituality and his relationship with the Supreme Being. Auditing also enables Man to become more understanding and capable along all eight dynamics.

Some detractors of the religion have compared Scientology to a form of psychotherapy. However, the methods and rituals are not the same, and they have totally different goals: psychotherapy deals with the mind; the goal of Scientology, on the other hand, is salvation of the spirit. 1) The audited person comes to understand the duality of Man and, through the discovery of past lives, understands the permanence of a single principle throughout all lives; 2) Scientology also deals with the thetan. By unburdening the thetan of the mental and corporal masses he recovers his initial power; the individual that the thetan represents would become "freed-alive" (*jivan mukti*).

b. Religious Training

The other core religious practice in Scientology is called *training*, which is the intensive study of Scientology Scripture both for spiritual enlightenment and for training as Scientology clergy.

Scientologists consider that they must use their quality of spiritual awareness in all conditions of life. They find this path through their study of Scientology Scripture. This is similar to study for enlightenment found in other

religions such as the study of the Talmud in Judaism, study of the teachings of Buddha and study of esoteric scripture. Moreover, according to them, auditing and training go together. One must raise at the same time one's abilities, one's responsibilities and one's knowledge. One discovers that one can act with the power of the incarnated thetan and that one can communicate with other spiritual beings. For instance, in training, Scientologists also learn how to "audit" to discover the process of spiritualization in others and to exercise their responsibilities of believers.

c. Ceremonies

The Church of Scientology observes a number of religious ceremonies which are traditionally found in mainstream religions: naming ceremonies, Sunday services, weddings and funerals.

d. Organization

The Church of Scientology has the complex organization typical of modern civilization, based on a large number of organizations. Each religion borrows its form of organization from the era in which it arises. More recently, the Jehovah's Witnesses borrowed organizational methods from the industrial era, while Scientology has adopted the organization style of the post-industrial era.

The purpose of the organization is to administer and reproduce the benefits of salvation. It is in the service of international expansion.

e. Pastoral Counseling

Scientology has a body of ordained ministers who celebrate ceremonies and practice auditing.

ii. Who Are the Scientologists?

In their studies on the Church of Scientology, Roy Wallis and Roland Chagnon have tried to outline a profile of the followers. On a good number of points their results agree.

In France, we have tried to gather data of the same type from 285 followers chosen randomly. The profile which emerges shows that two-thirds are men, that most are between 26 and 41 years old. Most are married and have one or two

children.

Usually, the Scientologists were born and lived in an urban zone up to the age of 18. They are well-integrated in society; their professional level is high (intermediary businesses, senior executives, businessmen, craftsmen, shopkeepers). Forty-two percent have gone up to secondary level education, and specialized in technical fields, art, trade or literature.

French Scientologists are mainly from Catholic backgrounds, but had fallen from it; 16 percent say they were atheists. Of those who agreed to talk about their present attitude towards their original religion, a bit more than half stated that they still belong to it, and several wanted to say that they understand it better and that they live it more spiritually. It is of note that the Scientology practice does not necessarily lead to a dismissal of the original religion, although as a practical matter Scientology is a complete religion and Scientologists generally retain affiliation with their prior religions solely for social and familial reasons.

iii. How Do Scientologists Validate Their Creeds?

Scientological writings provide some arguments to validate (legitimize) the Scientology religious doctrine of L. Ron Hubbard, which is called an “applied religious philosophy.” A reading of the argumentation shows that integration exists between Scientology and the ideals and practices of contemporary occidental society.

Scientology doctrine—which is not conceived as a revealed morality but rather as the result of the right use of human reason—takes on the ideals and values of liberal society: individual success, a morality of competition between individuals in order to avoid savage behaviour, the rise of economic power and science and technology which provide improvements in personal well-being, faith in the continuous progress of civilization, in Man and his potential, in the possibility of harmony between personal aims and those of civilization as a whole. Faith in these ideals is justified by the nature of Man: Man is good and, consequently, aspires to that which is good, i.e., optimum survival. If he fails to become more powerful or to practice a morality which encourages progress in civilization, this is because he suffers from aberrations which can be cured by means of certain techniques.

To summarize, Man may return to the omniscience and omnipotence of the primordial spirits and produce a human race like that in the beginning of the world. This is a kind of regressive utopia which spiritualizes progress by making it a pilgrimage towards a world of perfect people which existed at one stage in the past. The Scientology doctrine appeals to Man’s responsibility and offers him a choice

between an increasingly savage society if they do not change and a powerful society without war or violence if they agree to treat their aberrations. We can see that L. Ron Hubbard proposes an ethos of personal responsibility, a way to happiness, efficiency, prosperity and personal development which is not far from the philosophy of the Enlightenment which dominates our highly developed societies.

Therefore, we can see how the Scientology doctrine corresponds to empirical reality as far as the content of Western capitalist societies is concerned. It also corresponds in its means of acquisition and structure. The method of religious training conforms to the learning methods used in most systems of education: lessons, courses, practical exercises. Scientology's doctrinal edifice resembles the knowledge adherents have already acquired: the members think it is rational (it is presented like a scientific proof with concepts, hypotheses and axioms) and scientific (there is a collection of thick books documenting the discoveries of L. Ron Hubbard together with his various experiments, mistakes, problems and results). The system also allows each person to acquire techniques which they can immediately put into practice according to a clear order of precedence with predictable results. This type of training is similar in form to the training that Scientologists received in their earlier school or university system.

Many Scientologists are managers, company directors, professional people, sportsmen and show business personnel. They have usually reached at least A-level in their general education, often higher. The characteristics of Scientology which we have just described allow the members to feel at home because of the education they have already received. We can add that Scientology also speaks to the fears common in contemporary society—violence, wars, nuclear threat, pollution, etc.

On the other hand, the life force required to achieve these goals is identified with God, which gives the movement spiritual legitimacy. During the Sunday services the chaplain announces that "the ascension to Survival is in itself an ascension to God." We can find here an energetic vision of the divine common to many different metaphysical movements.

Secondly, to Scientologists, the validity of Scientology comes from the workability of its technology. Scientology holds that the man who applies the ethics technology and uses Scientology will inevitably have a better life and increased well-being and healing which indicate success. An instance of the absence of positive results does not discredit the technology. Rather, any apparent failure invites the user to examine his own resistances, his relationship problems within society or his faulty use of the technology. In either case, he is invited to persevere because Scientologists believe there is always a technical solution to any problem. Scientology works if followed correctly. Standard technology can be consulted in Scientology texts. The application of the technology is strictly standardized; one need only follow the instructions step by step to achieve the desired result, learned

by training in the religion. Certainty of the validity arises from experiencing the techniques.

Success proves the legitimacy of the technology and therefore also the applied religious philosophy and the spiritual concepts which go with it.

We wanted to know if the legitimation of Scientology as it is described in the official literature was the same as that used by the members. For this reason we interviewed 15 Scientologists. We asked them why they thought Scientology was true. The members interviewed had been in the movement for between five and 20 years. They were all highly educated. Their arguments can be divided into several categories.

iii.i. Pragmatic Legitimacy

The Scientologists questioned thought that their beliefs were valid because they brought tangible improvements in their lives, sometimes changing their situation completely. They claim that their health has improved, that their family life is more harmonious. They continued in the movement because they saw definite results right from the start. For the members, Scientology is a *useful* religion.

iii.ii. Probability in Belief

Personal verification of the validity of Scientology principles leaves an “unverified” realm. Many Scientologists admit that they have not personally verified all of L. Ron Hubbard’s doctrine for themselves and that there remain some zones of hypothetical belief.

Belief in God is much discussed. For some, the existence of a Supreme Being is not in doubt. They speak of an inner conviction, evidence of God’s existence which made them make up their differences with the “God of the Catholics” of their childhood. Others have been marked by contact with their past lives during auditing which led them to the idea of an infinite being. For example, “To start with I wasn’t aware of it, but as the auditing went on I realised that there really was an eighth dynamic which is infinite and which exists; at first I didn’t know about it, but now I know it exists.” However, for most of them, God (in their vocabulary—the eighth dynamic) needs to be verified in the same way as the other beliefs. At the same time, they consider God a probable hypothesis: for one thing, if they have checked a part of L. Ron Hubbard’s teaching, there is no reason why the rest should not be true. For example: “I know that there is a creator of all things, of the universe... I believe that there is a Supreme Being, it’s just a question of time. Does

he still exist? At the stage I've reached now I have no means of knowing. It's partly faith and partly *knowing*, because when you've verified for yourself 70 percent of a subject, you think the rest is probably true."—Scientologist of 20 years, age 47. Still others think that if Scientologists at higher levels have found God, then he must exist.

At the same time, they admit that they are on a search which may not end for them with the same discovery. For many Scientologists "the eighth dynamic" remains a world which must be explored personally to be fully believed. For the moment they are waiting. God is probably there. This can be called faith in probability.

iii.iii. Relative Truth

Where personal exploration dominates, truth is always relative to the stage reached along the Scientologist's path of spiritual development. Two truths mentioned by one of those questioned illustrate this relativity: the one which is beyond time and words and the truth of "here and now."

iii.iv. Relevance

Scientologists state that their belief is relevant to reality. One spoke about being in tune with reality, while at the same time admitting that he created it himself and that it had become natural for him. For example, one of them perceived Scientology ethics as adequate for understandings with others and for dealing with them. Another believer said that she had found a satisfactory method of social reform. Before her involvement with Scientology she had been a militant socialist. She felt that she had found in Scientology technology the tools she needed to "thoroughly reform society."

iii.v. The Meaning of Life

Members claim to have found a meaning for their lives. One of them described himself as a sailor drifting on the ocean under a cloudy sky with no compass and no landmarks to guide him when he found a map and all the navigational equipment he needed. Scientologists think they have found the meaning of life and the way to go forward. One of them, who gave up studying medicine, admits that he could not see the point of all the effort he was making, because the comfortable, middle-class existence he was heading for seemed to be inconsistent with what he felt was the meaning of life, meaning he said he had found in Scientology.

iii.vi. References to Science

In our interviews we found no references to accredited sciences as proofs for the doctrine or the technology of the Scientologists. This is in direct contrast with:

a. The expert knowledge required by leadership and mentioned above.

b. L. Ron Hubbard's statement that "I have to face up to the fact that we have come to the point where science and religion meet, and from now on we should stop pretending to have exclusively material aims. We cannot treat the human soul if we close our eyes to this fact."

We can form the hypothesis that:

a. Compatibility with the accredited sciences is an official doctrine considered as an accepted fact and which Scientologists do not feel the need to justify. Or,

b. The legitimation of this belief is a question of personal experience rather than attachment to an official position.

c. That Scientological technology replaces science.

We should also note that the Church of Scientology has changed from its formative years. It describes itself as a specific religious movement; the legitimacy that the Church seeks nowadays is less positioned on a scientific level than before.

iii.vii. The Importance of Scientological Technology

Scientology is not so much believed as practiced. The phrase "doing Scientology" was used several times. In an earlier series of interviews on the subject of defining what is Scientology, the members stressed *application* of the technology. During the current series of interviews, validity relied on the workability of the technology.

Scientology appears to be a practical religion.

iii.viii. Reference to a Religious Tradition

Those questioned only talked about religious traditions to point out their shortcomings. No one mentioned the link between Buddhism and Scientology although it is asserted by L. Ron Hubbard. He underlined their common points but lamented Buddhism's lack of effectiveness in the world.

This omission accompanies the omission of science. The faithful do not seek to legitimize their beliefs by referring to external factors. That which they have confirmed for themselves seems to suffice. They do not feel the need to support their beliefs to others in theological terms, nor to place themselves in a tradition of religious thought, even if L. Ron Hubbard perceived similarities between Scientology, Buddhism and various ancient wisdom religions.

The legitimation of Scientology by some members differs slightly from official documents. The "science based on certainty" is rather a "science based on certainties," which are only accepted after being confirmed by personal experience. It follows that faith is based on probability and is relative to the stage reached by the member on the spiritual scale. On the other hand, doctrinal affirmations with regard to the technology of the movement are accepted. We are not dealing with discernible proof of the truth which leads to a form of behaviour as in cases of conversion in religions with a doctrine of salvation. In those religions, believers pray because they accept the belief structure which recommends prayer. The Scientologist adds one certainty to another until he obtains sufficient evidence for the truth. One Scientologist told me that he preferred to talk about "continuous conversion."

It also appears that their faith is a *fides efficax* as the believers claim to have found in Scientology a means of understanding society and to transform both it and the whole world.

iv. Conclusions

Scientology has the characteristics of a religion. It has a theology, a set of exercises making it possible to reach the spiritual part in every human being, a "very bureaucratized" church structure, and religious rites. Several authors before us, even the most critical, have not doubted of its religious nature: Michel de Certeau, Roy Wallis, Bryan Wilson, Harriet Whitehead, Lonnie D. Kliever, Frank K. Flinn.

We find the following characteristics:

(1) It has techniques which are meant to make a path towards freedom as "a healthy spirit in a healthy body." L. Ron Hubbard and Scientologists carry very far the rationalization of religious life and its instrumentalization. Most often it has been

rightly compared to Buddhism. Some have described it as a “technological Buddhism.” Others have seen a resemblance with Methodism due to the systematic character of auditing (pastoral counseling).

(2) It enables the follower to give sense to cosmic, historical and personal events; it offers the believer the conviction that he holds the solution to personal and group salvation; it enables the individual to be at cause in his life and not the effect of external causes.

(3) L. Ron Hubbard is not a prophet who claimed a salvation path stemming from a revelation; he appeared as a spiritual researcher who progressively set up a salvation method, which is a path to “achievement.”

(4) It rests on a personal experience, somewhat mystical, which enables one to contact his own spiritual nature. It implies a “religious virtuosity,” i.e., an important self-commitment, and thus it is not a religion of mass worship.

(5) Scientology has the character of a “this world” religion reminiscent of Soka Gakkai where business success honestly obtained is seen as a sign of positive spiritual evolution. We can also draw a parallel between the ethics of Scientology and those of traditional Protestantism. In the latter case, success in worldly affairs testifies to a state of grace, and in the former it is the outward manifestation of the person's work on his own personality, of a personal religious and moral code made up principally of psychological liberation techniques that free the individual spiritually, and the application of a very concrete system of morality.

(6) It is not a sect – it is not exclusive, and the follower is not obliged to renounce his former religion, although most practice Scientology exclusively.

(7) The religious character of the Church of Scientology has been asserted since the early 1950s, according to the brochure the Church of Scientology International published on the occasion of its 40th anniversary in 1994. The Church of Scientology International, headquartered in Los Angeles, is described as the Mother Church (as the one of Boston for Christian Scientists). There is reference to the parishioners and religious brotherhood, pastoral services and church-affiliated charitable works. Moreover, during the recent interviews of Scientologists that we have done, the religious dimension was more and more emphasized. By increasingly proclaiming its religious nature, Scientology attracts people in search of religion, whereas in its beginnings it attracted people seeking to solve personal problems. As Scientology developed, Dianetics became integrated into progress of the whole.

(8) Scientology includes utopian elements: L. Ron Hubbard has conceived a utopian project of "Clearing the planet," which envisions a society free of insanity, criminals and war where the able can prosper, honest beings have rights and man is free to rise to greater heights. Ethics, spontaneously applied (open Bergsonian morals), will eliminate all the wrongnesses of existence and through theta being recovered, will be increased. The world should improve as the number of Scientologists grows.

(9) Scientology is born in a modern context. It gets from it certain elements (technicity, well-asserted methodical approach, importance of communication, well-being, understanding of organization, personal experience) which it has mixed with ancient spiritualistic traditions.

L. Ron Hubbard and Scientologists extend the use of instruments of rationality in the service of a mystical path, a self-transformation and a transformation of the world. It is probably for that reason that it appears unique among the religions.

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