

SCIENTOLOGY

Its True Nature

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Scientology has in recent years on several occasions, including in Finland, become the subject of public debate. Compared to some countries, very little has been said in Finland about its religious nature. In the following treatise, I focus on the question of whether Scientology is a religious denomination, and the basis for this conclusion.

I. No Unambiguous Definition of Religion

Religions and religious denominations constitute such a multitude of phenomena that it has not been possible for scientists to achieve agreement upon a definition of religion. In the Finnish sociology of religion, religion is often characterized by five aspects, as has been presented by the Americans, Glock and Stark.

1. An aspect of experience (religious feelings, experiences and visions of deity, etc.).
2. An ideological aspect (ideas about God, life after death, salvation).
3. A ritual aspect (private and denominational practicing of religion, such as prayers, meditation, divine services, and religious ceremonies pertaining to the various stages of life).
4. An intellectual aspect (a knowledge of the contents of the belief).
5. The aspects of consequence (salvation, peace of mind, correct behaviour).

Usually in all definitions of religion it is assumed that there is a certain idea of belief, which when followed will lead to a harmony with the most profound meaning of life itself—whether this may be an individual God, the Supreme Being or the Cosmic or Ethical basis of life. Second, to a religion pertains religious rites and rituals and norms of behaviour. Third, religion requires a denomination of believers or members.

II. *The Scientologists Consider It to Be Religion*

The writings of the Founder of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, constitute the basis of the Scientology religion. Hubbard is not subject to religious worshipping, but certainly to religious admiration and devotion. According to Scientologists, Hubbard was able to create a religious philosophy and means of practical application with which the basically mutual ideals of mankind and all religions can effectively be realized. The Scientologists regard their religion as the religion of the 20th century which will realize the eternal dream of mankind, to make the world a better place to live in, and will help people to find their most profound spiritual identity. Hubbard himself considered Scientology to follow the traditions of older religions, including Hinduism, the Veda religion, Taoism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity.

III. *Leading Sociologists of Religion Classify It as Religion*

Nearly without exception, all handbooks of new religions contain a chapter on Scientology, among them:

Eileen Barker, Professor at the London School of Economics: *New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society* (1982), and *New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction* (1989);

Bryan Wilson, Professor Emeritus at Oxford University: *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism* (1990); and

J. Gordon Melton: *The Encyclopedia of American Religions* (1993).

It is also categorized as a religion in most German publications such as *Lexikon Der Sekten, Sondergruppen Und Weltanschauungen* (1991).

As a good example, Bryan Wilson writes extensively in his book about what makes Scientology a religion.

IV. *From Dianetics to Scientology*

Dianetics was originally a fairly limited therapeutic method developed by Hubbard. It became widely known in 1950 when Hubbard's bestseller *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* was published. The purpose of Dianetics was to free man from his traumatic experiences and the memory pictures or engrams of these, so that he can achieve a state which Hubbard calls "Clear".

Almost immediately, Dianetics started to expand into Scientology, where metaphysics and spirituality are accentuated. It is based on the idea that man is basically a spiritual being, or *thetan*. The task of Scientology is to return the thetan, who has fallen into the subjugation of ignorance and matter, once again to awareness of his actual spiritual nature.

No religion has come into existence complete. Only after decades or even centuries has one developed into a religion aware of itself. For instance the theological understanding and denominational organization of Christianity took several decades to take form. It would be unfair to assume that Scientology would immediately have been born into its final form.

V. *Divinity and the Hereafter*

In Scientology very little is said about God. However, it believes in God or the existence of deity. It does not necessarily require a theistical personal god, but some kind of deity, Supreme Being or, as Scientology often expresses it, the eighth sphere of influence, or *God dynamic*.

It should be noted that not all the world's religions, or even *nearly* all, believe in a personal God. This is, for instance, the case in a large part of Hinduism. And Theravada Buddhism is in its philosophical form downright atheistic. Despite this, it usually has the status of a major religion.

VI. *Idea of Man*

A basic consideration in Scientology is that man is above all a spiritual being, a *thetan*, a kind of soul, nonmaterial and immortal, which possesses unlimited powers and potentials. This thetan takes in its possession a material human body when it comes to the world.

The thetans were once trapped in the chains of the material world and lost the knowledge of their actual beingness. In this aspect Scientology reminds one of Gnosticism and Neo-Gnostic movements, in which it is usually thought that they possess a lost (often secret) knowledge of the basic identity of man, and that their task is to awaken his original spiritual and divine awareness, so that he is even able to freely go over the border of life and death.

VII. *Salvation*

According to Scientology, the traumatic experiences of both this life and previous rebirths are an impediment to rational behaviour and spiritual development. The purpose of Scientology auditing is to free the thetan from the “reactive mind”, the chains of bad memories, and to recall the possibility of salvation.

The goal is a god-like state of full OT (Operating Thetan), wherein the thetan is free from all limitations in this life.

As in Indian religions, Scientology considers that man must be released from past deeds (compare the karma of Hinduism and Buddhism), which have accumulated in the chain of numerous rebirths. Scientology’s idea of salvation comprises both this life and the life hereafter. It promises in both cases the Bridge to Total Freedom.

Apart from individual salvation, Scientology sees as its task to clean up our whole planet and create a civilization where there is no irrationality, criminality or wars. In Scientology nomenclature, a synonym to salvation is “survival.” This includes both the present life and the life hereafter. *Auditing* and the E-Meter which is used in it, help the individual to find his actual and original identity.

VIII. *The Church of Scientology*

The Scientology church is a religious denomination with a hierarchical organization and management. On the lowest level of hierarchy are the field auditors and the Dianetics groups led by these. The next level comprises the Scientology missions which deliver basic Dianetics and Scientology services. These are a kind of missionary station which aim at reaching for new members. When a mission grows and its activity expands, it will usually become a Scientology church. The ministers of the Church of Scientology serve the congregational members in marital, familial and other problems, and perform the religious rituals of Scientology, such as naming, wedding and funeral rituals. They also conduct Sunday services.

Saint Hill organizations are central churches, which specialize in higher level auditor training. Such central churches exist in Los Angeles, Sydney, East Grinstead in England and Copenhagen. The spiritual headquarters of all the world's Scientologists is the Flag Service Organization in Clearwater, Florida, which delivers the highest religious services. The Flag Ship Service Organisation delivers the highest auditing of all (OT VIII). Its training takes place on the *Freewinds* ship in the Caribbean Sea.

The function of Mother Church is held by Church of Scientology International in Los Angeles, which plans world-wide mission campaigns, compiles training materials, and translates Hubbard's religious works to many languages.

IX. *Divine Services*

The Scientology church has its own divine services with its own ministers, sermons and creed. Part of a divine service may also be to listen to taped lectures of L. Ron Hubbard. It also includes a "Prayer For Total Freedom."

A church handbook compiled by the Mother Church in California also includes instructions for naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. The naming ceremony is held to help the thetan, the spiritual being, identify with his new body and to formally introduce him to his parents and family and friends.

The divine and ecclesiastical services, however, do not hold the central standing in Scientology as in traditional Christian churches. But it should be noted that the divine services of various religions constitute a wide spectrum.

For instance, in a typical Hindu temple, every individual or family goes there to conduct their own rituals and to ask for advice from their religious leaders, usually without common rituals conducted for all. Also, it is only natural that prayers have a different meaning in a religion where God is understood as an impersonal entity, than in a religion where a personal God or gods are believed in and communicated with.

X. Scientology Is a Religion

From all of the above it must be concluded that Scientology in its present form is a religion, offering crucial religious services, a distinctive belief and a tightly organized religious denomination.

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