

SCIENTOLOGY AND RELIGION

Christiaan Vonck, Ph. D.

Rector, Faculty for Comparative Study of Religions
Antwerp, Belgium



FREEDOM PUBLISHING

SCIENTOLOGY AND RELIGION

Christiaan Vonck, Ph. D.

Rector, Faculty for Comparative Study of Religions
Antwerp, Belgium



FREEDOM PUBLISHING

6331 HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD, SUITE 1200
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90028-6329
TEL: (213) 960-3500
FAX: (213) 960-3508/3509

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	PAGE 1
II.	OBSERVING SCIENTOLOGY	PAGE 2
III.	DOGMA	PAGE 2
IV.	CONCLUSION	PAGE 4
	NOTES	PAGE 5
	ABOUT THE AUTHOR	PAGE 6

SCIENTOLOGY AND RELIGION

CHRISTIAAN VONCK, PH.D.

RECTOR, FACULTY FOR COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGIONS
ANTWERP, BELGIUM

I. INTRODUCTION

What is the definition of a religion? Even recognized (not all political structures recognize religions) and traditional, established religions often question their origin in an effort to prove they are actually the only *true* religion. Anyone who says, “My master is the greatest incarnation of God, or the only enlightened master,” is unquestionably ignorant. The yardstick of judging fully enlightened spiritual leaders is possessed only by fully enlightened disciples. An enlightened disciple is completely loyal to his master, the teacher or guru who showed him the way of enlightenment, but he always respects other avatars and masters.¹

“So many different definitions [of religion] have been framed in the West over the years that even a partial listing would be impractical,” states the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Mircea Eliade, Macmillan, London/New York: 1986, p. 283). I must therefore be content with some of the characteristics of religious experience and the knowledge that religions have a *deep* cultural and social basis.

In the most general context, religion is man’s search for a link with the “spiritual” — actually a unification — often including or leading to worship.

For Christians this means getting back to the stage before the “fall of man,” which they believe is possible through the Son of God, Jesus Christ. In other words, religion (Jesus) unites and is a symbol for unity with God and Man. A main problem of religion, however, is that each religion’s theologians view it differently. It can be said that religion unites and theology divides. But theology is needed in order to understand religion and religions.

In his book *Das Heilige*, Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) defines the essence of religious awareness as awe, a unique blend of fear and fascination before the divine. Quoting many experiences, from India, Morocco and his own country, he concludes that men, all men, do from time to time acknowledge the “wholly otherness.”

Mircea Eliade (1907-86) would add that knowledge concerning God is not limited to experience. It is exemplified in symbolisms and rituals, all over the world. Symbols, rituals and experiences result in searching for why man acts the way he acts. Symbols and rituals are rooted in mythology.

With these definitions in mind, I therefore use two common statements about the main characteristics of a religion. One is mentioned by Dr. Rainer Flashe (Marburg) on page 27 in “Acta Comparanda II” (Antwerp 1987): “By a *new* religion we mean a religious movement centered on a *new* doctrine, a *new* cult, and a *new* community established through these two factors.”

The second statement or definition I take from Dr. W. Lutjeharm (Brussels) of the Hernhutter religion in a study on Zinzendorf and the numinous which proves that all religions are a product of evolution (*Brusselse Theologische Studies*, Number 1, 1976, p. 6): At the moment a group of people comes together due to a common experience and bow, there is religion. When they — this group — use this act as a habit we can speak about a concrete religion, *Religionsanstalt*. When somebody takes the lead, becomes in charge, and tells the people that they have to act in the same way, then it is a denomination or a sect. And if somebody likes to do it in another way, he can start a new sect. In that way, all the people worship the Being “das uns so einen Schauer macht.”

In a religion we can therefore expect to find a link or unification with the spiritual and the transcendental; a doctrine and praxis as well as symbols, rituals and experiences connected with this transcendental realm; and a community centered around such beliefs and praxis.

II. OBSERVING SCIENTOLOGY

When examining Scientology, I observed that it has characteristics in common with a number of other religions, some of which include: Christian Science (founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1879)²; the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers (founded by George Fox in 1665)³; the New Church of Jerusalem (based on E. Swedenborg's, 1688-1772, philosophy), founded in the 1780s⁴; Antoinism (founded by Père Antoine in 1910)⁵; and, regarding philosophy itself, some aspects of Buddhism.

This is not syncretism but merely fate. Scientology has come from a mind — L. Ron Hubbard's — developed in a time when people are searching for new forms of worship within their own religion, denomination, cult or sect. (Etymologically, the term sect can be related to the Latin *sequi*, to follow.) The message of Scientology is neither Christian nor Jewish nor Islamic but does have ancient roots. It starts with the Vedas in which Hubbard finds more wisdom than in the theology/philosophy of the West which attempted to segregate and make divisions in wisdom.⁶

While it has characteristics in common with other religions, Scientology itself is unique, with an extensive doctrine of its own, based on the writings of L. Ron Hubbard, and its own unique religious praxis.

Because Scientology was founded in the “barbaric” West⁷ where “Golem” has become the “master,”⁸ it provides an open door for those looking for a spiritual message in the modern age.

III. DOGMA

When L. Ron Hubbard wrote the book, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, setting out an abreaction therapy, he did not think, as far as I know, that a church or faith would be the result of it. His only aim at that time was the question of how to help people by means of processes addressing the mind. In other words, he doubted the treatment of psychoanalysts.⁹ So he searched for another possible system that would help people and make them more able, which he set forth in the basic textbook *Dianetics*, first published in 1950.

As he conducted further research, Hubbard discovered that a person is more than just a body or a mind. He is actually an immortal spiritual being, which he called a “thetan.” The thetan is the individual himself, not his body or mind or anything else. It is not something he *has*, but what he *is*. This thetan has lived through countless past lifetimes and will survive the death of the current body. This concept of past lives in Scientology can be compared to the karmic formations (*samskara*) in Buddhism.¹⁰

According to Scientology doctrine the thetan has been burdened by traumatic experiences in the current and prior lives which are stored in a reactive mind. These experiences can continue to cause him to feel pain or act irrationally and bar him from full spiritual awareness and abilities. Scientology addresses these past traumas through the practice of *auditing* in which the thetan can be unburdened of these past experiences and become more aware of himself as a spiritual being. He finds answers to questions such as: Who am I? or Why am I? As one attains greater spiritual awareness through auditing he also learns to live a more complete and ethical life on all planes of existence, which in Scientology are called the Eight Dynamics. Each person is seen to exist and seek survival on eight dynamics, described as follows:

1st Dynamic: the dynamic urge to survive as an individual.

2nd Dynamic: the urge to survive through sex and family.

3rd Dynamic: survival as a group. This includes all groups such as one's job, school, a club, etc.

4th Dynamic: the urge to survive for all Mankind.

5th Dynamic: the urge to survive for all life forms, both plant and animal.

6th Dynamic: the urge toward survival of the physical universe, including all matter, energy, space and time.

7th Dynamic: the urge to survive as spirits — the spiritual dimension.

8th Dynamic: the urge to survive as infinity or the Supreme Being.

These dynamics can be conceived as concentric circles with each higher dynamic encompassing those below it. *Auditing* (the one-on-one spiritual counseling which is the central practice of Scientology) addresses all the dynamics and raises a person's awareness and responsibility on all of them, including his relationship with the spiritual dimension and God.

The concept of the Supreme Being or God dynamic runs throughout Scientology doctrine. While Scientology has no specific dogma as to the form the Supreme Being takes, it is found in the religious doctrine to be a creator-God at the apex of all existence. The existence and role of God is seen, for example, in the Creed of the Church of Scientology:

We of the Church believe:

That all men of whatever race, color or creed were created with equal rights;

That all men have inalienable rights to their own religious practices and their performance;

That all men have inalienable rights to their own lives;

That all men have inalienable rights to their sanity;

That all men have inalienable rights to their own defense;

That all men have inalienable rights to conceive, choose, assist or support their own organizations, churches and governments;

That all men have inalienable rights to think freely, to talk freely, to write freely their own opinions and to counter or utter or write upon the opinions of others;

That all men have inalienable rights to the creation of their own kind;

That the souls of men have the rights of men;

That the study of the mind and the healing of mentally caused ills should not be alienated from religion or condoned in nonreligious fields;

And that no agency less than God has the power to suspend or set aside these rights, overtly or covertly.

And we of the Church believe:

That man is basically good;

That he is seeking to survive;

That his survival depends upon himself and upon his fellows and his attainment of brotherhood with the universe.

And we of the Church believe that the laws of God forbid man:

To destroy his own kind;

To destroy the sanity of another;

To destroy or enslave another's soul;

To destroy or reduce the survival of one's companions or one's group.

And we of the Church believe that the spirit can be saved and that the spirit alone may save or heal the body.

In addition to auditing, Scientologists also seek enlightenment through the study of L. Ron Hubbard's writings or by listening to his recorded lectures, which are voluminous. This study, called *training*, is the other principal religious practice in Scientology in addition to auditing.

Scientology also has a Purification Program which uses a combination of physical exercise, vitamins and sauna to rid the body of drugs, chemicals and other impurities which impede spiritual progress. This is part of living a "balanced life" (also a keynote within the Church of Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Mormons) which helps a person in reaching to the 8th and highest dynamic which is the "God dynamic."¹¹

Scientology ministers also perform marriages, funerals, baptisms and pastoral counseling using ceremonies and symbolism unique to Scientology.

Scientology holds about the same view on dogma as most other religions. It presents them as matters of objective fact¹² but does not use the word, as does the Roman Catholic Church in which dogmas are fixed for eternity (Vatican Council, 1870).

Hubbard declared that the first principle is that wisdom is meant for anyone. The second is that wisdom should be capable of being applied, and the third principle is that it is valuable only if it is true or if it works. L. Ron Hubbard said: "Scientology will go as far as it works."¹³

IV. CONCLUSION

For scholars in the field of the history of religions, sociology and/or comparative religion, there is no doubt that Scientology is a religion.

Through auditing and study of the writings of L. Ron Hubbard, an individual increases his spiritual awareness and strives for unity across all the dynamics, including the 7th dynamic (spiritual dimension) and the 8th dynamic (the Supreme Being). It is a religious movement with its own doctrine and practice and a community established for and centered around its religious beliefs. Scientology has its own rituals and symbolism and is based upon the discoveries and vision of its founder, L. Ron Hubbard.

Scientology shares some characteristics with other religions but is, for its believers, a unique path that links them to the spiritual and the divine.

Christiaan Vonck
Antwerp, 1996

NOTES:

1. "Truth vs. Small-minded Religious Dogma" in "Self-Realization," U.S.A., Winter 1995, Vol. 67, No. 1. p.32
2. Christian Science was founded under similar circumstances to Scientology, starting with questions about mental healing. Mary Baker Eddy's main principles were that God is Mind and Spirit and that He is good. Because He is good, His works (creations) are also good. In other words, matter, sin, sickness and death do actually not exist. The person who accepts this is enlightened. The person who lives according to the teachings of Jesus will have a good physical and spiritual life.
3. Membership, marriage and other formalities are likewise that of the Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers) without a fixed form of liturgy, although there are examples of certain set patterns depending on the cultural environment. See, for example, "Church Government" of the London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. (Friends Book Centre, London 1968.)
4. Like the writings of Hubbard in Scientology, the writings of E. Swedenborg are sacred (revelational experiences) and are to be used by its followers according to the steps as set out by the author. Translations are used, but for the basic doctrines, one should go back to the original language. Dictionaries are seen everywhere in these Centres. In certain New Churches of Jerusalem, such as the one in Den Haag, the Netherlands, the reading is from the Latin original texts (Swedenborg wrote in Latin) and the minister will comment as profoundly as possible. Only ministers who read Latin can be ordained. The original writings of Ron Hubbard are used with the same care. ("The Religion of Scientology," 1994, page 5.)
5. (Père) Louis-Joseph Antoine (1845-1912) was a Belgian miner who after reading the book *Livre des Esprits* by A. Kardec founded numerous churches, called temples, (in Belgium and also in Germany, France, Poland and countries in Africa and South America) where healing ceremonies took place. He was not a Christian. As a structural theosophist (he called himself the founder of "New Spiritualism") he was open to all forms of religious doctrines, especially from the East. His teaching: "Toute matière est illusion; le mal n'existe pas en soi mais est un produit de notre imagination. Le bonheur consiste à être dépouillé de tout désir, provoqué par la vue des formes changeantes et illusoires de la matière. De réincarnation en réincarnation, notre esprit atteindra un jour la libération." *The Dictionary of Religions* (University Press of France) calls this religion a sort of primitive Buddhism. His spiritual healing of the sick brought him to court in 1901 and 1907 (both the clergy and the legal medical authorities accused him), where he, after arduous debate, was found innocent. Virtually the same happened to Mary Baker Eddy, George Fox and Emmanuel Swedenborg. Scientology has suffered similar persecution in some areas.
6. The tradition of barbarism, *The Phoenix Lectures*, p. 33. (Publications Organization World Wide, 1968.)
7. Rabbi A. Malinsky concerning "the progress of technical science and the decline of man" in "Acta Comparanda II," Antwerp 1987, p. 7.
8. *The Phoenix Lectures* p. 33.
9. In psychoanalysis, for instance, the analyst does not accept what the person says but interprets it, evaluates his condition for him, etc. This is the antithesis of Scientology auditing, wherein the *auditor* ("one who listens" from Latin *audire*, to listen) is expressly forbidden to evaluate for the individual. The person finds his *own* answers. (*What is Scientology?* Bridge Publications, 1992 p. 163.)
10. In *Have You Lived Before This Life?* Although the original meaning of the term *karma* simply means "deed," it has, in relation with the theory of causation, come to be popularly regarded as a kind of potential power gained as a result of every deed done in the past. That is, all past acts result in either good or bad, suffering or pleasure, depending upon the act, and it has an influencing power upon the future, and this is regarded as one's karma. It is believed that if a good deed will be repeated, good will be accumulated, and its potential power will function upon the future as a beneficial influence. (See, e.g., of "The Teaching of the Buddha," Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, Tokyo 1966, p. 300.)
11. *The Phoenix Lectures*, p. 315.
12. The most important objective facts ("dogma") within Scientology are Hubbard's writings, starting with *Dianetics*. These are to be encountered and resolved by the student himself. The duty of the auditor or supervisor is only to assist the parishioner.
13. In "*The Church of Scientology*," p. 2.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

EDUCATION

Marnixschool (Antwerp)
K. Atheneum (Antwerp)
Landbouwschool (Agriculture in Stabroek)

Institut Biblique Européen, Paris, France (1957-60)
Linguistics (S.I.L. in cooperation with University of London. 1959)
Seminario Teologica Baptista, Lisbon, Portugal (1960-61)

ORDAINED

United Protesant Church in Belgium (Genk, 1979)
Southern Baptist Covension (Phoenix, Arizona USA, 1980).
Protestantse Theologische Faculteit, Brussels, Belgium (1969-70)
Southern University, USA. Ph.D. thesis, "The Philosophy of Inmates based on the Theology of K. Barth & R. Otto (1977)
Parthasarathy C. Academy, India: Honorary Ph.D. (1985)

POSITIONS

Assistant Chaplain (C.I.B.I.) in the Belgian Army in Germany (1962-63)
Teacher of Protestant Religion, State Schools (1963-65)
Editor/Founder of the fortnightly magazine "Op Vrije Voeten" (1962-79)
Director/Founder of Op Vrije Voeten Youth Service (1963-79)
Founder/Administrator of the Independent Federation for Youth Services (until 1978)
Member of the Commission and Council in the Ministry of National Education and Culture (until 1978)
Founder and Chairman of the Belgian Surinam Committee (1975-92)
Administrator of the Flemish-Periodical Press Association (1967-83)
National Director of the International Christian Youth Exchange (1971-76)
National Correspondent of Ecumenical Youth Council Europe (1975-77)
Youth-minister of the Gospel Missionary Union (Zeist) for Belgium until 1970
National Director of Youth for Christ (1963-79)
Treasurer of the YFC-International Europe (1967-70)
Chaplain of the Prison System (1976-82)
Chaplain of Migrant Workers (1980-85)
Member of the General Assembly of the Schola Para Medicorum (1982-89)
Member of the U.P.C.B. (Brasschaat)
Member of the General Assembly of the Faculty for Comparative Study of Religions (1980-)
Rector of the Faculty for Comparative Study of Religions (1980-)
Professor of Philosophical Theology (1985-)
Member of Foundation "Craeybeckx, Detiège, Grootjans," University of Antwerp (1995-)
Administrator of the World Congress of Faiths (1974-)
Administrator of the Friends of the Ethnographical Museum in Antwerp (1979-)
Member of the Ecumenical Workshop for Information in Europe (1974-)
Member of W.C.R.P. Belgium (1989-)
Advisor to the Commission Christianity-Islam of the U.P.C.B. (1981-)
Member of Baptists Ministers' Fellowship (1979-)
Administrator of the Patronizing Committee – Jurisdiction of Antwerp (1982-)
Editor of "Acta Comparanda," (1983-)
Reporter of "Kerk en Leven," (1974-)
Pastor of the Multi-Lingual Baptist Church, Antwerp (1983-)
Member of the Antwerp Philosophical Association Werkgroep Kierkegaard (1990-)