

Scientology

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Scientology

Primary Disciplinary Field(s): Religion, Applied Philosophy, Social Movement

1. Core Definition

Scientology is a body of religious beliefs and practices established by the American author, L. Ron Hubbard, in 1952. Defined by its founder as the "science of knowledge," Scientology presents a comprehensive methodology for spiritual rehabilitation and human betterment. The movement posits that humans are immortal spiritual beings who have forgotten their true nature, and through structured practices, individuals can achieve a state of heightened spiritual awareness and capability. Although frequently contested, the Church of Scientology achieved official recognition as a tax-exempt religion in the United States in 1993, following decades of legal and public disputes regarding its status and practices.

At its heart, Scientology aims to address the sources of spiritual trauma and confusion that accumulate over countless lifetimes, thereby increasing spiritual freedom and intelligence. It emphasizes that problems in the physical world stem primarily from past pain and misunderstanding recorded in the mind, rather than external forces. This systematic approach to self-improvement and spiritual mastery forms the foundation of its global organizational structure, which operates through the Church of Scientology International and various affiliated organizations dedicated to education, social reform, and rehabilitation.

2. Etymology and Historical Development

The term **Scientology** is derived from a blend of Latin and Greek roots, reinforcing its purported commitment to empirical spiritual knowledge. Hubbard defined the name as combining the Latin word *scio*, which means "to know or distinguish," with the Greek word *logos*, meaning "the word" or "the science of." Thus, the name literally signifies "the knowing how to know" or "the science of knowledge."

Scientology emerged directly from Hubbard's earlier philosophical system, Dianetics, which was introduced in 1950. Dianetics focused primarily on the mind-body relationship and mental health, proposing techniques to eliminate psychosomatic illnesses. As Hubbard expanded these principles to encompass concepts of immortality, past lives, and the spiritual nature of man, the scope broadened, necessitating the creation of Scientology as a comprehensive religion. The formal establishment of the Church of Scientology in the early 1950s marked the transition from a self-help philosophy to a structured religious institution with clergy, doctrines, and organized services intended for spiritual advancement.

3. Key Theological Principles

Scientology's cosmology is based on several core tenets that distinguish it from many Western religions. The central figure in its theology is the **Thetan**, which is the spiritual, immortal identity of the individual--the "man himself." Scientologists believe that humans are fundamentally good, immortal spiritual beings who possess unlimited capabilities, although these capabilities are currently obscured by reactive trauma.

The primary principles upon which the faith is built include the affirmation that **man is an immortal spiritual being**. Furthermore, the doctrine asserts that individual **experiences extend well beyond a single lifetime**, implying a belief in reincarnation or the repeated physical existence of the Thetan. This expansive view of existence across vast timeframes is crucial to understanding the long-term spiritual goal of achieving full Thetan status. Finally, the religion maintains that **men have unlimited capabilities**, an awareness of which is regained through diligent application of the church's technology.

4. Doctrine of the Mind: Auditing and the State of Clear

A cornerstone of Scientology practice is the understanding of the mind, which is divided into two primary parts: the **analytic mind** and the **reactive mind**. The analytic mind is the part responsible for rational thought, decision-making, and creativity. Conversely, the reactive mind is an automatic, involuntary part that stores painful experiences, or "engrams," which are recorded during moments of pain and unconsciousness. These engrams, triggered by environmental factors, are believed to muddle the analytic mind and lead to irrational behavior and personal struggles.

The core religious practice used to address the reactive mind is called **auditing**. Auditing is a form of spiritual counseling conducted by trained auditors using a device known as the E-Meter. The process aims to locate and neutralize the spiritual impact of these stored engrams, thereby restoring the individual's spiritual capacity. The ultimate goal of auditing is to achieve the spiritual state of **Clear**. A person who is Clear is defined as being genuinely in touch with one's reality, free from the detrimental influence of the reactive mind, and possessing enhanced control over their thoughts and environment.

5. Controversies and Criticisms

The Church of Scientology has been associated with persistent and severe controversies throughout its history, leading to intense public scrutiny and debate regarding its nature and operations. One major area of contention revolves around its fundamental acceptability as a legitimate religion, particularly in countries outside the United States where its practices have sometimes been viewed as a commercial enterprise or a cult.

Furthermore, the organization maintains a fierce **opposition to psychology and psychiatry**, classifying them as destructive and ineffective practices. Critics often point to the strict secrecy surrounding advanced religious texts and symbols, which are only revealed to members who have reached high levels of spiritual progression and paid substantial fees. Serious allegations have also included reports of **brainwashing techniques**, the aggressive practice of harassing and attacking critics (known as Fair Game), and advocating for members to practice disconnection, which mandates that members sever all ties with family members or friends deemed antagonistic to the church.

These controversies are sometimes amplified by reports concerning the suspicious deaths of certain members and widely publicized defections. Despite these rumors and criticisms, the organization maintains high-profile supporters, including notable actors such as Tom Cruise and John Travolta, whose public advocacy provides continued visibility and cultural relevance to the movement.

6. Further Reading

[Scientology - Wikipedia](#)

[L. Ron Hubbard - Wikipedia](#)

[Dianetics - Wikipedia](#)

[Auditing \(Scientology\) - Wikipedia](#)

[Disconnection \(Scientology\) - Wikipedia](#)