

## RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION AND CHURCH

G.C. Oosthuizen, Th.D.

*Dr. Oosthuizen is a South African professor of religion with a Calvinist background. He holds that an understanding of why Scientology is a religion will be hard to arrive at without a knowledge of eastern religions, especially Buddhism. Oosthuizen belongs to the Dutch Reform Church, but in this study he asks whether Scientology would have been easier to accept as a religion "had they bowed before a holy cow or a monkey god or an elephant god or a snake or a frog." Scientology comes in the context of modern man with his emphasis on modern technologies and techniques, but is nonetheless a religion.*

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G.C. OOSTHUIZEN, TH.D.

professor (retired), dept. of science of religion  
university of durban-westville  
natal, south africa

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As a student of the Science of Religion, I have worked for a number of years in the field of comparative religion. I am an adherent of a Calvinistic Church, but as an academician who has to give an objective analysis, irrespective of my own religious persuasions, I am called upon through my own conscience to be objective. Thus, all subjectivity has to be checked by the broader context in which one has to act. It would be misleading if one came forward merely with his own norms, and in any state where religious freedom is allowed this approach could be most dangerous.

Any discussion which centers around the various immanent and transcendental emphases of Scientology is difficult to understand if a knowledge of Eastern religions, especially Buddhism, which functions as a religion in South Africa, is defective. There are other aspects to be considered, such as the concern with physical and spiritual survival and the 'Life Force,' or 'Supreme Being' and the importance of that 'force' which is not part of the physical universe; and the importance of communication in human relationships and man as a spiritual being.

There is no contradiction whatsoever when it is stated that Scientology is "an applied religious philosophy of life and a body of knowledge concerning Man and his relationship to the Universe, to his fellow beings. It holds that

man is inherently a spiritual and immortal being." The study of religion could be done from various angles such as the psychology of religion, sociology of religion, geography of religion, including ecology and religion, ethics of religion, etc.

Who sets greater store in religious practice if he wishes to understand "the riddle of existence?" Does Christianity? Or does it seek this in what the Scriptures say about Man and the meaning of his existence? One could practice a religion without asking questions about his existence. Is that not the great problem with which Søren Kierkegaard struggled in regard to the formalistic church of his time?

On analysing the works of Scientology one has no doubt that it has very definite religious characteristics and that it is in fact a religion. Some Christian theologians have maintained that Christianity is not a religion but a faith. Pentecostal churches often emphasise that what they profess is not a religion but that it is related to their belief/faith in Jesus Christ through the world of the Holy Spirit. This does mean that they do not belong to the Christian religion. They reject the "religions" of the established churches -- i.e., the emphasis on outward formalistic acts and a repetition of creeds.

Similarly, L. Ron Hubbard says that Scientology is not a religion in this sense. He conveys that Scientology is not merely the repetition of a ritual, or the doing of certain acts called religious. It is related to the individual in his existential situation and it thus "gives freedom and truth to the individual." A person's religion could be misleading and false if it were not related to the deepest problems of his life. This is one reason (an important one) why Western Europe has discarded the religion of an apostate church, and this process has even reached some of the more conservative churches.

Scientology rightly states that it has been influenced by various sources. Many religions have been influenced in this manner. Hinduism, for example, is the outcome of the Aryan Vedas and the indigenous religions of India. Islam has been influenced by Judaism, Christianity and the indigenous religion of Southern Arabia.

Scientology makes an important statement: "The spirit then is not a thing. It is the creator of things. "There is thus a strong emphasis on the metaphysical aspect of life. To Scientology, man is an "immortal being." Buddhist thinking, which is accepted by millions in the West, prevails in the statement that "the thetan is the person. You are in a body."

L. Ron Hubbard has studied many aspects of human existence, and his

studies include an analysis of what happens to the human spirit at death:

"Some facts, however, are completely known. The first of these is that the individual himself is a spirit controlling a body via a mind. The second of these is that the thetan (the spirit) is capable of making space, energy, mass and time. The third of these is that the thetan is separable from the body without the phenomenon of death, and can handle and control a body from well outside it. The fourth of these is that the thetan does not care to remember the life which he has just lived, after he has parted from the body and the mind. The fifth of these is that a person dying always exteriorises. The sixth of these is that the person having exteriorised usually returns to a planet and procures, usually, another body of the same type of race as before."

Similar theories are accepted by many religious people in the West. In Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard expounds a theory that life consists of a conquest of the material universe by the spiritual. This is expressed in terms of a conquest of "MEST" (a composite word meaning Matter, Energy, Space and Time) by "Theta" (meaning life force, elan vital). The struggle of theta with MEST is not uncommon in Christianity -- only the terms are different. The Apostle Paul wrote meaningfully of this struggle.

In Scientology, there is a great emphasis on the importance of human relationships; L. Ron Hubbard repeatedly stresses the importance of communication in them. And part of Scientology's emphasis on the human side of life, and on personal relationships, is that it considers being as more important than doing. Scientology is by no means merely a functional discipline, but is a religion which upholds the vital importance of man's state of being.

Scientology is sometimes characterised as mere functionalism, but the importance of "beingness" refutes this incorrect evaluation. Although it may appear to the casual observer that few Scientologists have a profound knowledge of Scientology as a body of thought, this is, in fact, not an accurate observation. And in any case, is the percentage of Christianity any higher with regard to the Church's doctrine as a body of thought? Is the emphasis in Christianity not mainly on attendance at church services, giving financial aid, getting involved in various activities -- rather than in understanding and study of the scriptures and in prayer and meditation?

Scientology claims to be a religion: In the words of its Founder, L. Ron Hubbard, "the word religion itself can embrace sacred love, wisdom, knowingness of gods and souls and spirits and could be called with a very broad use of the word, a philosophy."

"Scientology carries forward a tradition of wisdom which concerns itself about the soul and the solution of mysteries of life."

"Scientology is a religion in the very oldest and fullest sense. Anybody who would dare try to make religion into solely a religious practice and not a religious wisdom would be neglecting the very background of Christianity."

L. Ron Hubbard explains the Supreme Being with the term "Eighth Dynamic," which is "the urge towards existence as infinity. This is also identified as 'The Supreme Being.'" Is not the Eighth Dynamic, "the urge towards existence as infinity," a much stronger statement on the Supreme Being than that made by those in Christianity who deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ; who deny the continuation of man's existence in the afterlife in whatever form? These people belong to churches and some are even hailed in the West as prominent Christian theologians. Their ideas, and the churches which propagate or accept their theories, need to be squarely confronted by anyone doing a comparative study into the differences between Scientology's viewpoint of divinity and that of other churches.

Scientology claims to be a non-denominational religion:

"Scientology has no dogmas or creed. As its principles are based upon self-evident truths, acceptance of these truths is left entirely to the free choice of the individual."

Hinduism also claims to include all religions. This is also the case with specific reform movements such as the Divine Life Society and the Ramakrishna Movements. This does not make them less religious. Why mention isolated cases of Scientologists' reaction against Christianity? One could mention so-called tolerant Christians reacting against any other form of Christian expression than their own, such as when a Roman Catholic marries a member of the Anglican or Dutch Reformed Churches.

Why bring in the argument of a personal God? Pantheism in Hinduism does not believe in a personal God. Neither is this the case in deism. Buddhism identifies the self with Nirvana, the Absolute, which is no personal entity. But Scientology's Supreme Being has definite theistic attributes.

Why could Scientology not speak about a person having the divine within himself or even about "God-realisation" -- a word it never uses but is accused of practicing -- while Hinduism is allowed to use it and while this religion proposed to have "God-realised" saints in its midst in South Africa, for example? Scientology is however careful not to go to the extreme of God-

realisation, but accepts the metaphysical aspect called the Eighth Dynamic as active in the life of a human being.

The word "church" in the original Greek meant a political gathering. The word church is used in South Africa to describe The Church of the Nazarites which does not accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour; Jehovah's Witnesses; the Mormons; and theosophists and Unitarians. So one cannot accept a narrow definition of the word "church." It is not a patented term.

If the Christian Church's chief attributes are "spiritual unity" and "universality," why does an Anglican not accept another at the Communion table? Or why does the Dutch Reformed Church exclude the Roman Catholic? As regards the use of church discipline for the correction of sin, Lutherans do not mention it as the mark of the true church. Neither do Anglicans or Methodists.

If this Calvinistic definition predominates today, what about 1985, when the Roman Catholic Church will be the most representative Church in South (also Southern) Africa if developments continue as they revealed themselves from 1961-1970?

The 1970 census indicates the following: Out of a total population of 21,402,470 in the Republic of South Africa, 3,329,740 belonged to the three Afrikaans Churches; 2,151,840 to the Methodist Church; 1,844,270 to the Roman Catholic Church; 1,676,800 to the Church of the province (a small number of these to the Church of England); 884,000 to the Lutheran Churches; 454,460 to the Presbyterian Churches; 349,790 to the Congregational Church; 276,120 to the "Separatists Churches" and 2,042,160 to the "Other Christian" groups, many of which are "separatist." The Catholic Church has increased by 777.6% among the Africans and about the same among the whites from 1961-1970. The Dutch Reformed Church has decreased from 43% of the white population in 1961 to 39% in 1970.

As a member of a Calvinist Church these figures disturb me, but as an academician these figures emphasise the fact that the time has passed in South Africa to take a one-sided point of view which is interpreted as arrogance and which leads to reaction. This is already seen in the non-white churches.

On what basis could it be said that the attribute of holiness is not evident in the Church of Scientology? One could enter here into particulars which will reflect badly on some of the established churches and bodies that are accepted as churches.

Why should Scientology comply with the requirements of what is described

by some as a "true church"? Because it uses the word "church"? The Mormons and other non-Christian movements such as the Unitarians also use this word; so do the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of the Nazarites where Jesus is scarcely mentioned.

The Quakers do not use the Bible as Scripture but they also can read from it as well as any other scripture.

The sermons in many churches are ethical in nature; some are even lessons on economics, other on politics, (could Scientology be accused of any subversive political diatribes in their churches?), others on etiquette and social issues. There are many Christian churches which make no allusion to the Bible in many of their sermons.

That man is basically good is one of the main accusations against the Creed of the Church of Scientology. What about the many Pelagian Churches in the West?

The Scientology naming ceremony had been criticised as not being a Christian christening service. Why should it have anything in common with the Christian Church? Is this the case with the Jehovah's Witnesses; with the 2 million strong Kinbangu Church in Zaire, where instead of baptism, hands are laid on initiants to receive the Holy Spirit.

Without Christ there can be no Christian church. But "church" is a much wider term in the context of religion than Christian church.

Methodists say that man is basically good. So did the Remonstrants. So do the Anglicans, and others.

Scientology has been criticised as having no transcendental, infinitely compassionate redeemer. In this, Scientology is not unlike Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarians, Theosophists and others.

Why should Scientology be required to mention Jesus Christ as Liberator from sin? The Church of the Nazarites near Durban does not proclaim Jesus Christ as Liberator from sin, yet they are accepted as a church. Many of the newer religious movements, recognised as churches, emphasise self betterment, and it is emphasised even in some long-established churches.

Why should Scientology be required to study the "Word of God?" It does not profess to be a Christian church, but it does not oppose or reject Christianity as is the case with some other religions established in this country. As a movement, it has not treated Christianity with disrespect.

The view that the truth, in the form of Jesus Christ the Liberator, will set one free is a Christian point of view to which I personally subscribe but which some liberal churches and theologians do not accept. Jesus Christ is considered to be merely an example; he was never resurrected. He died and remained in the grave -- cf., the existentialist theologians. Why should Scientologists be required to subscribe to a conservative theology?

Mr. Hubbard has been accused of trying to usurp the place of Christ, but the whole of secularist philosophy has usurped the place of Christ. Western secularism has done it; it destroys everything spiritual. But Mr. Hubbard still emphasises the spiritual aspect in a despiritualised, materialistically aggressive world. Why accuse Mr. Hubbard of usurping the place of Christ when there are so many evidences of this problem in Christian churches?

Many religions emphasise "wisdom" as the basis for freedom -- Buddhism, Confucianism and the wisdom literature in the Old Testament. How does the existentialist theologian treat truth? Not as an absolute quantity! And their literature is freely read, propagated and practiced in this country. So much so that violence itself has a "truth value" that Jesus Christ's death on the cross implies "sanctified" violence! Listen more carefully to what fellow churches say before condemning others who have never indulged in such atrocities. These views float today in respectable churches and church gatherings. Has Scientology indulged in such fantasies? No.

Setting out the ministerial duties of a Scientology Chaplain, comparisons can be made with those of the Christian Chaplain. The duties of a Scientology Chaplain include the following:

"... To succor those who have been wronged and to comfort those whose burdens have been too great ... the Chaplain holds services when required, regularly on Sunday, or marriages, or christening, or funerals."

It would be grossly biased to say that this is not comparable to a minister of religion.

Some people consider that the attributes essential to all religions have to include revelation and holy scriptures as the source of knowledge of a divine being. This, however, is a non-academic view, for according to these norms, Buddhism will not be a religion -- it has no form of revelation and no divine being. African religions do not have "revelation" in the Christian sense of the word and have no holy scriptures, and the divine being is secondary -- ancestors are in the forefront. There are still 4 million adherents of these African religions in the Republic of South Africa.

Some other people consider that a religion must have a doctrine of sin and of redemption and the need of redemption. However, the doctrines of "sin" vary -- for one religion it is a tribal concept of restoring disturbed social relationships, for others it is associated with guilt, as in Christianity. Furthermore, there is no redemption concept in Buddhism -- only absorption in Nirvana -- nor in Hinduism -- only freeing from the cycles of reincarnation and entering into the state of Moksha. Confucianism concentrates only on right social relationships. Another view of religion held in some quarters is that it must contain some form of prayer or sacrifice to entreat the favor of the Divine Being and to render homage to him. This again is seeing the question of what is a religion only from the Christian point of view. Many religions have no special prayers to a divine being. Even in Christianity, theologians such as the well-known Ernst Fuchs do not pray to God because they maintain that God knows everything about a man's needs. They can only say "thank you" for blessings received. Another attribute of religion considered essential by some is some form of eschatology or expectation of things to come. This is also a very limited qualification of what religion is.

Even saying that Scientology is a religion without God and without reverence for a higher power is a questionable statement as it is manifestly incorrect, as is evident from what has been said earlier in this paper. Scientology also claims to have the answer to questions such as "Who am I?" "Where do I come from?" "What is death?" "Is there a hereafter?" A person who studies Scientology soon knows that one does not have to die to find out what he is or where he is going after death, for one can experience it all for himself with no persuasion of hypnotism or "faith." "For the first time in all the ages there is something that within one lifetime delivers the answers to the eternal questions and delivers immortality as well." Buddhism will say the same. And Buddhism is a religion.

That Scientology differs from Christianity is obvious but this does not mean that it is not a religion or a church.

To say that it professes a Supreme Being but "does not worship him" could be said of the largest percentage of people in Germany and France who sail under the flag of Christianity and the church but who never read the Bible and never worship God.

The "urge toward the infinite," the Eighth Dynamic, is not limited to the human plane only. One can point out that "sin" in the context of Scientology is wrong thoughts, wrong disposition to life, wrong mental make up. Man is basically good for many churches, besides the Church of Scientology.

As regards absolute standards of good and bad, there are various approaches to Christian ethics -- whether we agree with it or not. Many churches propagate an existentialist, even permissive, ethics where no absolute norms (or presumptive ethics) are accepted. One could mention here a variety of authors. Presumptive ethics had made way for existentialist, situational ethics as is the case in philosophy where Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative no longer applies.

Some have criticised the Scientology Creed as a declaration of human rights and not a profession of faith. This criticism is also typical generalisation. Without defining religion, the second paragraph of the Creed states, "that all men have inalienable rights to their own religious practices and their performance." This "inalienable right" emphasises the right of each to expression of his or her faith. One reads further "that the study of the mind and the healing of mentally caused ills should not be alienated from religion or condoned in non-religious fields." This important statement highlights an aspect of our modern "rationally" oriented civilisation with its science and technology which has received very little attention in the established churches. A large percentage of modern mankind suffers from psychic disabilities, and religions should take this phenomenon seriously.

In its Creed, Scientology confesses that God is in charge of the rights of man. He is the arbiter. If he is not a personal God for the Scientologist, how could he fulfill this function?

The emphasis here on the spirit saving a person and healing the body refers to the spirit in association with the Eighth Dynamic. In Scientology the individual is continuously advised to get beyond his own limitations, which cannot be achieved by his limited self. But why criticise Scientology for something which existentialist philosophy has introduced into certain strains of Christian theology and which emphasise that "man, by making his own choices, shapes his own destiny?" For many an existentialist theologian this destiny is not beyond the "here and now." Heaven is here and man's final destiny does not go beyond the final sphere. For these existentialists, man's destiny here is so important that if the freedom of self-expression and development is curtailed he should use violent means. The World Council of Churches gave to violence a "theological basis" at its meeting at Uppsala, Sweden, in 1968. Is there any such resolution in Scientology literature? Do they consider the horizontal so important that the individual does not get beyond himself? Everything in Scientology points to the fact that man must overcome his limitations in going beyond himself -- this is deeply imbedded in the thetan concept. Emphasis is put on the immortality of man.

Donations for Scientology services: Why did Luther react to Tetzl? Because he gave money to the poor? Or because the church used him to extort money from the impoverished peasants? What about the large amounts to get Toub out of purgatory? Nearer home: What about the "ticket" system of the mission churches? If a member fails to pay his church dues the holy communion is denied to him.

It has sometimes been unfairly held against Scientology that the basic requirement of church membership is faith and not membership subscriptions. This is the ideal in some churches, but even in these it is not always the case. How rich do some ministers of religion look in the face of the poverty of their flock?

Applying the above requirement to the history of the church through the centuries, many churches will fall by the wayside. What about fees even today for baptism, for weddings, for funerals, for conducting services? What about the exorbitant "stipends" of some ministers in the face of the poverty of their flock?

What about the "church tax" in Germany, for example? Anyone may be exempt from deduction from their salary to support the church, but if he/she does, he/she will not have a church wedding, cannot have a child baptised in the church, and cannot have a church burial. One can point out a number of churches here and abroad which emphasise the "business side" of the church's activities more than its spiritual concern.

If Scientology seeks a recognition as a church merely as a matter of policy, what about the religious aspects of this movement? Man is not religious by choice, he is a homo religiosus, a religious being, as he is a social being. Scientology is denied this human aspect of existence and put in the unfortunate position of having to prove its religiosity to those who refute it. This is why it stresses this aspect. One supposes it would have been easier had they bowed before a holy cow or a monkey god or an elephant god or a snake or a frog. This would have been easier to judge whether they are religious than when they come in the context of modern man with his emphasis on modern technologies and techniques, irrespective of whether these are used rightly or wrongly.

It is incorrect to say that Scientology is not a religion but merely a philosophy. It has all the attributes of a religion, i.e., the objective analysis of the phenomenon "religion." It is, however, not a Christian church and does not strive to be. It is a religious community and any religious community may rightfully be regarded as a church.

What norms obtain in the Republic of South Africa where Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Quakers, Unitarians and others practice their faith and receive recognition? To ask the State to accept only the Christian definition of what a church or religion is, is to limit these concepts to such an extent that it will impair the very concepts of religious freedom in this country.

As a member of the Dutch Reformed Church one accepts the beliefs of the Dutch Reformed Church, but as an academician he has to emphasise that this is unacceptable as a norm for the state. If Scientology is not subversive, if it acts as a religious body without harm to anyone (much of the criticism against this body has proved to be unfounded and it has received recognition in many parts of the world; and as any church it also had irresponsible individuals who acted in their individual capacities) it should receive recognition as a religious body and be treated in the same manner as a recognised church.

G.C. Oosthuizen  
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