

Scientology

Basic Facts

Founded

Either 1949, when L. Ron Hubbard created/discovered the idea of “Dianetics,” or 1954, when Hubbard founded the first Church of Scientology.

Key Figures

L. Ron Hubbard (1911-1986): Founder and writer of the church’s key documents. Well known as a science fiction novelist and Hollywood screenwriter.

David Miscavige (1960-): Current leader of the Church of Scientology. Official title: Chairman of the Board, Religious Technology Center

Geography

Founded in Los Angeles, when centers in most major U.S. cities and many countries throughout the world. The current headquarters is in Clearwater, Florida, with another major headquarters in Sussex, England.

Adherents

The Church of Scientology publicly claims more than 8 million members worldwide. However, independent researchers have identified far fewer active members - perhaps only 50,000.

Basic Beliefs

Scientology is a religion of self-improvement. There is not much discussion of God, heaven, worship, communal gatherings, etc., in the religion. It claims that it is compatible with other religions - that one could be both a Scientologist and a Christian, for example - but that claim is difficult to reconcile with Scientology’s basic beliefs about human beings.

Thetan: An individual, immortal spirit, which motives both mind and body. Each person is a combination of a mind, body, and thetan. Scientologists stress that a “thetan” should not be understood as a soul, however. Each thetan (i.e. person) can be and has been reborn countless numbers of times. The thetan retains *engrams* from each of its past lives. The initial goal for a Scientologist is to remove all engrams and become “Clear.”

Engram: A harmful impression on the mind, which causes stress, psychological distress, bad behavior, etc. Scientologists believe that engrams are constantly being formed on the mind, even when unconscious. Engrams can be removed through auditing.

Auditing: The closest thing to a worship serve or ritual found in Scientology. Auditing is a one-on-one procedure with an auditor (usually an employee of the Church of Scientology, but it could be a fellow Scientologist). The auditor connects the auditee to an E-meter (an electronic device that supposedly measures engrams) and conducts a long interview, removing engrams via the E-meter. Professional auditing sessions costs \$1,000 or more depending on the level of auditing required. The goal of auditing is to remove all engram sand become “Clear.”

Clear: The state of being free of engrams. Required to become an *Operating Thetan*. Scientologists believe that being “Clear” is necessary to reach one’s full potential.

Operating Thetan (OT): One who is Clear. According to Scientology, OTs can control matter, energy, space and time (MEST) after progressing through a series of additional training sessions and receiving additional secret revelations about Scientology. These are labeled by number (OT I, OT II, OT III, OT IV, etc.). Critics and ex-members of Scientology have said that becoming Clear and reaching these higher levels can cost anywhere from \$100,000 to \$250,000.

Controversies

Scientology is a very controversial religions, even by standards of other controversial religions.

Psychiatry

L. Ron Hubbard was extremely critical of psychiatrists, and Scientologists continue to criticize the entire discipline of psychiatry, especially the practice of prescribing drugs for mental problems. Scientology teaches that use of any drug is harmful, especially those that affect your mental state, whether they be illegal drugs like cocaine or legal antidepressants.

Relationships with Governments

Scientology has occasionally been banned in many countries (e.g. Great Britain, Australia, Germany) as an illegal “cult,” and Hubbard led the organization for many years from a fleet of ocean-going vessels because of legal troubles in the U.S. and other countries. (This is why Hubbard is frequently portrayed by the Church wearing a sort of admiral’s uniform.) The IRS initially denied Scientology tax-exempt status, claiming that it was a business, not a church. In 1979, Mary Hubbard (L. Ron’s wife) and several other leaders were sent to prison for 5 years on conspiracy against the government, after they were found wiretapping government officials, stealing government documents, and infiltrating the IRS. In 1993, the IRS and Scientology settled their legal disagreements, though many claim that it was the result of coercion and blackmail by the Church. Now, many critics claim that Scientology is actually given preferential treatment by the IRS - for example, by allowing Scientologists to claim expenses for religious education as a tax-deduction.¹

Treatment of Critics

Hubbard wrote that critics and ex-members of Scientology were “fair game” and could be subjected to any treatment necessary to neutralize them (including bodily harm and intimidation). Critics of Scientology say that disobedient members of the Church can be sentenced to months or years of hard labor aboard the Church’s fleet of ships. Family members of Scientologists report being treated to “disconnects,” in which their children or relatives cut off all contact with them. For example, after being released from prison, Mary Hubbard was cut out of Scientology completely because she was seen as a disruptive influence. Journalists who have attempted to write about Scientology claim that they and their families have been followed and harassed by Scientology operatives.²

¹ For a February 2008 case bringing up this issue, see <http://tinyurl.com/32jtuo>.

² A BBC journalist reports his experiences here: <http://tinyurl.com/yvct8b>