

CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY¹

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Scientology is a religious and therapeutic system of ideas and ritual practices developed, starting in the early 1950s, by American writer, adventurer, and philosopher L. Ron Hubbard (1911-1986). The first church was founded in Los Angeles, California in 1954. At the beginning of the new century Scientology is represented on all continents, in 145 countries. The church estimates that 8 million people worldwide are, in some way, using Hubbard's life-improvement techniques, but not all of these people are devoted members. Most of them are buying books and taking courses in the church facilities on a regular basis without considering themselves devotees.

Scientology was reorganized in the beginning of the 1980s, and today the organizational structure is divided into two major units. The first is the Church of Scientology International, founded in 1991, with its headquarters in Los Angeles. This unit oversees public relations, legal affairs, organizational expansion, and other practical affairs. The second unit, Religious Technology Center, appeared in 1982. This unit owns all trademarks and service marks of the religion and controls the licensing of these items worldwide. Together these two units control all Scientological activities, from field activities to missions and churches and advanced churches, in order to secure what are considered the unique teachings of Hubbard.

In the 1960s a religious order of dedicated Scientologists, the Sea Organization, was founded, and in the 1980s its members assumed control of the church internationally. All executives and most of the staff of the Church of Scientology International, the Religious Technology Center, and those facilities that deliver the more advanced training for Scientology leaders and facilitate access to what are considered the higher levels of Scientology teachings are Sea Organization members. Members of the Sea Organization take vows of commitment to the faith similar to those expected of members of ordered communities in other religions.

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During the late 1930s and 1940s Hubbard developed his do-it-yourself-therapy, Dianetics, according to which every human being is suffering from severe mental and psychosomatic traumas because of the functions of what Hubbard calls the reactive mind. In the memory bank of this mind are stored the engrams, that is, all the pieces of a person's memory involving mental or physical pain. In the book *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, published in May, 1950, and still figuring on bestseller lists, Hubbard presented his ideas on how one can eliminate the engrams through dianetic therapy, called auditing.

From 1951 Hubbard carried his ideas further and began the transformation of the therapy to a fully developed religious soteriological system by including metaphysical ideas and axioms about the individual and the universe in his representations. In 1954 Hubbard announced the full transformation into a religion. The new religion got the name Scientology (from Latin *scio*, to know, and from Greek, *logos*, word or thought), knowing about knowing.

The basic idea in Scientology is the idea that the human being, a composite of body, mind, and spirit, is a spiritual, individual being (called a Thetan). Each individual, or Thetan, has existed through an endless number of incarnations on this and other planets through hundreds of millions of years. Scientology's mythological texts tell, for instance, how the Thetans in a remote past made the mistake of identifying themselves with a physical universe and physical bodies and how the different states of existence and mytho-evolutionary history have influences on the present condition of the individual. For each incarnation, the Thetan is suffering a series of karmic experiences hidden on what is called the timetrack. Through the ritual practices of Scientology one can get insight into these matters, confront one's mythological past on one's individual timetrack, and thereby improve one's happiness, relationships, and general well-being, as well as find one's individual path to ultimate truth.

Scientology, inspired by, to name a few, Buddhism, Hinduism, Western Esotericism, science fiction, and psychotherapy, offers an individual salvation to its practitioners through a number of ideas and related practices by means of which individuals can recognize and change various existential conditions of their lives. The salvational path to ultimate spiritual salvation, called the Bridge to Total Freedom, represents an extensive soteriological hierarchy of ritual steps to which each individual is gradually initiated in a codified prescribed sequence. Through these initiations one can move oneself into higher and higher states of awareness and order of existence, toward an ultimate recognition of oneself as a spiritual being and of the universe.



As the new century begins, Scientology is probably the new religion most exposed to the controversy among anti-cultists and most discussed in the media in the Western world. The organization has been accused of controlling its parishioners, financially and mentally, as well as of having an opaque organizational structure and using shady financial transactions between the different organizational units. These accusations prompted a prolonged and thorough examination of the church's financial and organizational practices in the United States by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). When that examination was completed, in the mid-1990s, the IRS concluded that Scientology is, as it claims, a religion that works for charitable purposes, that the income is used for these purposes, and that the organization does not operate in order to damage public policy or society. Although the conclusion reached by the IRS was clear, it does not seem to have influenced the church's reputation in many countries of Europe. In most European countries Scientology is not recognized as a religion, although the church continuously strives to win recognition, and has done so in such places as Italy, Sweden, and South Africa. In several countries, among them France, Germany, and Russia, not only the organization but individual Scientologists are exposed to different kinds of more or less sophisticated restrictions and discrimination.

The Church of Scientology International supports the official Internet site given below, and there are numerous additional sites concerning the church sponsored by the church, its members, and its critics. Congregations and missions of the church are now located in more than 120 countries.

Address:

Church of Scientology International
6331 Hollywood Blvd., Ste. 1200
Los Angeles, CA 9002866329
www.scientology.org/home.html

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