

Scientology: A True Religion

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I. Introduction

In recent years some controversy has arisen regarding Scientology in some sectors in Europe, particularly in Germany, which seem to misinterpret the real social intentions of this religious group.

From the viewpoint of someone who knows philosophy and religion there is no question of any polemic, but it is easy to understand that the lack of knowledge of the religious phenomenon as a whole and the variety of the possible manifestations of this phenomenon can unjustly lead to antagonistic and intransigent attitudes.

It is for this reason that I decided to publish my conclusions about the religion of Scientology in this report, a religion which I have studied for several years, both in its formal aspects (writings, books and philosophy) and in its more day to day aspects (ceremonies, internal and external

organization, practices of religious observance and community activities), both in our country as well as in other countries (France and Denmark).

II. The Concept of Religion

The theological tradition does not give us many resources when we wish to analyze the objective characteristics which define a religion and differentiate it from other types of beliefs, ideologies or social groups.

For that purpose we need to use concepts and modern bases which allow us to provide a scientific viewpoint about the religious phenomenon, but without forgetting that this is an individual and intimate experience of spirituality and as such evades some of the commonly used arguments of other social sciences.

This approach of tolerance and inter-religious dialogue constitutes a challenge and an absolute necessity in our current society, as is stressed by renowned theologians such as Leonard Boff and Hans Kung.

Just as the word religion is defined (from the Latin *re-ligare*: unite or re-unite) as a community of persons united by a faith, a practice or form of worship, so may religion itself be considered. Of course, this community must be united by a search for "the divine," and defined by its manner of confronting the problems of human life. That is why in the history of religions much is said of the experience and personal contact with "the sacred."

An elevated concept of the dignity of the individual, the knowledge and recognition of something called "sacred" are not exclusively Christian but are the essence of all religions. This was recognized by Vatican Council II itself in its document *Dignitatis Humanae* concerning religious faith and purity.

There are other religious phenomena, such as Buddhism and Jainism, which, although lacking an idea of God in terms of reference, do practice a form of respect and reverence of the "sacred divinity," as a generic element with characteristics much more general than the Christian, Muslim or Judaic "particular gods."

Maintaining a unitary concept of religion based solely on one's own experience and excluding other particularities, cannot be other than a form of fundamentalism which violates the most elemental test of religious freedom.

As Max Muller affirmed, "he who knows only one religion knows none," which would express the idea with complete precision. Durkheim himself explains the key to this phenomenon:

"... religion is a universal phenomenon which appears in all known human societies. ..."

It is routine to use known models to attempt to define the unknown. This is a procedure used to excess by social investigators in many cases. Abusing comparative analysis will lead without a doubt to blindness when faced with standards of behavior, beliefs or experiences, which cannot be explained except by omitting any other factor and their similitudes.

Religion is evidently the search, inherent in man, which the spirit makes in order to apprehend the "infinite"; the longing and endeavor of the being with regard to his sense of unfulfilled desire for infinity. Religion is, then, an absolute necessity, nothing less than a constituent of human existence, which the individual feels in order to "communicate with the infinite"; it is the source of what sustains the human being and on which man depends in many of its aspects. The definite proof of this is anthropological analysis in which distinct religious creeds or the lack of them are a determining factor for scholars in understanding social and individual standards of the behavior of societies.

To understand a religion like Scientology it is necessary to evaluate very diverse aspects, such as those indicated by modern experts on this subject (see Bryan Wilson: *The Social Dimension of Sectarianism*, 1990, and Eileen Barker: *New Religious Movements: A Perspective to Understand Society*, 1990). Among the many possible approaches, I have selected what could be an objective and scientific view of the matter based on the aspects which I will enumerate here:

1) **The philosophical and doctrinal aspect.** In this I include the complete body of beliefs, scriptures and doctrines which hold the three fundamental parts of religious knowledge: the Supreme Being, Man and Life.

2) **The ritual aspect.** This includes the totality of ceremonies, rites and religious practices applied to the religious phenomenon experienced by the Scientologists.

3) **The ecumenical organizational aspect.** This is an aspect of great importance, because it serves to define the dividing line between religions and beliefs in formation, with those which are already completely formed and evolved.

4) **The aspect of the purpose or final objective.** Here is the definition of a purpose of life and the final attainment of the spiritual objective which leads to the goal Scientology offers to its parishioners.

III. Philosophical and Doctrinal Aspect

Scientology is based on the works of L. Ron Hubbard. Scientologists recognize the works and investigations of its creator; philosopher and humanitarian L. Ron Hubbard as the sole source of the Scriptures of the religion.

Starting with Dianetics (see *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, 1950) the evolution of Scientology offers enormous similarities to the majority of religions, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism. Its history is one of discovery or systematic “revelation” of the basic “philosophic truths” which progress step by step and lead to the construction of a complete doctrinal body.

With Dianetics its founder seeks to relieve man of the sufferings the mind produces in the body and the life of men.

For some years, Dianetics has been the tool used by its followers to attain the state of *Clear*. This state, which the book itself defines, signifies an important advance in the eradication of the conditions of unwanted suffering and elevates the human being to a category in which he can better experience his own spiritual self (called the *Thetan*). If we analyze this in depth, the mystical experiences, Nirvana and other spiritual states described in most religions; they could have been looking for the same spiritual state which is sought by Scientologists in the state of Clear.

Later on, Hubbard discovered, when studying the manifestations of many people who had already attained Clear, that there existed a clear proof of the existence of a spiritual being, and additionally, that the person himself was a spiritual being, immortal and with enormous potentials which had been cancelled by the sufferings and experiences of the “constant spiral” of life, death of the body, new body.

He developed a spiritual technology which leads to “freeing” the being (the thetan) from this spiral and returns to him his complete awareness and his spiritual freedom. In this way he developed the principles and practices of spiritual counseling (called *auditing*) which lead to the highest states of awareness and being, called OT levels (*OT: Operating Thetan*, because he does not have the compulsive need to be in a body and can operate without one).

All of this is expounded in clear steps which are outlined in the route (*The Bridge*) toward “Total Freedom.” The emphasis in all of the Scriptures given to knowledge of the being himself as well as life, God and the relations of man with the different universes in which he acts (the material or physical universe and the spiritual or theta universe) must be noted as important.

From this belief arise two fundamental activities of Scientologists in their path to spiritual salvation: the study of truths of life according to the Scriptures of Scientology (*training*) and the liberation (*auditing*) from the sufferings or aberrations which prevent the thetan from acting like himself and make him act in an irrational or harmful manner both towards himself and to others. (See *What Is Scientology?*)

Apart from an enormous volume of technical materials for the ministers of the Church of Scientology, an extensive index of materials and reference books for students of this religion exists. Particularly important and describing the basic truths of Scientology are the following books:

Scientology: The Fundamentals of Thought

Scientology 0-8

Scientology 8-8008

Scientology: A History of Man

Dianetics 55

Scientology: A New Slant on Life

Science of Survival

Dynamics of Life

The Scientology Handbook

As a fundamental aspect, Scientologists define their religion as “an applied religious philosophy, which allows the person to know more about himself and life.” (*Technical Dictionary of Dianetics and Scientology*)

L. Ron Hubbard divided life into its eight fundamental manifestations, each one of which is an impulse towards survival of the person, his vital force directed towards a goal of betterment. He called these the “eight dynamics,” due to the fact that these are the dynamic impulses of life:

The **first dynamic** is the impulse towards survival of the person as himself.

The **second dynamic** is the impulse towards survival in the sexual sense: the couple, family and the rearing and education of children.

The **third dynamic** is the impulse towards survival of groups or as a group, including those in which the individual is part (friends, business, club, nation, race).

The **fourth dynamic** is the impulse towards survival of humanity or as humanity.

The **fifth dynamic** is the impulse towards survival of living species (animals, plants) or as a living being.

The **sixth dynamic** is the impulse towards survival of the physical universe or as the physical universe.

The **seventh dynamic** is the impulse towards survival of spiritual beings or as a spiritual being.

The **eighth dynamic** is the impulse towards survival of the infinite or as part of the infinite. This is the dynamic of the Supreme Being or God for Scientologists.

In these eight manifestations of life are contained the areas in which the person has to progress spiritually and act, maintaining ethical behaviour (which does not harm the dynamics) in order to achieve spiritual betterment. Good and bad are defined by Scientologists as a function of the benefit or harm they cause to the dynamics. Absolute good would be that which assists all the dynamics and absolute evil that which harms all of them. Of course, there would be intermediate points of good and bad which would lie on a gradient scale to the degree they benefit or harm, more or less, some of the dynamics, taking into account that all the dynamics have the same level of importance. (See *Introduction to Scientology Ethics*)

The concern with ethics and moral aspects are of the utmost importance in the doctrine of Scientology. The references to these concepts in different reference books are uncountable, and there are also complete publications dedicated to the subject, such as the one already mentioned or such as *The Way to Happiness*, the Code of Honor, The Auditor's Code and the Code of a Scientologist. (See *Handbook for Preclears*)

Taking into account that for the Scientologists the person is a spiritual and immortal being, his behaviour in each one of his different lives has great importance, not only for the benefit of his dynamics but in order to be able to reach a complete spiritual betterment. "We are in this world in order to work out our own salvation" is a statement by L. Ron Hubbard from the video Introduction to Scientology.

Scientologists themselves declare that they have experienced a real betterment and spiritual freedom both through study (training) as well as through spiritual counseling (auditing). They describe their "wins" as real liberations of mass, conflicts, ignorance and unwanted attitudes and sentiments. They feel that their abilities have increased, their perceptions bettered and that they have a renewed knowledge of themselves, life and God.

The Creed of the Church of Scientology defines its system of beliefs which unites its believers with the ultimate meaning of life. This creed underscores the dignity of man, his inalienable and undeniable rights; it defines the natural brotherhood of man and recognizes the spiritual nature of

the individual in his striving towards infinity authorizing only God the “right” to act with regard to the freedom and wisdom of men.

This creed provides a clear purpose to the practices of auditing and training as means to achieve spiritual salvation which the Scientologists promulgate in their creed.

IV. The Ritual or Mystical Aspect

Part of the practices which are described in this section have already been described in the former chapter (training and auditing), therefore I will concentrate more on what can be understood as ceremonies and rites.

These are collected in the Book of Ceremonies of the Church of Scientology. Despite the fact that the founder himself places Scientology in the tradition of the oriental religions, inheritors of Buddhism and the Vedas, it nevertheless has ceremonies which to a large degree remind one of the western religions. This is the case with the Sunday Services and the Matrimonial Ceremonies.

But due to its tradition, it possesses various and very personal rites which, although reminiscent of the Judeo-Christian tradition, turn out to be completely coherent with the body of beliefs of Scientology. I'm referring to the Naming Ceremony, the Naming and Recognition Ceremony and the Funeral Service. In accordance with the belief in the immortality of the thetan, Scientologists conduct these ceremonies to give a name to the new body of the being which has arrived, to welcome the being to his new body and his new family or to say goodbye to a being who has abandoned his body in order to find a new one and to try to help to orient him in the new situation in which he finds himself.

All of these ceremonies are performed under the auspices of an ordained minister, or by the chaplain of the church, and the members of the community of Scientologists participate actively in them on a regular basis.

V. The Organizational Aspect

On a worldwide basis, the Church of Scientology is structured in different churches, with various names according to their status and size.

At the lowest level are found groups and missions of Scientology and Dianetics. These are small communities of Scientologists, led by one or several ordained ministers who minister basic services of spiritual counseling, religious ceremonies and who come together to study the Scriptures of Scientology, but at the lowest level. They cannot ordain nor prepare ministers nor minister the religious auditing services of the OT (Operating

Thetan) levels.

At the next level there are the churches of Scientology. These can prepare and ordain ministers and they minister auditing up to the level of Clear.

Above the latter are the advanced churches. These train the ministers of the highest level and minister pastoral counseling of some of the Operating Thetan levels.

The Church of Scientology Flag Service Organization, in Clearwater, Florida, is the highest of all the advanced organizations. It trains people in the highest ministerial levels and Scientologists go there to ascend to high levels of OT.

A special case is the Church of Scientology based on the *Freewinds*, a ship operating in the Caribbean islands, which ministers a specific OT level which can not be received in any other church.

This type of structure of religious services is common to practically all known religions, insofar as the different levels of preparation of the clergy are not accessible in all the centers, but only in the central institutions (Rome, Tibet, Tel Aviv, Mecca). It is where the missionaries, the monks or priests can receive the ordination of the highest level.

With regards to the religious community of Scientology, they form a real community of ministers and religionists, who live in community, with a total dedication to the purposes of the Church and with abandon of worldly interruptions and vanities.

The Sea Organization, so named after the original crew which manned the ships commanded by its founder in the early days, has five principal locations in the world which carry out various functions—although there exist groups of missionaries and members in many of the countries where Scientology is present. Those five headquarters are situated in East Grinstead (United Kingdom), Copenhagen, Los Angeles, Clearwater, Florida and Sydney. In those five headquarters, more than anywhere else, one can feel the real spirit of a community dedicated to its evangelizing and pastoral work. Although there is no obligation of celibacy for the ministers of Scientology, these communities resemble in their functioning and dedication those of many other religions, including the Catholic Church. Members of the Sea Organization do follow a very strict code of ethics which includes very ethical and monogamous sexual relationships, complete abstinence from any use of drugs and complete devotion of one's life to achieving the goals of the religion.

Of course, the training of ministers of the highest levels, auditing to

the highest level of Operating Thetan, ministry of the highest levels of organization and the responsibility for the level of ethics of Scientology at an international level rest only in the hands of members of the religious order called the Sea Organization, who are dedicated exclusively to this work.

VI. The Final Objective of Scientology

In the words of L. Ron Hubbard himself, the goals of Scientology are: "a civilization without insanity, without criminals and without war, where the able can prosper, and honest people can have rights and where man can be free to rise to greater heights." (See *What Is Scientology?*)

As the objective for the individual, Scientology pursues the salvation of man, his spiritual liberation and the freedom of the barriers which existence has been imposing on him. But no man can be free without the society also being free. The search for responsibility is the main road through which Scientologists seek their freedom; responsibility which requires bettering our life and that of our fellow man before reaching superior goals.

Goals of such breadth could not be reached solely through pastoral work carried out by the followers. For that reason, the Church of Scientology International created different groups or associations which carry out social campaigns dedicated to those purposes. One of them is ABLE (Association for Better Living and Education) which sponsors several programs of help in the community: Narconon, which delivers services of prevention and rehabilitation in the field of drugs; Criminon, which has programs in various countries to educate and rehabilitate criminals; Applied Scholastics, which conducts education and literacy campaigns in disadvantaged areas and neighborhoods; and the Way to Happiness Foundation, which is based on the book of the same title by L. Ron Hubbard and develops campaigns with children and adolescents to reestablish codes of conduct which help the community, such as programs for the protection of the environment, study programs, civil assistance programs, etc.

Another important group created by the Church of Scientology is the Citizens Commission on Human Rights, which has received international awards for its investigations and exposés carried out in the field of mental health reform.

Of special importance is the Volunteer Ministers Corps, formed by Scientologists around the world, who work together with experts and authorities in cases of accidents, natural disasters or tragic events in which help is needed. These volunteers are perfectly trained to give solace and first aide to people while the medical corps and civil defense workers take action.

VII. Is Scientology a Religion?

From my viewpoint as a theologian and philosopher, and having studied the religion of Scientology in its writings and practices, I can strongly affirm that Scientology is a religion, in the very fullest sense.

The community of persons united with a complex body of beliefs, in its search for the infinite, the sacred, searching to place man into his proper relationship with the divine, is what one encounters in examining the beliefs and practices of the religion of Scientology.

One cannot see any religion without this factor which involves specific behavior toward this spiritual reality. Scientology seems to turn specially around the fact of survival and salvation, concepts clearly expressed by Xavier Zubiri as inherent tenets in any religious experience. The association or not with a God does not vary in any way the reality of this experience. This is not the case with Scientology, because Scientologists confirm their search for God and infinity in their eighth dynamic, although they do not glorify him. In fact, one of the accusations which separates Islam most from Catholicism is that the latter, so say the Moslems, let itself be carried away by idolatry after its continuous reforms.

The roots of Scientology (Buddhism and the Vedas) already point out that one can only through a complete knowledge of oneself commence to know and love God.

As religion is a universal impulse, as the ecumenists maintain, one should not forget that Catholicism itself had to go through a long stage of formation and a continuous history of crisis and reforms until it adopted its "final form" which we know today. Islam, Judaism and Buddhism passed through similar stages and through a much larger duration than the few years the Church of Scientology has had to organize itself in a completely organized form and aspect.

The clear confrontation of Scientology with the "scientific" doctrines of psychology and psychiatry which deny the goodness of man, as affirmed by Scientology, frees this religion even more from any confusion. Scientology only values the spiritual essence of man, his innate goodness, his immortality and his search for infinity as a final goal. The novelty here is that its founder developed the religion of Scientology as a body of knowledge and practices which direct man towards these goals. To confuse this with an attempt at "therapy" or "healing" is easily imputed to the superficiality of poorly documented opinions.

Only a complete and bona fide religion could confirm and maintain these assumptions, while creating a body of beliefs, doctrine, practices, rites, structure and objectives directed towards the salvation of the spirit. This is

part of no other field than religion and Scientology is a religion.

Without entering in administrative, juridical or tax-related considerations, I reaffirm that Scientology fulfills completely the requirements that can be asked of any religion.

Scientology responds to its true religious nature and pursues no other goals than those to do with the spiritual nature of man.

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About the Author

Professor Alonso, a Doctor in Philosophy and a Licenciante in Theology (cum Laude), obtained his degree at the Gregorian University and the Saint Bonaventure Pontifical Faculty, both in Rome. He has been a moderator in Ecumenical Congresses directed by the Vatican and in this capacity has worked with Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI on religious matters.