



# SCIENTOLOGY

*A Religion in South Africa*

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Professor of Comparative Religion

University of Cape Town  
South Africa

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### *1. Introduction*

Among other things, religions are distinctive human experiments in the production of sacred time and sacred space. Religions mark out the holy days of a sacred calendar for special observance, celebration, or commemoration. Religions also mark out sacred places—places of worship, places of gathering, places of pilgrimage—for a special kind of ritual attention. By participating in sacred time and space, human beings ground their religious commitments in the world.

All religions, even “new religious movements,” find ways to make time and space sacred. In the international sacred calendar of the Church of Scientology, for example, the 11th of November is designated as “National Founding Day, South Africa,” celebrating the establishment of the first Scientology church in South Africa, the church that was founded in Johannesburg in 1957. Although lectures on Scientology had been presented in Johannesburg as early as 1955, the founding of the first church there marked the beginning of Scientology’s organised religious life in South Africa.



After more than a decade of growth, the church encountered opposition from the South African government. Under the auspices of the Department of Health, a formal government Commission of Inquiry was convened between April 1969 and December 1970 to investigate the Church of Scientology. Submitting its report in 1972, the commission issued the insupportable recommendation that Scientology should not be legally recognized as a church or a religion in South Africa.

However, in spite of this commission's recommendation, the Church of Scientology was allowed to register as a non-profit organisation. In the international sacred calendar of Scientology, the 16th of January marks the holiday "Recognition Day Africa" in commemoration of the day in 1975 on which the Church of Scientology was recognized as a non-profit organisation in South Africa. The church awaits, however, full legal recognition, in keeping with the recognition that Scientology has received elsewhere in the world, as a *bona fide* religion in South Africa. When that occurs, a new holiday might be added to the international sacred calendar of the Church of Scientology.

In the production of sacred space, the Church of Scientology has established places of worship in most of the major metropolitan centres of the country. Following the lead of the first church in Johannesburg, Scientology churches were founded in Cape Town in 1961, in Port Elizabeth in 1962, in Durban in 1963, and in Pretoria in 1968. Another church was founded in Johannesburg, serving Johannesburg North, in 1981. Like any sacred place, these churches are sites for special kinds of religious activity. Ordained ministers at these churches offer a wide range of religious services, including Sunday sermons, pastoral counselling, and rituals for marriages, christenings, and funerals, that make these sites vital centres of Scientology religious life.

Like any other religion, therefore, Scientology is a distinctive human experiment in the production of sacred time and sacred space. However, also like any other religion, Scientology is a distinctive human experiment in being human. By the church's own definition, Scientology is an "applied religious philosophy. Its goal is to bring an individual to an understanding of himself and his life as a spiritual being and in relationship to the universe as a whole."<sup>1</sup> In other words, the Church of Scientology develops a religious way of being human that is realized in relation to sacred and superhuman dimensions of life.

Standard academic definitions of religion tend to focus on either the superhuman or sacred features of religious worlds. In an approach to defining religion that can be traced back to



the nineteenth-century anthropologist, E. B. Tylor, religion is essentially an engagement with superhuman transcendence. In these terms, religion is a set of beliefs and practices in relation to spiritual, supernatural, or superhuman beings that rise above and go beyond the ordinary level of human existence. In another approach to defining religion, which can be traced back to the work of the Sociologist Emile Durkheim, religion is a set of beliefs and practices related to a sacred focus that unifies a human community. From this perspective, religion invests life with sacred meaning and power through beliefs in myths and doctrines, through the practices of ritual and ethics, through personal experience, and through forms of social organisation.<sup>2</sup>

Certainly, the Church of Scientology, which grew out of the spiritual healing techniques of Dianetics that had been formulated by 1950 by its founder, L. Ron Hubbard, can be defined as a religion in terms of the standard definitions. However, academic discussions tend to ignore the political dynamics of denial and recognition that are involved in defining religion. Before outlining the basic features of the religion of Scientology, therefore, it will be necessary to reflect briefly here on the contested history of recognizing religion in South Africa.

## II. *Recognizing Religion*

In western discourse, the term “religion” has always been problematic. Its ancient Latin root, *religio*, designated an authentic way of acting—carefully, faithfully, and with scrupulous attention to detail. That authentic way of acting, however, was defined by its opposite, *superstitio*, a kind of conduct motivated by ignorance, fear, and fraud. As the linguist Emile Benveniste observed, the “notion of ‘religion’ requires, so to speak, by opposition, that of ‘superstition.’”<sup>3</sup> Inevitably, the distinction between religion and superstition, the authentic and the fraudulent, the familiar and the strange, collapses into a basic opposition between “us” and “them.” In that opposition, authentic religion is claimed for “us,” while beliefs and practices based on superstitious ignorance, fear, and fraud are attributed to “them.”

In southern Africa, this conceptual opposition between religion and superstition has had a long history in European reports about indigenous African beliefs and practices. Throughout the nineteenth century, European observers refused to recognize that those forms of African religious life should count as “religion.” For example, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, J. T. van der Kemp, the first missionary of the London Missionary Society in southern Africa, demonstrated this denial of African religion. Referring to the people of the eastern Cape, van der Kemp stated: “If by religion we understand reverence of God, or the external action by which that reverence is expressed: I never could perceive that they had any religion, nor

any idea of the existence of a God.”<sup>4</sup> Clearly, van der Kemp denied the fact that the people of the eastern Cape had a genuine “religion.” Instead, van der Kemp insisted, Africans suffered under the ignorance, fear, and fraud of “superstition.”

This refusal to recognize African beliefs and practices persisted into the twentieth century. In the 1920s, for example, the Afrikaner anthropologist, W. M. Eiselen, who would serve in the Bantu Affairs Administration of H. F. Verwoerd during the implementation of “Grand Apartheid” in the 1950s, argued that Africans had no indigenous religion. The term, *godsdiens* (religion), Eiselen insisted, should be reserved only for what he called “an elevated culture.” Lacking such a culture, according to Eiselen, Africans might have *geloofsvorme* (forms or patterns of belief) but they have no *godsdiens*.<sup>5</sup> In this formula, therefore, Africans in southern Africa continued to suffer under the categorical denial of their indigenous religious heritage.

The term “religions” has been just as problematic. In the English language, the first recorded use of the plural term, “religions,” is found in 1593 in the work of the Protestant theologian Richard Hooker. Unlike contemporary usage, Hooker used the term “religions” to distinguish between two religions: Protestant and Roman Catholic.<sup>6</sup> Obviously, Hooker saw two religions—Protestant and Catholic—where subsequent thinkers have often seen one, Christianity. During the eighteenth century, European thinking about religion divided the world into four religions, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Paganism, with the latter sometimes further divided into ancient, modern, and “diabolical” heathenism.<sup>7</sup> By 1870, when F. Max Müller delivered his introductory lectures on comparative religion, the number of major religions had expanded to eight—Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, and Taoism—with the significant remainder, however, of what Max Müller called indigenous “religions without books.”<sup>8</sup> Originally used to define Christian divisions, therefore, the term, “religions” was increasingly employed in efforts to make sense out of a world of religious diversity.<sup>9</sup>

In the twentieth century, the terms “religion” and “religions” have continued to be entangled in religious conflict. In response to the emergence of “new religious movements” in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, anti-cult propaganda denied the religious status of these movements by labelling them as entrepreneurial businesses, as subversive political organisations, or as brainwashing “cults.” Anti-cult polemic along these lines even seemed to influence the academic analysis of new religions.<sup>10</sup>

Although it was informed to a certain extent by anti-cult propaganda, the South African Commission of Inquiry that tried to deny the religious status of Scientology in its 1972 report

seemed more concerned with reinforcing certain Christian assumptions about what ought to count as legitimate religion in South Africa. According to the commission, the Church of Scientology was not a religion because it did not observe the proper worship of a personal God. “Although Scientology professes to recognize a Supreme Being,” the commission asserted, “it never mentions it as a controlling power or a personal God entitled to obedience and worship.”<sup>11</sup> Recalling the Christian missionary’s nineteenth-century denial of African religion, this denial of religious status to Scientology was based upon a specific Christian assumption about the proper form of worship that is supposedly necessary for beliefs and practices to count as authentic religion.

In a detailed rebuttal published in 1975, the distinguished South African Professor of Science of Religion, G. C. Oosthuizen, wryly observed that Scientologists could have gained recognition as a religion by the commission more easily “if they bowed before a holy cow or a monkey god or an elephant god or a snake or a frog.”<sup>12</sup>

Since a religious way of life can be regarded as a way of being human, this denial of the religiosity of others has also been a denial of the full humanity of other human beings. The question of the definition of religion, therefore, is not merely an academic issue. It is as basic as the question: What counts as a human being?

### III. *Religious Beliefs*

At some moments, L. Ron Hubbard seemed to reject the designation “religion” for the beliefs and practices of Scientology. For example, he once observed that Scientology “is not a psychotherapy. It is a body of knowledge which, when properly used, gives freedom and truth to the individual.”<sup>13</sup> In this context, however, Hubbard seems to have distinguished between the formal aspects of religion, such as creeds, practices, or membership, and the liberating truth. This way of distinguishing between “religion” and “truth” is a common religious strategy. For example, the Christian theologian Karl Barth insisted that his gospel was not a religion; it was truth. Maududi made the same claim for Islam, Franz Rosenzweig for Judaism, and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan for Hinduism. In all these instances, religious thinkers have asserted the ultimate meaning and power of their “truth” by distinguishing it from religion.<sup>14</sup>

However, Hubbard also found that the term, “religion,” if properly defined, could be used to designate the liberating truth of Scientology. “Scientology,” Hubbard explained, “is a religion in the very oldest and fullest sense.” More than merely a “religious practice,” however, Scientology is a “religious wisdom.”<sup>15</sup> The term “religion,” according to Hubbard, “can embrace sacred lore,

wisdom, knowingness of gods and souls and spirits.”<sup>16</sup> In these terms, therefore, Hubbard asserted that Scientology should be recognized as a religion.

Hubbard identified the Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist roots of this religious wisdom. Like certain forms of Hinduism, especially Advaita Vedanta, Scientology supports the recognition that the human self is ultimately the supreme divine power of the universe. In the Sanskrit formula of the Vedanta, *Atman* (the human self) is *Brahman* (the divine). Like Buddhist practice, however, Scientology outlines a step-by-step trajectory towards liberation from ignorance that recalls the “Eightfold Path” of Buddhism. This Buddhist path moves through the stages of right understanding, dedication, communication, conduct, way of life, effort, awareness, and meditation to achieve a state of joyful liberation aloof from the world. In a similar way, Scientology identifies a religious path, or bridge, that marks out progress towards liberation. However, while the Buddhist path was designed in principle for a monastic life removed from ordinary human relations and occupations, the Scientology path has more in common with a Taoist approach to achieving spiritual harmony in the midst of the world. In the Taoist sense, liberation is a state of balance in which a human being is in harmony with all the conditions of existence. Scientology is directed towards attaining a similar harmony.

Echoes of these ancient Asian religions, therefore, can be found in the religious beliefs of Scientology. However, Hubbard concluded that the ultimate goals of these religions—spiritual liberation, knowledge, and harmony—were only rarely achieved in practice. Reflecting on his travels in Asia, Hubbard observed that he saw a great many studying but very few arriving. According to Hubbard, the ancient religious paths lacked the sense of “urgency necessary to arrive.”<sup>17</sup> A modern religion, he concluded, had to do more than identify spiritual goals; it had to provide the practical means for achieving them.

Scientology also has much in common with the alternative Christian and Jewish religious movements of antiquity known as Gnosticism. Like the ancient Gnostics, Scientology teaches that human beings are essentially spiritual beings, with divine souls of pure light, that are caught up in the darkness of the material world. In its cosmology, Scientology identifies three basic aspects of reality—the life force that is referred to as *theta*, the Supreme Being that is also known as Infinity, and the physical universe of matter, energy, space, and time that is represented by the acronym, MEST. As a personalized form of the life force, the human soul—thetan—has become entangled in the forces of MEST. In the cosmic drama of Scientology, the thetan can be rescued from that entanglement in the conditions of the physical universe.

Scientology poses this liberation of the thetan as a matter of survival. Scientology's "Eightfold Path" is the "Eight Dynamics" that represent successive stages of expansion in the basic urge for survival. The first four Dynamics are the "urge towards existence" of one's self, family, group, and humanity; the next two are the urge for survival at the level of life forces and the physical universe; and the seventh and eighth Dynamics represent the ultimate spiritual survival at the level of souls and the Supreme Being. As Hubbard proposed, "the progress upward toward survival on higher levels is a progress, as well, toward God."<sup>18</sup> In this sense, the Eight Dynamics outline a path, not only for the liberation of the soul from the limitations of the physical world, but also for achieving an ultimate God-realization by existing at the level of the Supreme Being.

Like other religions, the Church of Scientology has a formal creed that presents its basic beliefs. Four major aspects of this creed can be identified. First, the Scientology creed emphasizes basic human rights. These rights are binding on every level of existence and therefore also represent the rights of human souls as free spiritual beings. All have equal and inalienable rights to freedom of religion, association, thought, expression, life, sanity, self-defence, and reproduction. To underscore the ultimate nature of these rights, the creed affirms that "no agency less than God has the power to suspend or set aside these rights, overtly or covertly." Second, the creed announces a dedication to the religious healing of the human mind. That commitment is formulated in the belief that "the study of the mind and the healing of mentally caused ills should not be alienated from religion or condoned in nonreligious fields." Third, the creed embodies an ethical orientation towards life that holds that "Man is basically good." While that basic goodness is realized in harmony with others, "the laws of God" forbid any acts that would destroy or reduce the survival of another's life, sanity, or soul. Finally, the Scientology creed declares a commitment to achieving salvation. "The spirit can be saved and," the creed concludes, "the spirit alone may save or heal the body."<sup>19</sup>

The salvation promised in the Church of Scientology does not depend upon having faith in the principles of this creed. As Hubbard argued, the question of faith has been one of the most misunderstood aspects of religion. He distinguished between having "faith-in" something and the spiritual character of "faith" itself. When a person has "faith-in" something, whether in a religious creed, a church, or a saviour, that person has surrendered his or her freedom as a spiritual being to the control of another. Having "faith-in" the beliefs of a religion ultimately results in "the sacrifice of one's universe." Faith itself, however, is the spiritual condition of being in harmony with the universe and God. In this specific sense, faith is "a full state of

beingness. And with this condition, one could occasion Faith itself to occur within his own universe or could occasion people to have faith in him.”<sup>20</sup> Scientology is directed towards achieving that unconditional faith. More than a matter of belief, that faith is a liberating knowledge that is attained through a specific course of action.

#### *IV. Religious Ritual*

Like any religion, the Church of Scientology conducts the formalized, repeatable, and extraordinary types of religious action that constitute ritual. Certainly, Scientology ritual includes ceremonies that recall the familiar practices of other religions. Ordained Scientology ministers perform the rites prescribed by the church for marriages, christenings (called *namings* in Scientology), and funerals. They also conduct regular Sunday services at Scientology places of worship. In the Church of Scientology, however, these rituals are not ends in themselves. They provide formal occasions for reinforcing the liberating knowledge of Scientology. As L. Ron Hubbard explained: “In a Scientology Church Service we do not use prayers, attitudes of piety, or threats of damnation. We use the facts, the truths, the understandings that have been discovered in the science of Scientology. We do not read from the Bible (or the Koran or the Torah or the Vedic Hymns, for that matter) and say to the people assembled there— ‘Now this is something you have got to believe.’”<sup>21</sup> Again, the objective of Scientology is not to cultivate a devotional faith in a personal deity, a sacred text, or a religious practice; the objective is to achieve religious knowledge.

On the path towards this liberating knowledge, the central ritual practice in the Church of Scientology is known as auditing. From the Latin *audire*, meaning to hear or listen, auditing is conducted in sessions that are held between a novice and an experienced auditor who listens carefully and monitors progress. The theory that supports this practice proposes that human beings have an analytical mind that processes information and a reactive mind that stores memories of all painful experiences from the past. Since many of those experiences were traumatic, the reactive mind bears deep traces, or psychological scars, that are referred to as *engrams*. These psychological obstacles have been implanted from previous life experiences, from prenatal experience, and from past lifetimes. Although engrams are embedded in the reactive mind, they can be brought to conscious awareness and cleared through auditing. As an aid in this process, an electronic meter—the electropsychometer, or E-Meter—is used in auditing sessions to measure the psychological charges associated with the reactive mind. In Scientology terms, the E-Meter is a religious artifact used in sessions of pastoral counselling. Through auditing, engrams can be released, resulting in a state of being that Scientologists refer to as Clear.

Although it draws upon certain psychodynamic theories and methods, auditing can be understood as a ritual practice that combines features of religious healing, confession, and meditation.

First, auditing can be understood as ritual healing. As historian of religions Jonathan Z. Smith once observed, “a religion that does not heal cannot long survive.”<sup>22</sup> In the modern world, religious traditions have given over the responsibility for healing the body and the mind to a scientific medical profession. Like other “new religious movements,” however, the Church of Scientology has worked to reclaim this religious function of healing. In particular, Scientology practice is directed toward achieving a spiritual healing that can have positive consequences for the health and well-being of the mind and body.

Second, auditing has many of the characteristics of religious rituals of confession. As a familiar feature of Roman Catholic practice in which contrition, confession to a priest, and acts of penance form an important ritual cycle, confession also appears as a ritual in Buddhism. According to the Buddhist text of the *Mahavagga*, if anyone “remembers having committed a sin, and desires again to be pure, let him reveal the sin he committed, and when it has been revealed, all shall be well with him.”<sup>23</sup> In the Buddhist ritual, therefore, a state of spiritual purity, which is similar in some respects to what Scientologists refer to as being Clear, requires recollecting memories of the past and revealing them through confession.

Third, the practice of auditing, especially in the advanced stages of “solo-auditing,” recalls more traditional religious rituals of meditation. In Buddhist practice, for example, ritual aids are often used to focus attention. The meditator might concentrate on a visual design, a sacred tone, or an enigmatic riddle to achieve a new clarity of awareness. Frequently, meditation is monitored by a teacher who observes the progress of novices.

In addition to auditing, Scientology provides training as an educational programme that recovers the religious dimension of the activity of study. In many religious traditions, the intensive study of sacred texts is an important religious ritual. In the Jewish *yeshiva*, for example, the study of sacred texts under the supervision of a Talmudic master is explicitly understood as a religious activity with all the characteristics of ritual. Similarly, Scientology training involves an intensive engagement with sacred texts, under ministerial supervision, as a significant religious activity. Just as the Church of Scientology has tried to recover the religious function of healing, it has also worked to restore the religious significance of the disciplined activity of study.

## V. *Religious Ethics*

All religions develop ethical rules, ethical standards, and ethical values that guide conduct in the everyday, ordinary situations and circumstances of personal and social life. The Church of Scientology also has a system of religious ethics. Guidelines for conduct have been formulated in a set of ethical codes: The Code of a Scientologist outlines basic principles of moral behaviour; the Auditor's Code provides an ethical guide for pastoral practice that governs the conduct of Scientology ministers; and the Code of Honour sets out ethical ideals to which all Scientologists can aspire. Not only governing personal behaviour, these codes are regarded as the basis for a social transformation that promises a world without insanity, criminality, or war.

Underlying these ethical codes, however, is a distinctive approach to religious ethics in which ethical conduct is regarded as an integral part of spiritual growth. Ethical behaviour is seen as a direct result of advancement on the bridge to spiritual liberation. In this respect, therefore, ethics is intimately related to all the religious beliefs and ritual practices of the Church of Scientology.

Assuming that human beings are inherently good, Scientologists also recognize that they are capable of evil. The evil acts that human beings perform, however, are regarded as aberrations of the intrinsic goodness of human nature. From this perspective, the central ethical imperative of Scientology is to correct ethical aberrations and recover the original goodness of the human spirit. Essentially, religious ethics becomes a matter of restoring a primordial condition of ethical harmony.

In the history of religions, systems of religious ethics have not merely addressed specific actions. They have not merely prohibited some actions, such as lying, theft, or murder, and prescribed others. Rather, religious ethics has addressed what might be called dispositions of desire. In the Christian tradition, for example, medieval theologians formulated a standard list of the Seven Deadly Sins—pride, anger, lust, sloth, greed, gluttony, and envy. These sins, however, were not specific actions; they were dispositions of desire that directed human beings away from God. As the Italian poet Dante Alighieri declared in his *Divine Comedy*, these sins were seven different forms of the same “misdirected love.”<sup>24</sup> According to Dante, misdirected desire alienated human beings from the divine love that orchestrated the celestial harmony of the heavenly spheres. Religious ethics, therefore, ultimately depended upon transforming spiritual dissonance into spiritual harmony.

Similarly, Buddhist ethics has identified the Three Deadly Sins—the emotions of lust, greed, and anger—that can also be understood as forms of desire. In this case, misdirected desire is



not in harmony with the purity and freedom of Buddha nature. Therefore, both Christian and Buddhist traditions have understood religious ethics as a matter of bringing human desires into harmony with a spiritual ideal.<sup>25</sup>

Scientology ethics is based on a similar analysis of the relation between dissonance and harmony in human dispositions of desire. This ethical analysis is most clearly formulated in the Tone Scale. On a scale from zero to forty, the Tone Scale charts the spiritual dispositions from which different qualities of action flow. At the bottom of the scale, very low dispositions of desire—apathy, despair—are so close to death that they provide no basis for ethical action. Slightly higher, dispositions such as fear, anger, and hostility inhibit the freedom necessary for living an ethical life. In the next range, progress up the scale is evident in moving from conservatism, through strong interest in life, to a state of cheerfulness. Ethical conduct now becomes possible. But the scope for ethical action increases exponentially as the scale moves up through dispositions of enthusiasm, aesthetic participation, and exhilaration to arrive at the higher levels that represent the source of all action and the supreme Serenity of Beingness.

The Tone Scale, therefore, presents terms for assessing the relative dissonance or harmony of human dispositions of desire with the spiritual ideals of Scientology. As L. Ron Hubbard put it, “Descending down the Tone Scale, greater and greater dissonance could be considered to be introduced into theta...” “As a musical analogy, one could say that the note was becoming less and less a pure and harmonious vibration and was becoming more and more off-key from itself.”<sup>26</sup> In the religious ethics of Scientology, therefore, ethical action depends upon restoring the human spirit to its original condition of spiritual harmony.

## *VI. Religious Experience*

According to historian of religions Mircea Eliade, the most ancient form of religious experience is found in the practices of Shamanism. Employing what Eliade called “archaic techniques of ecstasy,” shamans enter into trance states, claim to travel out of their bodies, and exercise the power gained by their extraordinary experiences to heal the body, mind, and spirit.<sup>27</sup> In local, small-scale indigenous religions all over the world, the shaman has represented the standard for defining the nature of religious experience.

As anthropologist Felicitas Goodman<sup>28</sup> has argued, however, shamanic techniques produced not only the most ancient, but also the most persistent and enduring type of religious experience, the trance. Through a variety of techniques—meditation, prayer, chanting, singing, dancing, and so on—religions have induced and cultivated the experience of trance.

According to Goodman, trance states represent the common denominator underlying all religious experience. In Goodman's terms, all religions, whether they know it or not, induce experiences of trance.

Although the Church of Scientology employs specific "techniques of ecstasy," those procedures and processes that are referred to as its "religious technology," the church has consistently insisted that the religious experience supported by these practices should not be misconstrued as trance. Furthermore, contrary to the discredited claims of anti-cult propaganda, these techniques bear no relation to processes of hypnosis or "brainwashing."<sup>29</sup> Instead, the religious techniques used in the Church of Scientology are directed towards experiencing a greater clarity of spiritual awareness.

For Scientology, religious experience is basically a matter of achieving understanding. The nature of understanding is represented as a triangle—the ARC triangle—comprising three component parts: Affinity, Reality, and Communication. As the first corner of this triangle, Affinity signifies the degree of closeness, affection, or love that is experienced in relation to another person. The second corner, Reality, indicates an interpersonal agreement about what appears to be the case in any situation. At the third corner, Communication defines the interchange of ideas. As the most important part of this ARC triangle, clear communication can provide the basis for creating interpersonal affinity and mutual agreement about reality. However, since all three aspects of understanding are interrelated, the ARC triangle is described as growing as understanding increases. As a formula for understanding the nature of understanding, the ARC triangle operates as a measure of expanding awareness.

Religious experience in Scientology progresses through a series of graded levels. Having achieved the necessary "releases" from the conditioning of the reactive mind, a person can attain the experiential state of being Clear. According to the Church of Scientology, the "full glory of the state of Clear has no comparable description in any writings existing in our culture."<sup>30</sup> Like mystical experience in general, therefore, the experience of being Clear might be described as ineffable, as a state of consciousness that is beyond words. However, also like mystical experience, that state of consciousness is characterized by a heightened awareness in which new knowledge and insight are gained.

Beyond the state of Clear, Scientology provides techniques for achieving even higher levels of spiritual freedom and ability. As an Operating Thetan, a person experiencing these higher levels is said to become a "Knowing and willing cause over Life, Thought, Matter, Energy, Space, and Time."<sup>31</sup> Extraordinary abilities are claimed for the Operating Thetan. Like a

shaman, for example, an Operating Thetan is supposed to be able to experience conscious awareness independent of the physical body. At these higher levels, however, the major ability recovered by an Operating Thetan is the experience of eternity. Through that experience, the person attains knowledge of immortality and freedom from the cycle of birth and death. The spiritual knowledge, freedom, and power represented by the Operating Thetan is the ultimate goal of the religion of Scientology. Essentially, these abilities represent the culmination of a religious quest for spiritual salvation and immortality.

## VII. *Religious Organisation*

The Founding Church of Scientology was formed as a religious society in Washington, DC, on 21 July 1955 for “the propagation of the religious faith known as Scientology, and to act as a Church for the religious worship of that faith.” Over the next thirty years, the Church of Scientology expanded dramatically to become a global religion. Like any religion, the religion of Scientology is anchored in specific places of worship. The social organisation of the international Church of Scientology is based on a hierarchy of five different types of religious centres.

First, Scientology missions provide introductory services and auditing to the level of Clear. Although missions are primarily engaged in outreach to people who are unfamiliar with Scientology, they also are authorized to deliver all the basic “routes to the Bridge.” When a mission achieves a sufficient size, it can become a church.

Second, Scientology churches provide all the auditing, training, and other religious services available at the missions. However, churches also offer advanced training for auditors and have the authority to ordain ministers. Regular Sunday services are held.

Third, Saint Hill Churches and Advanced Organisations are religious centres for advanced auditing and training. Located in Sussex, Copenhagen, Los Angeles, and Sydney, these centres specialize in the religious technology for achieving the initial levels of Operating Thetan.

Fourth, the Flag Service Organisation, located in Clearwater, Florida, is the spiritual headquarters for the international Church of Scientology. The centre provides all Scientology religious services, including the higher levels of training as Operating Thetan and the highest degree of training for auditors.

Fifth, the Flag Ship Service Organisation, which conducts its services on board the *Freewinds*, a 440-foot ship based in the Caribbean, is the only Scientology centre that offers the highest

level of auditing. In addition, the Flag Ship Service Organisation provides special courses and religious retreats for spiritual advancement.

This hierarchy of religious centres functions under the authority of the Mother Church in Los Angeles, the Church of Scientology International. Responsible for preserving and propagating the Scientology religion, the Church of Scientology International has established several subsidiary divisions. Golden Era Productions produces and disseminates a wide range of publications, films, and recordings. Two publishing companies—Bridge Publications in Los Angeles and New Era Publications in Denmark—handle the publication of the books of L. Ron Hubbard. Although it looks like a modern corporate structure, this ecclesiastical organisation serves religious interests by overseeing the preservation and expansion of the religion of Scientology all over the world.

Dedicated to the preservation of the church's sacred scriptures and religious teachings, the Religious Technology Center registers and supervises the use of Scientology trademarks and copyrights. In guarding the orthodoxy of the religion, the Religious Technology Center maintains the purity of its teachings and ensures that the ministry of the church is conducted on an ethical basis.

Outside of the church hierarchy, the Church of Spiritual Technology was established in 1982 to ensure the survival of the religion by preserving the writings of L. Ron Hubbard on imperishable materials. Indicating that these writings are regarded as sacred scriptures, the Church of Spiritual Technology has developed various means of preservation, including inscribing Hubbard's texts on stainless steel plates to be stored in titanium containers, that will guarantee the permanent survival of the foundational documents of the Scientology religion. In this way, the Church of Spiritual Technology has assumed the responsibility of protecting the sacred scriptures of Scientology from "any conceivable catastrophe in order that future generations, even wandering tribes of savages thousands of years from now, will have the Scripture to resurrect the religion."<sup>32</sup>

In addition to preserving and propagating its religious technology, the Church of Scientology has developed a range of public services in the fields of drug rehabilitation, criminal reform, business administration, and education. Narconon provides services and support to reduce drug use; Criminon works with convicted criminals to keep them from returning to prison; the Way to Happiness programme supports the development of personal morality and social ethics; and Applied Scholastics provides educational programmes in studying and learning

methods. Through these and other programmes, the Church of Scientology extends its religious mission into social services.

The central focus of the Church of Scientology, however, remains its religious mission. As L. Ron Hubbard intended, Scientology has been planned on a religious organization basis throughout the world. Not all “new religious movements” have been so comfortable with being identified as religions. For example, Transcendental Meditation, founded by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, insisted that it was not a religion; it was a secular organisation that offered a purely scientific technique for stress reduction.<sup>33</sup> But Scientology has always been clear about its status as a religious organisation. That status has been affirmed all over the world by governments that have granted the church the same legal recognition and tax exemptions accorded to any religion.

### *VIII. Scientology in South Africa*

In South Africa, the apartheid government did try to deny the religious status of the Church of Scientology in the early 1970s. The government’s Commission of Inquiry argued that Scientology should not be recognized as a “true church” because it allegedly did not preach the Bible as the Word of God; it did not promote a “sound doctrine” of sin and redemption; and it did not proclaim Christ as the only redeemer of humanity. Although this Commission of Inquiry decided not to recommend banning Scientology, it nevertheless found that the Church of Scientology lacked the “holiness” that was necessary for it to count as a church or a religion in South Africa.<sup>34</sup>

Ironically, this official commission refused to recognize the legitimacy of a religious movement that had offered its support to South Africa. As the Church of Scientology noted in its reply to the commission, the church and its founder had been “active in championing the cause of South Africa.”<sup>35</sup> While the Church of Scientology was in principle a non-political religion, a church open to people of any political persuasion or commitment, L. Ron Hubbard had explicitly declared his support for South Africa in its battle against international communism. “Probably the only nation on earth with the will to truly fight subversion is South Africa,” Hubbard had written in 1961. Instead of a military solution, however, Hubbard offered the religious technology of the Church of Scientology. “To turn this tide,” he exhorted, “use E-Meters, not guns.”<sup>36</sup>

Having toured South Africa at the beginning of the 1960s, L. Ron Hubbard developed a definite interest in the country and its people. As the standard reference work for the Church

of Scientology observes, “Following his visit to South Africa in the early 1960s, he predicted massive social upheavals and a severe rift between black and white communities. To avert disaster, he advised measures and provided the technology that would enable the country’s large black population to become literate.”<sup>37</sup> Coinciding with Scientology’s legal recognition in 1975, the church created an affiliate of its Applied Scholastics International programme, which was introduced as “Education Alive,” to make its study techniques available in South Africa. According to the Church of Scientology, “In South Africa, these programs helped well over two million underprivileged black Africans improve their ability to study, well before the walls of apartheid came down or the world had even noticed.”<sup>38</sup>

Throughout the apartheid era, the church was actively involved in campaigning against the human rights abuses of separate development, Bantu education, and the mental health profession. As the church argued, psychiatry served the interests of apartheid in justifying racial separation and reinforcing the racist oppression of black South Africans. The church struggled to identify and expose the inhumane treatment of black patients in psychiatric hospitals. Although this campaign brought the church into conflict with the apartheid government, its concerns about racism in the South African mental health profession were echoed by the World Health Organisation, which observed in 1977 that “in no other medical field in South Africa is the contempt of the person, cultivated by racism, more concisely portrayed than in psychiatry.”<sup>39</sup> The church’s opposition to psychiatry arises from its creed that affirms the religious basis of mental health and healing. However, in the South African context, this opposition was directed explicitly against the endemic racism that seemed to pervade the practice of psychiatry under apartheid.

Through these religious and educational initiatives, the Church of Scientology has established its place among the religions of South Africa. In recent years, the church has been an active participant in the South African chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace.<sup>40</sup> In drawing up a charter for the rights and responsibilities of religious organisations in South Africa, the WCRP has been supported by the church’s commitment to religious freedom. In a new South Africa, therefore, the Church of Scientology has assumed its position within the country’s rich fabric of religious diversity.

As the philosopher William James held, every religion has a therapeutic intention. Every religion diagnoses the basic problem of the human condition, whether that problem is identified as sin, ignorance, suffering, alienation, or oppression, and proposes a cure.<sup>41</sup> The Church of Scientology is a therapeutic religion that diagnoses the problem of the human condition and

provides specific techniques of spiritual healing and an applied religious philosophy designed to cure that problem.

Although Scientology is often described as a “new religious movement,” it is not actually new. In South Africa, as we have seen, Scientology has been present for forty years. In the early 1980s, some sociologists and historians of religion predicted the decline of Scientology. They argued that the church would find difficulty in surviving the death of its founder; that its religious “science” would become outdated by changing scientific fashions; and that its spiritual “therapy” would lose “market share” to an expanding competition.<sup>42</sup> During the intervening years, however, these predictions of the demise of Scientology have not been confirmed. As a religion that is both old and new, the Church of Scientology has continued to advance religious aspirations that have gained adherents all over the world. At the very least, the Church of Scientology merits continued recognition and attention as a religion in South Africa.

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## IX. Reference Notes

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