

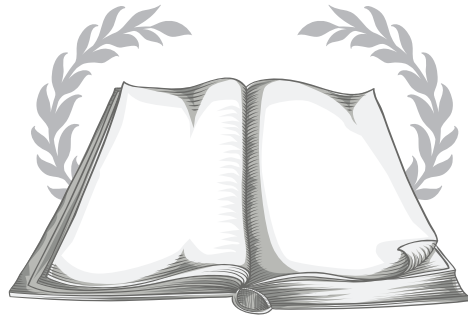
THE CONGREGATIONAL  
SERVICES *of the*  
CHURCH  
OF SCIENTOLOGY

BRYAN R. WILSON, PH.D.  
EMERITUS FELLOW

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD  
ENGLAND

8 FEBRUARY 2002





THE CONGREGATIONAL  
SERVICES *of the*  
CHURCH  
OF SCIENTOLOGY



# THE CONGREGATIONAL SERVICES *of the* CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY

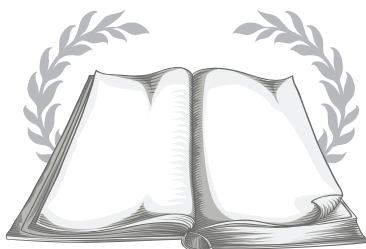
BRYAN R. WILSON, PH.D.  
EMERITUS FELLOW  
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD  
ENGLAND

8 FEBRUARY 2002

1 I have been asked to review the way in which congregational services are today conducted in the Church of Scientology, and to evaluate these services in the light of the Court of Appeal ruling in 1970 in the case of *R v Registrar General ex parte Segerdal*, and, with reference to the same criteria, to compare Scientology religious services with those of other denominations which presently have places of religious worship registered by the Registrar General.

## SCIENTOLOGY CONGREGATIONAL SERVICES

2 The joyous disposition to give thanks that prevails in Scientology Sunday services and Friday evening meetings must be evident to any observer. The meetings on Friday may be likened to an informal version of the type of



Testimony Meeting popular in some Christian denominations particularly in the United States: an example being the, albeit more sedate, occasions sponsored by every Christian Science church.

- 3 A church service in the Church of Scientology is virtually unembellished by imagery, icons, or other ancillary adjuncts of worship such as have accreted to the core elements of obeisance in the Christian tradition. One designated emblem is the distinctive eight-point cross, which is depicted on the authorised literature of the Church. It is also a feature of Scientology minister's vestments, worn as a pendent, but otherwise such decorative symbols are few and serve more as badges of identity, and are sparingly used.
- 4 The Church's Creed, written by the founder, L. Ron Hubbard, is the orientation point for a Scientology service. It invokes the laws of God as conferring upon man a specified number of rights, and affirms that these rights are sustained by God, with the object of conferring on man total freedom.
- 5 The dominant feature in the performance of Scientological service is the preaching of the word, which is the traditional focus of American Protestantism. In Churches of Scientology, the word is not drawn from the Christian scriptures, but from the writings and lectures of L. Ron Hubbard, the Church's founder. The sermon is the central occasion for the exposition of the movement's teachings. Mr. Hubbard bequeathed to his churches a series of sermons, one of which a minister might select for his Sunday service. Sometimes, in lieu of a sermon, a recording of Mr. Hubbard delivering a lecture might be substituted. Pre-prepared sermons are not unique to Scientology: they are a feature of some other denominations, of which Christian Science provides an example.
- 6 Services conclude with a prayer, which is cast as supplication that God might intercede in man's affairs to bring about freedom from material entrapment. Dependence on God is clear in the assertion that man's potential is God-given, and it is clear that, in referring to man's potential as God-like, Scientologists see in the Supreme Being the indisputable source of well-being and the model for their aspirations. Reverence for God is implicit in attributing authority to him as "author of the universe".

## WHAT IS WORSHIP?

- 7 The characteristic elements of worship, as set out in the *Segerdal* judgment, constitute a range of emotional responses that are also typical of human relationships as manifested

in normal social intercourse, but in worship, these dispositions are accorded an enhanced profundity and sacrality appropriate to a subservient relationship with a transcendent entity, conceived as the Supreme Being.

8 The conception of that Being, together with other religious concepts (e.g. heaven, hell) was first established centuries ago. In recent times, the conception of deity has undergone profound change both within Christian tradition and beyond it. God is much less likely than hitherto to be seen in anthropomorphic terms. However, in contrast to this evolution of concepts, the language of worship, and the dispositions it is intended to define and evoke, have changed much less, if at all. The language that describes worship remains in the personal mode. Given the change in theological concepts, the language of worship has become increasingly anachronistic. Dispositions of veneration, humility, submission, laudation, and supplication may be appropriate still in those human relationships which rest on the contrast of sovereign and subject, (and may persist in attenuated form in other, less status-differentiated contexts) but they are scarcely congruous when deity is no longer conceived as a “superman”, but in an abstract form.

9 A majority of the British people profess belief in God when deity is described in general terms, but of the population as a whole, only a minority believe in a *personal* God. (The Revd. Robin Gill’s research shows that those professing belief in any sort of god, no matter how broad and encompassing the definition, fell from four-fifths of those surveyed in 1940s to two thirds in 1990s: belief in the narrower specifically Christian conception of a personal God fell from 43% to 31% in the same period.) Even though worshippers were increasingly disposed to relinquish belief in a personal God, and to regard deity more as a spirit, a power, or a metaphysical principle, the—by-now incongruous—personal, language of worship, persisted. That it did so reflected the strength that this traditional language enjoyed by being institutionalised in church practice and by being deemed sacrosanct in the public *mentalité*.

10 One of the central concerns of nineteenth and twentieth century mainstream Christian theology was to demythologise religion. Part of that reform led to the godhead being described in more abstract terms and the elimination of primitive, anthropomorphic imagery in both linguistic and graphic representations of deity. This process has been more easily pursued in the philosophical sphere than in matters of liturgy and worship, where some primitive and unsophisticated elements have survived. The repetitive recurrence of traditional acts and attitudes of worship has preserved personalized language in

a changed theological and philosophical context in which that language has become incongruous and anachronistic.

- 11 Some non-conformist Christian denominations, being less bound by traditional usage, adopted less personal modes of worshipful address. The Quakers saw no need to address the deity directly. Unitarianism, in the eighteenth century, divested the godhead of its human element, so that God might be seen in less anthropomorphic terms. In the nineteenth century, Christian Science, unitarian in its theology, endeavoured to resolve the vexed question of gender that faced any conception of deity as a person by introducing the use of the invocation, “Father-Mother God”, and by proclaiming seven nomenclative synonyms for deity—Life, Truth, Love, Mind, Soul, Spirit, Principle, conceived as abstract metaphysical qualities.
- 12 Given these various tacit admissions of the inadequate applicability to the godhead of personalized attributes and the incongruity of modes of address drawn from hierarchic, barbarian and mediaeval societies, it is no surprise that new spiritual movements emerging in the twentieth century should have adopted modes of worshipful address and conceptions of worship that more adequately reflected the ethos of modern times. Whilst they might initially deploy traditional language and concepts, they do so for a transitional stage, to address their prospective constituents in comprehensible terms, until the new concepts have been absorbed and become part of the regular discourse of members of the burgeoning new movement. For a time at least, the members appear to be spiritually bi-lingual, as they come to terms with the mysteries of new varieties of expression.
- 13 There are many registered religious denominations which do not worship according to the *Segerdal* criteria, as illustrated by the table below. One may doubt the adequacy of those criteria in determining what constitutes worship: reverence and veneration are attitudes not uncommonly accorded to fellow mortals—elders, leaders, exemplars, teachers. In such cases, these dispositions are not considered to be tantamount to worship. Indeed, in the Roman Catholic Church, saints are venerated and revered, but the Church authorities reject any suggestion that this amounts to worship. The appropriate test of what counts as worship is conduct which has as its function the particular aim of establishing rapport between the votary and the Supreme Being, and reassuring the votary of his prospects of ultimate salvation. This criterion is based on the function of worship, and has the merit of variety of cultural forms, is identifiable as of the same kind in that it pursues a common goal. Such a criterion admits numerous variant conceptions of the nature of



the deity (as anthropomorphic god, universal law, ultimate concern, ground of being, life force, etc.). It offers a more abstract, hence a more widely applicable, concept of worship, and escapes the cultural chauvinism and religious discrimination of supposing the traditional Christian cultural form to be the sole true model of worship and deity. Fixed ideas that require that worship be corporate, collective, and/or congregational; that the Supreme Being is a judge and the votaries, individually or collectively, are unworthy, sinning miscreants, or at least supplicants; that rituals identify the votary as dependent, guilty and in need of admitting as much by public acts of self-denigration or even of self-immolation—all stem from exclusively Christian traditions. There is no ground for supposing that worship and deity must, of necessity, be of this kind. Further, these values sit uneasily with the orientations of modern society with its enhanced individualism, its increasing demand for non-judgmental attitudes; the post-Freudian distrust of guilt motivation; and the assault on hierarchic authority.

*14* One may need to go further than this—as not all commonly recognised religions involve a belief in a Supreme Being. Therefore if worship were to be considered an essential component of religion (a possibly doubtful and problematic proposition), the word “worship” itself would have to be defined along the lines of “practices designed to bring a person into communication with the basic spiritual reality”. That, in whatever form, is the function of worship.

### TABLE

RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION	SUMMARY OF PRACTICES AND BELIEFS	BELIEF IN A SUPREME BEING?	WORSHIP ACCORDING TO THE SEGERDAL CRITERIA?
Sankhya School of Hinduism	A non-theistic system of belief, recognised as an orthodox school of Hindu religion. Primordial matter and the soul are uncreated and indestructible. Karma governs man’s affairs—rebirth is a consequence of past acts. Salvation is escape from reincarnation. Knowledge of suffering and its causes is the way to liberation. Since karma determines one’s life-chances, supplicatory prayer (often a cardinal feature in worship in other religions) is eschewed. All conceptions of deity are rejected—an atheistic religion.	No belief in a Supreme Being.	No.

RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION	SUMMARY OF PRACTICES AND BELIEFS	BELIEF IN A SUPREME BEING?	WORSHIP ACCORDING TO THE SEGERDAL CRITERIA?
Jainism	A division from Hinduism. Karma: Alien elements of karma weigh down the soul. The Jain scheme of things leaves no place for a creator God. The great teachers are not regarded as divine, nor is there divine revelation. Jainism is in essence an atheistic system. "Devas" (demi-gods) are acknowledged, but they do not determine man's destiny and are not worshipped. The means of salvation (by overcoming rebirths) is the practice of an ascetic ethic, which liberates the soul, and annuls karma.	No Supreme Being. The law of cause and effect is the ultimate principle of life. Local devas are not worshipped.	No.
Taoism	Operating among Chinese populations alongside Buddhism, ancestor cults and the ethical system of Confucianism, Taoism promotes a religious cosmogony; organises temple festivities; provides rites of passage. Its mystical teachings embrace a complex universe of spirit beings and heavenly masters who reign over heaven, earth and man.	Belief in various mystical entities in a complex cosmic scheme but no Supreme Being as such.	No direct correspondence.
Theravada Buddhism	The universal law of cause and effect issues in karma: unending rebirths ensue unless the individual is liberated by becoming enlightened with respect to suffering. No creator or saviour god is postulated. Salvation is attained by impersonal means, by achieving detachment hence obedience to an ethical code, rather than ritual performances, and constitute the means of transcending mundane experience and the material world.	No Supreme Being. Devas are subject to the same system of rebirth as humans.	No.

RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION	SUMMARY OF PRACTICES AND BELIEFS	BELIEF IN A SUPREME BEING?	WORSHIP ACCORDING TO THE SEGERDAL CRITERIA?
Nichiren Buddhism	This branch of Buddhism (Nichiren b. Japan 1222) regards subsequent incarnations of the Gautama Buddha as having transcended the enlightenment he brought. Truth is encapsulated in the <i>Lotus Sutra</i> , the mere invocation of which suffices to release the totality of benefits to believers. Reincarnated Buddhas are not gods, merely the vehicles through which progressive illumination may be attained. Every layman has possibility to attain Buddhahood, and happiness in this world is his entitlement.	No. The universe is regulated by impersonal law of cause and effect— karma, as experienced by humans.	No.
Quakers (Society of Friends)	Special emphasis on the “inward light” (voice of conscience). There is no ritual, no obeisance, no supplication, no formally approved statement of creed. Meetings take the form of collective meditation. No requirement to believe in a Supreme Being, though such an entity is not denied and many do so believe.	A Supreme Being may be acknowledged, but the ethos of Quakerism opposes hierarchy and sovereignty.	No.
Christian Science	Man is purely a spiritual being and the material world is illusory, realisation of which sustains physical healing and even immortality. These ideas are attributed to Jesus, who was not God but a man and an exemplar. There is belief in God, who is frequently referred to in conventional Christian terms as an anthropomorphic god, but more distinctively by synonyms, Mind, Soul, Spirit, Principle, Life, Truth, Love, towards none of which are the dispositions expressed in traditional language really appropriate. Mrs Eddy (founder b. 1820) said “divine service” should mean daily good deeds not public worship.	There is belief in a Supreme Being.	Only partial concurrence.

RELIGIOUS DENOMINATION	SUMMARY OF PRACTICES AND BELIEFS	BELIEF IN A SUPREME BEING?	WORSHIP ACCORDING TO THE SEGERDAL CRITERIA?
Unitarians	Reject the doctrine of the Trinity and seek congruity of religion and reason. Permissive with regard to creeds, doctrine, biblical authority and liturgical forms, Unitarians tend to stress ethical commitments rather than ritual obligations. Some Unitarians are avowedly agnostic or even atheist.	Belief in a Supreme Being is not required and many Unitarians do not believe in a Supreme Being.	No.

### THE APPLICATION OF THE SEGERDAL CRITERIA TO PRESENT DAY SCIENTOLOGY

- 15* Whatever may have been the case in 1970 at the time of the *Segerdal* judgment, members of the Church of Scientology today meet in congregation both for occasional services of *rites de passage* (naming ceremonies for children, marriages, and funerals) and for regular weekly religious services, and these services are religious worship services according to the criteria laid out in *Segerdal*.
- 16* There is a regular ministry in whose hands lie the arrangements for services and their performance in accordance with the Church's regulations, which are the equivalent of the rules of faith and order in Christian denominations.
- 17* Services are decorous and dignified. The prevalent mood is expressive and out-going, consonant with the open, positive, and optimistic orientation of Scientological teachings.
- 18* In the *Segerdal* judgment, religious worship was held generally to include invocation of, and submission to an object which is venerated; laudation of that object, being, or entity; supplication, intercession and affirmations of thanksgiving. These attitudes are evoked in worshippers by diverse means in various religions, but typically in the form of verbal affirmations of belief, by participation in ritual acts, and by the receipt of symbolic vessels of empowerment (i.e. the bread and wine of the Christian communion service).
- 19* Scientology services commence with a reading of the Church's Creed, which is a declaration of the rights of man. A superficial reading might suggest that this creed

failed to establish the primary criterion of the characteristics of worship set out in the *Segerdal* judgment by Buckley LJ, namely that there should be an object of worship to which believers submitted. A closer reading makes it evident that the creed, whilst not formally asserting the existence of God or declaring his supremacy over all other beings, actually takes his existence for granted. In asserting that “no agency less than God has the power to suspend or set aside these [human] rights”, there is implicit recognition of God’s being and of his supremacy, to which mankind is subject.

*20* The Sunday service includes prayer, and always ends with a set prayer. The focus of the prayer is on human freedom, and God is supplicated, called upon, to grant freedom from war, poverty and want, as well as to permit human rights the fullest expression. Thus, this is a prayer of intercession. God is asked to intercede to establish righteousness and the conditions in which man may realize his potential. The prayer enjoins God in its final sentence, “May God let it be so”.

## CONCLUSION

*21* Given that Scientologists do believe in a Supreme Being and that their congregational services include expressions of reverence and respect for that Supreme Being, and seek that Supreme Being’s intercession through prayer, I conclude that Scientology services today do meet the narrow criteria for religious worship laid out in the case of *Segerdal*—even if the services of some major, universally accepted religious denominations, do not meet these criteria.

BRYAN RONALD WILSON  
8th February 2002  
Oxford, England



## BRYAN RONALD WILSON

Bryan Ronald Wilson is the Reader Emeritus in Sociology in the University of Oxford. From 1963 to 1993, he was also a Fellow of All Souls College, and in 1993 was elected an Emeritus Fellow.

For more than forty years, he has conducted research into minority religious movements in Britain and overseas (notably in the United States, Ghana, Kenya, Belgium and Japan). His work has involved reading the publications of these movements and, wherever possible, associating with their members in their meetings, services, and homes, and critical appraisal of the works of other scholars.

He holds the Degrees of B.Sc. (Econ) and Ph.D. of the University of London and the M.A. of the University of Oxford. In 1984, the University of Oxford recognized the value of his published work by conferring upon him the Degree of D.Litt. In 1992, the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, awarded him the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa.

In 1994, he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy.

At various times he has held the following additional appointments:

Commonwealth Fund Fellow (Harkness Foundation) at the University of California, Berkeley, United States, 1957–8;

Visiting Professor, University of Ghana, 1964;

Fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies, at the University of California, Berkeley, United States, 1966–7;

Research Consultant in Sociology, University of Padua, Italy, 1968–72;

Visiting Fellow of The Japan Society, 1975;

Visiting Professor, Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium 1976; 1982; 1986; 1993;

Snider Visiting Professor, University of Toronto, Canada, 1978;

Visiting Professor in the Sociology of Religion, and Consultant for Religious Studies to Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand, 1980–1;

Scott Visiting Fellow, Ormond College, University of Melbourne, Australia, 1981;

Visiting Professor, University of Queensland, Australia, 1986;

Distinguished Visiting Professor, University of California, Santa Barbara, California, U.S.A., 1987;

Visiting Professor, Soka University, Hachioji, Japan, 1997;

For the years 1971–5, he was President of the *Conférence Internationale de Sociologie Religieuse* (the world-wide organization for the discipline); in 1991 he was elected Honorary President of this organization now re-named as *Société Internationale de Sociologie des Religions*.

Council Member of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (U.S.A.) 1977–9;

For several years, European Associate Editor, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*;

For six years, Joint Editor of *The Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion*.

He has lectured on minority religious movements extensively in Britain, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Japan, and the United States, and occasionally in Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden.

He has been called as an expert witness on sects in courts in Britain, France, Greece, the Netherlands, New Zealand and South Africa and has provided evidence on affidavit for courts in Australia, Latvia, Russia, Spain and in France. He has also been called upon to give expert written evidence on religious movements for the Parliamentary Home Affairs Committee of the House of Commons.



Among other works, he has published eleven books devoted in whole or in part to minority religious movements:

*Sects and Society: the Sociology of Three Religious Groups in Britain*, London: Heinemann, and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961; reprinted, Westport, Conn., U.S.A.: Greenwood Press, 1978

*Patterns of Sectarianism* (edited) London: Heinemann, 1967

*Religious Sects*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson; New York: McGraw Hill, 1970 (also published in translation in French, German, Spanish, Swedish and Japanese)

*Magic and the Millennium*, London: Heinemann; New York: Harper and Row, 1973

*Contemporary Transformations of Religion*, London: Oxford University Press, 1976 (also published in translation in Italian and Japanese)

*The Social Impact of the New Religious Movements* (edited) New York: Rose of Sharon Press, 1981

*Religion in Sociological Perspective*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982 (also published in translation in Italian, Romanian, and Bulgarian. Japanese translation in preparation)

*The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990

*A Time to Chant: the Soka Gakkai Buddhists in Britain*, [with K. Dobbelaere] Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994 (Japanese translation 1997)

*New Religious Movements; Challenge and Response*, [co-edited with Jamie Cresswell] London: Routledge, 1999

*Global Citizens: The Soka Gakkai Buddhists in the World*, [co-edited with David Machacek] Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000

He has also contributed more than thirty articles on minority religious movements to edited works and learned journals in Britain, Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, India, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the United States. He has contributed articles to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; *the Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*; *the Encyclopaedia of Religion*, *Encyclopédie des religions* (Paris) and *Enciclopedia Italiana* (Rome).

Among the movements on which he has undertaken research has been the Church of Scientology. He is not and never has been a member of that Church or any of its affiliated organizations. His research has been conducted in accordance with the principles of detached objectivity and ethical neutrality as maintained in the academic tradition of the social sciences.





