

Church of Scientology

*An Evaluation from the Theological Perspective of
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
August, 2005
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History, Beliefs, and Practices

Identity:

The Church of Scientology is a new religious movement created by L. Ron Hubbard who drew from psychological theories (called “Dianetics”) and a mixture of ideas developed from Eastern religious philosophies.¹ Scientology calls itself “a religious philosophy in its highest meaning.”² The Scientology religion promises “workable answers to the problems people face in their lives”: “It is concerned with nothing less than the full rehabilitation of the thetan (see below), to increase spiritual awareness, native capabilities and certainty of his own immortality.” Scientology claims that its axioms define “the underlying causes and principles of reality as we know it, and thus unlock the very riddle of existence.”³ According to L. Ron Hubbard, “Scientology has accomplished the goal of religion expressed in Man’s written history, the freeing of the soul with wisdom.”⁴

Founder:

Lafayette Ronald (L. Ron) Hubbard (1911-86)

Statistics:

Estimates of the number of members and adherents vary widely. One estimate: 5-6 million worldwide

History:

Lafayette Ronald Hubbard, born in Tilden, Nebraska in 1911, was the founder of Scientology. While the details of Hubbard’s life have been in dispute, it is claimed that he traveled widely during his youth (his father a career Navy man), acquainting himself with Beijing magicians, Tibetan lamas, Mongolian bandits, Pygmy huntsmen and shamans from Borneo. He returned to the U.S. in 1929, completed his education, and was accepted as a student of mathematics and engineering at George Washington University (though he never graduated). He claimed to have learned psychoanalysis from a student of Sigmund Freud. Hubbard left the university unsatisfied with psychologists’ understandings of the human mind and pursued independent research. It is reported that he suffered injuries in WWII, leaving him partially blind and crippled. He claimed that he regained his health through findings about the human mind. In 1950 Hubbard published *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (still regarded as an introduction to Scientology and used widely by Scientologists).

¹*What Is Scientology?* (Los Angeles: Bridge Publications, Inc., 1992), 7-82.

²*A Description of the Scientology Religion*, Presented by The Church of Scientology (Los Angeles: Bridge Publications, 1994), 57.

³*Ibid.*, 36, 39.

⁴L. Ron Hubbard, *The Creation of Human Ability* (Los Angeles: The Publications Organization Worldwide, 1968), 177.

Hubbard founded the Hubbard Association of Scientologists International (HASI) and late in 1950 the Hubbard Dianetic Research Foundation. He wrote prolifically, including science fiction (bestseller in 1981 *Battlefield Earth*). In August 1952 the *Journal of Scientology* was published introducing techniques of auditing (see below). First Church of Scientology was established in Los Angeles in 1954. It expanded into other countries as well. Hubbard formed the *Founding Church of Scientology* in July 1955 and then the first Academy of Scientology. Toward the end of his life Hubbard lived in seclusion, dying of a stroke in Creston, California in January 1986.

Today the Church of Scientology is led by David Miscavige. It has its headquarters in Los Angeles, California, and a religious retreat in Clearwater, Florida, called Flag Land Base.

Texts:

Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health

Other writings by Hubbard

Periodicals: *Advance!*; *Source*; *The Auditor*; *Celebrity*; *International Scientology News*

Beliefs and Practices:

Scientology is a combination of L. Ron Hubbard's theory of psychotherapy called Dianetics⁵ and a religious philosophy. *Dianetics* is Scientology's teaching that the human mind has two components: the Analytical and Reactive minds. The Analytical mind is the mind that one consciously utilizes; it analyzes, calculates, and distinguishes. The Reactive mind is irrational; operating unconsciously to record impressions during emotional and physical pain. The Analytical mind shuts down and the Reactive mind takes over, storing unpleasant memories that later cause pain, irrational fears, and mental blocks.⁶ Recordings of perceptions in the Reactive mind are called *engrams*. Human potential is unattained because of undeleted engrams. A method or process called *auditing* (form of counseling) allows one to explore and erase engrams. An auditor ("one who listens"; considered a minister) conducts auditing sessions and listens to the "*preclear*," the person receiving the auditing. Auditing involves the use of the *E-meter* (electropsychometer) invented by Hubbard and said to measure energy of the mind created when an engram is "pictured." The preclear focuses on the engram with the help of a "process question" from the auditor. The objective is to free a Preclear of engrams, letting the Analytical mind function without the effects of the Reactive mind and its engrams. Persons who have gotten rid of their engrams are called *Clear*.⁷

Scientologists do not regard Dianetics itself as a religion, but they do regard Scientology as one. Scientologists define Scientology as "knowing about knowing."⁸ Hubbard taught that man is actually neither a mind nor a body, but a soul, that is, a spiritual being. The being or personality, separate from the body and mind, is called a "thetan."⁹ All humans are thetans or immortal spiritual entities

⁵Dianetics ("through thought" or "through the soul") is defined by Scientology as "what the soul is doing to the body through the mind." *Description*, 70.

⁶*Description*, 70.

⁷Scientologists believe toxins in the body hinder one from becoming clear, encouraging a course that clears out the toxins. They are opposed to the use of drugs to control psychiatric conditions. Drugs, they maintain, treat the self as a physical entity, rather than spiritual. Christopher Partridge, ed. *New Religions: A Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 386.

⁸*Ibid.*, 36.

⁹"You are an immortal spiritual being...you are called a *thetan* (from the Greek letter *theta*, for thought or life or the spirit)...The thetan *is* the spiritual being himself. It is the individual. It is *you*." *Description*, 57.

who are basically good and possess virtually infinite powers.¹⁰ Thetan is the backbone of creation and life. “In Scientology terminology, a highly aware thetan who has the ability to handle the affairs of life in this exterior state [separated from body and mind] is called an Operating Thetan. The thetan has lived and can continue to live through a series of lifetimes.”¹¹ Access to operating Thetan literature is restricted to scientology adherents.¹²

Beyond being “clear,” individuals can progress up the “bridge of total freedom,” freedom from the constraints of the material (called *MEST*—Matter, Energy, Space, and Time). “Scientologists who progress up the OT (Operating Thetan) Bridge¹³ may ‘know...immortality and freedom from the cycle of birth and death,’ according to ‘The State of Operating Thetan,’ a Church document.”¹⁴

Scientology also speaks of “Eight Dynamics” that transcend throughout all of nature and beyond and pertain to survival: Self, Creativity, Group Survival, Species, Life Forms, Physical Universe, Spiritual Dynamic and Infinity.

In a 1993 article on Scientology, Christian apologist John Weldon, providing extensive documentation, summarized what appear to be Scientology’s theological views regarding God, Man, Creation, Salvation, and Death.¹⁵ “The Supreme Being” is purposefully left undefined, though the concept appears panentheistic.¹⁶ Man is not morally fallen, but is basically good and divine; the universe is a subjective emanation or “projection” of the thetans, having merely an agreed-upon (and not actual) reality; salvation is achieving a state of “clear,” progressing through numerous levels of “Operating Thetan,” and finally achieving self-realization (spiritual freedom). Death is sometimes a blessing permitting the release of the soul from the body, but is finally inconsequential, passed through trillions of times by each person.

Scientology has the following organizational entities:

IHELP: basic level Scientology; *SMI*: Scientology Mission International, a mission effort to provide primary Dianetic and Scientology services; *CHURCHES*: organizations providing religious services (services include a reading of the Scientology creed, a sermon based on Hubbard’s writings, group auditing, and prayer) and administering courses; *Celebrity Centres*: provide services for artists (associated with Scientology are: Karen Black, Priscilla Presley, Kirstie Allie, Lou Rawls, Isaac Hayes, John Travolta, Tom Cruise; Chick Corea, and Stanley Clarke);¹⁷ *Organizations and Advanced*

¹⁰“Your capabilities are unlimited, even if not presently realized...Man is basically good.” *Description*, 57. “...the thetan is ...capable of accomplishing *anything*. Thus the Operating Thetan, or OT, may be defined as one who is at ‘knowing and willing cause over life, thought, matter, energy, space and time.’” *Description*, 79.

¹¹J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedia of American Religions* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1999), 723.

¹²*New Religions: A Guide* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 386-87, notes this about “body thetans”: “From official Scientology literature...it seems likely OT material relates to ‘body thetans’—the remains of thetans who lost their bodies many millions of years ago as a result of a gargantuan explosion. These beings, devoid of physical bodies, continue to latch on to the physical bodies of others, and it is incumbent on those who progress through OT levels to help to release them from this situation.”

¹³Referred to as “a route across the chasm between his [man’s] present state and higher levels of awareness...greater ability and total freedom” (*Description*, 80). This “Bridge,” called “The Bridge to Total Freedom” is charted in *Description*, 80.

¹⁴See <http://web.archive.org/web/20060907005952/http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/re/move>

¹⁵The summary that follows is taken from John Weldon, “Scientology: From Science Fiction to Space-Age Religion,” *Christian Research Journal* (Summer 1993), 23, 32-33.

¹⁶A term coined by K.C.F. Krause (1781-1832) for the view that God is in all things. This view also sees the world and God as mutually dependent for their fulfillment. It differs from “pantheism,” which views God as all and all as God. (Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* [Westminster John Knox Press, 1996], 199.)

¹⁷Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Hank Hanegraaff, General Editor (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997 edition), 379.

Organizations: basic auditing and upper level courses; *Flag Service Organization*: religious services and upper level courses; for advanced Scientologists; retreat center, Clearwater, FL; *Church of Scientology International*: management; *Religious Technology Center*: ensures doctrine is taught truthfully and in keeping with Hubbard's intention; guards Sacred texts and symbols; *Other*: Narconon, Criminon, WISE (World Institute of Scientology Enterprise), CCHR (Citizen's Commission on Human Rights); Cult Awareness Reform Group.

A Lutheran Response

Evaluating Scientology from a Christian perspective is complicated by the extremely esoteric nature of the concepts and religious vocabulary developed by L. Ron Hubbard.¹⁸ Typical of organizations and movements such as Scientology, biblically-sounding concepts have radically different meanings that actually oppose Christian understandings—a situation of which recruits are often unaware. At a very basic level, Lutheran Christians differ sharply with Scientology's understanding of what constitutes the normative basis for religious truth. A Scientology spokesperson has written, "Mr. Hubbard's writings and lectures on the human spirit comprise the Scripture of Scientology religion...As the sole source of the Scriptures, he has no successor."¹⁹ Lutherans reject such claims on the basis of the Bible's own testimony that it alone is God's very own Word, solely normative for all teaching and profitable for man's temporal and eternal well-being (e.g., 2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16; Jer. 23:30-31).

Certain elements of Scientology's religious philosophy merit special comment from a Christian perspective. Christian observers have rightly noted that the concept of "God" in Scientology is undefined, and purposefully so—though it does claim to be a religion that recognizes a "Supreme Being." Expressions such as "the Eighth Dynamic," "God dynamic," "infinity," and "all Theta life" are used.²⁰ Scientology frankly admits, "The Church has no dogma concerning God, and each person's concept is probably different."²¹ The Holy Scriptures, however, not only reveal who the true God is—God who is three persons in one divine essence (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit), Creator and Preserver of all things visible and invisible—but label as idolatry worship of and service to any other deity (Matt. 28:18-20; John 5:23; see Ex. 20:3; see also Martin Luther, Large Catechism, Part I).

L. Ron Hubbard interpreted Jesus Christ within the Scientologist framework: "Neither Lord Buddha nor Jesus Christ were OT (Operating Thetan), according to the evidence. They were just a shade above clear."²² He refers to Christ as an "implant" (a false concept forced on a Thetan): "You will find...the Christ legend as an implant in pre-clears a million years ago."²³ Christian belief in Jesus the Christ is determined by the high Christology (teaching concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ) presented in Colossians 1: "He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn [Gr: *prōtotokos*=pre-eminent] of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible..." (15-16). Christ is not simply a "spiritual leader" possessing a "dream" of

¹⁸See Robert A. Gilbert, "Western Esotericism," in *New Religions: A Guide*, 304-308.

¹⁹Leisa Goodman, *L. Ron Hubbard, Founder of Dianetics and Scientology*, 1, quoted by Craig Branch, "Scientology Part One: Hubbard's Religion," *Watchman Expositor*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1996, 10.

²⁰*The Scientology Handbook, Based on the Works of L. Ron Hubbard* (Los Angeles: Bridge Publications, 1994), 69.

²¹It adds: "As a person becomes more aware of himself, others, the environment and God, each person attains his own certainty as to who God is and exactly what God means to him. The author of the universe exists. How God is symbolized or manifested is up to each individual to find out for himself." *What Is Scientology?* 545.

²²Quoted in Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 383.

²³Quoted by Kevin Anderson, *Report of the Board of Inquiry into Scientology* (Melbourne: Australia Parliament Government Printer, 1965), 150 (W. Martin, p. 383).

“higher states of spiritual awareness” like other religious leaders in history.²⁴ On the contrary, in Jesus Christ “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col. 1:19), “in him all the fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col. 2:9), and His name is “above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-10).

For Scientology “salvation” appears to be fundamentally a matter of spiritual enlightenment: achieving a state of “clear” and progressing upwards through levels of “Operating Thetan,” until one achieves “total freedom and truth” or self-realization (a process extending beyond a single lifetime).²⁵ Man (spiritual being or thetan) is “basically good,” but ignorant of perfection. He is in need only of freedom from entrapment in MEST (matter, energy, space, time). The Bible teaches that human beings are corrupted by sin (matter in itself is not evil, but God’s good creation) and incapable of achieving saving knowledge, freeing themselves from sin’s bondage, or meriting God’s favor (Eph. 2:1-2; Rom. 8:8; Ps. 51:5). The Bible’s central message is that salvation comes *from above* (not from below through counseling or educational processes). Salvation has come through the saving action of the transcendent God in history, through the sending of His only Son in the flesh and His atoning sacrifice for sin—the benefits of which become ours through faith in Jesus, whom God raised from the dead (Eph. 1:20-21; 2:1-10; 1 Pet. 1:18-21). In the Bible Christ’s resurrection guarantees the resurrection of the body for those in whom His Holy Spirit dwells—a day toward which the entire creation yearns. Such is the true freedom for which Christians long (Rom. 8:11, 18-25). Christ alone sets man free, body and soul, from the bondage of sin and death.

For Further Reading

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Links and Websites

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²⁴*Description*, 55.

²⁵*The Scientology Handbook*, i.