

# SCIENTOLOGY AND CONTEMPORARY DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Beginning in the middle of the current century, Western societies have observed a renewed interest in the diversity of expressions of religious phenomena, Such interest is due to:

- the rise or development of new religions, particularly in the United States of America (such as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Church of Scientology, the Mission of Divine Light);
- the extension to new geographical areas of religions already established in others (such as some Eastern religions in America and Europe; Pentecostalism, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Jehovah's Witnesses from the United States in South America and Europe; the Santeria from Cuba to the United States and countries of Central America; and the Umbanda from Brazil to Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, Chile and to a lesser extent the United States and Europe);
- the “revivals” of the established religions (as in the charismatic reformations in evangelism and in Catholicism, the rise of spiritualist Catholic groups, etc.) and
- the rise of a diverse, uncentralized spiritual subculture (comprised of what has been given the name New Age).

The interest in religious diversity revived old discussions within the social sciences which resulted in more accurate definitions of religious phenomena. Distinct groups of social



scientists have opted for different types of definitions often responding to their immediate theoretical interests.

These different types of definitions include:

*Substantive definitions* of religion which attempt to characterize “from within” or in terms of the intrinsic significance;

*Comparative definitions* of religion which approach it by distinction from other systems of meanings;

*Functional definitions* of religion which characterize it in terms of its consequences over other spheres of social and personal life;

*Analytical definitions* of religion which characterize it by the distinct aspects which religious phenomena encompass; and

*Emic definitions* of religion which consider religious those phenomena which the members of its society or its institutions consider to be such.

From the viewpoint of the social sciences, the task of establishing whether a body of beliefs and practices constitutes a religion requires that one take heed of the diversity of definitions of religion in the current discussion in these disciplines.

In the following pages we propose to establish if Scientology constitutes a religion, taking into account the diverse definitions by which this term is currently characterized by the social sciences.

## I. SCIENTOLOGY AND THE SUBSTANTIVE DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION

The *substantive* definitions of religion intend to characterize it in accordance with the *intrinsic traits* which the religious experiences have for those who practice it. Defined as religious from this perspective are *those experiences which individuals perceive as extraordinary, transcendent and clearly different from the quotidian reality which is perceived the majority of the time.*



Those who have such experiences cannot explain them through the concepts and theories which are normally used to define and explain the events of their lives. Experience in these circumstances, however, appears to them as undeniable, more real than that which is perceived in the everyday world. Peter Berger says:

“In the context of religious experience, the reality of daily life loses in dramatic form its status as supreme reality. It appears, to the contrary, as the anteroom of another reality, one of a drastically different nature and nevertheless of immense importance for the individual. Through this change in this perception of reality all worldly activity of quotidian reality is seen as radically reduced in importance, trivialized—in the words of Ecclesiastes, reduced to *vanity*.” (Berger 1974, 130–131)

From this viewpoint, religion is defined as the kingdom of the extraordinary, the sacred, “the other.” In other words, religion is the sphere of activity and human thought which draws in turn on experiences which put the individual in contact with something inexplicable, marvelous, mysterious and majestic which cannot be explained through the rationality and theories through which one is aware of the events of his life. Religious institutions are those which act to regularize, define and explain religious experiences.

To ask oneself if Scientology fits the existing definitions of religions is the equivalent of investigating if it revolves around, regulates or explains some type of extraordinary experience which puts the individual in contact with a reality of another order, marvelous and surprising. The answer is, according to my understanding, affirmative.

Beyond the resolution of problems and the accomplishment of quotidian objectives, the road of Scientology promises, to one who applies himself to the understanding of its practices, gradual advancement to a lasting happiness and new states of consciousness never dreamed possible. The culmination of such states of consciousness constitutes an experience of total freedom in which the individual would have the capacity to control the physical universe, composed of matter, energy, space and time, and reach a total omniscience. The awareness of life and death and awareness of the universe would therefore be clearly evident to one. The Church of Scientology states:

“Man consists of three parts: the body, little more than a machine; the mind divided into analytical and reactive, which computes and contains little more than a collection of pictures; and the thetan, life itself, the spirit which animates the body.... The point

being, the thetan is superior to both body and mind... But what are his limits? How high can he ultimately ascend?

“From the search for these answers came the subject of Scientology, and the door opened to the full realization of spiritual potential.

“That state is called Operating Thetan... Although without mass, motion, wavelength or location in space or time, the thetan is nonetheless capable of accomplishing *anything*. Thus, the Operating Thetan or OT may be defined as one who is at ‘knowing and willing cause over life, thought, matter, energy, space and time.’

“It is not for nothing, then, that Scientology has been described as realizing man’s most basic hope for spiritual freedom—by stripping away the accumulated impediments of the ages and returning to our native state, with all the abilities that are inherently ours.” (*The Scientology Handbook*, page lxxxv.)

A publication of the Church describes in the following manner the results that can be obtained by reaching the ultimate level of Operating Thetan:

“These truths are essential to your survival as an OT and your ability to achieve total spiritual freedom. Your concepts of time, the future and the past suddenly shift and you will experience an incomparable new level of stability and knowingness that will stay with you for this and future lifetimes.” (*Source Magazine* 99:21)

The difference between this experience of freedom and omniscience on the one hand and the common experience of man is clear. Furthermore, the doctrine of Scientology holds that he who follows the road it has laid out can achieve the experience of “exteriorization” in which the *thetan* (spirit) leaves the body and exists in a form independent of the flesh. Upon exteriorization the person would be able to see without the eyes of the body, hear without ears, and feel without hands, achieving the certainty that he is himself (the thetan) and not his body. According to Scientology, exteriorization of the thetan makes it obvious that the spirit is immortal and is endowed with abilities which exceed those which one could predict through quotidian reasoning:

“The thetan is able to leave the body and exist independent of the flesh. Exteriorized, the person can see without the body’s eyes, hear without the body’s ears and feel without the

body's hands. Man previously had very little understanding of this detachment from his mind and body. With the act of exteriorization attainable in Scientology a person gains the certainty he is himself and not his body." (*What Is Scientology?* 1992:147)

In summary, like the large number of religions which internationally constitute the "religious ferment" of the last several decades (the religions of Eastern origin, Pentecostalism and the Afro-American religions, among others) religious experiences which are not ordinary and not quotidian have a central place in Scientology. As in other religions, such experiences are on the one hand motivated, regulated and interpreted by doctrine and on the other hand are taken as proof of the correctness of the cosmic vision held by the group. Therefore, Scientology fits the substantive definitions of religion in use in the social sciences at the present time.

## II. SCIENTOLOGY AND THE COMPARATIVE DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION

Some authors have approached a definition of religion distinguishing it from other systems of meaning (understood to be such bodies of thought or theoretical tradition which give meaning to reality and to life experience). Thus, for example, Stark and Gluck (1965) distinguish between the "humanist perspectives" which constitute attempts to make significant the life of man from religions which, to the contrary, assert that they have discovered or established paths to discover the *true* meaning of life. The difference between some and other systems is that in the case of the humanist perspectives one looks intentionally to grant to life a meaning which is agreed upon and relatively free-willed: in the second it is presumed that the same has a *pre-existent* meaning to that which the individual man or social group wishes to give it and that it is possible to agree to the stated meaning. On this subject, Reginald Bibby says:

"Religious perspectives imply the possibility that our existence has a meaning which precedes that which we as human beings decide to give it. By contrast, the humanist perspective leaves to one side the search for the meaning of existence in favor of a new preoccupation with giving meaning to existence." (Bibby 1983, 103)

From this perspective, to ask if Scientology constitutes a religion is to investigate if it postulates a meaning for the life of man which *pre-exists and is considered true and immutable*. In relation to this point we can note that according to Scientology, man is defined as a spiritual being. It is affirmed that man does not *have* a spirit but that a spirit is what the individual

truly *is*. This spirit is called a “thetan,” a name taken from the Greek letter *theta*. It is asserted that the individual exists as himself as a spiritual being. The artistic capacity, the fortitude of the person and his individual character are all manifestations of the spiritual nature of the individual. The thetan constitutes the person himself.

According to Scientology, man is composed of a body, organized physical substance or composition; a mind which consists of pictures, recordings of thoughts, conclusions, decisions, observations and perceptions; and the thetan. The thetan is conceived as the creator of things. He has animation and life even without the mind and body and uses the mind as a system of control between himself and the physical universe. Scientologists maintain that man is a thetan and the thetan is the source of all creation, is immortal and is life itself, with potentially infinite creativity and, if not part of the physical universe, having the potential capacity to control this universe composed of matter, energy, space and time.

On the other hand, Scientology explicitly asserts that training in its doctrine furnishes a comprehension of man, his potentials and the difficulties with which he is faced which goes much further than what is taught in the humanities or social sciences. With the knowledge of the principles of Scientology the person would be able to understand, for example, why some people have success while others fail, why one man is happy while another is not, and why some relationships are stable and others fall apart. Training in Scientology would permit one who would apply himself to know the mystery of life and to attain an absolute comprehension of its immortal nature. Through the teachings of L Ron Hubbard disseminated by the Church, the individual can achieve the development of all his abilities across the “Eight dynamics” postulated in its cosmic vision. These dynamics, or areas through which human activity is expressed, are:

1. The individual; 2. Family and sex; 3. Groups; 4. Mankind; 5. All life forms; 6. The physical universe; 7. Spirituality; and 8. The infinite or Supreme Being. (*Scientology o-8: The Book of Basics*, pages 83–93)

The object of the teachings of the Church is to increase the level of awareness of the individual so that he can control and influence all of the dynamics of life.

In summary, like most religions, Scientology claims to have revealed the mystery of life. It does not propound an arbitrary meaning for the life of man, but claims to have discovered the *true* meaning. In doing so, it differentiates from humanist perspectives: It does not propound or suggest ethical norms and values to make human life meaningful. On the contrary, *it claims*

*to truly know what is man and what is the meaning of his life.* At the same time, and in spite of using a vocabulary similar to the sciences, it can be clearly differentiated from these, given that it does not intend to describe how things happen, it does not formulate questions, nor present a hypothesis for its opposition and eventual modification. Rather, it claims to have discovered the *true causes* and invites one to share in said knowledge.

### III. SCIENTOLOGY AND THE FUNCTIONAL DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION

Another class of definitions characterizes religion by the consequences that it holds in other areas of life. The first *functional* definitions of religion came out of the work of Emile Durkheim and put the stress on the feelings of solidarity which religious ceremonies evoked and its effects on social cohesion and community unity. These definitions have been criticized on the basis that, on the one hand, there frequently exist multiple religions in the same society putting in doubt the cohesive function of religion for the community as a whole and, on the other hand, other non-religious symbols and rituals, such as those which belong to the nation, the state or ethnic group, can serve the same function of creating ties of solidarity and community sentiment.

Actually a certain number of social scientists now define religion by its consequences not in social life but in the personal life of individuals. These authors define religion as “*a combination of forms and symbolic acts which relate the individual to the ultimate conditions of his existence*” (Bellah 1964:358) or as “*a system of beliefs and practices through which a group of people faces the fundamental problems of life.*” (Yinger 1970:7) Such fundamental problems would include: the perception of injustice, the experience of suffering and the awareness of what life lacks in meaning and purpose. Religions propound two types of answers to such problems of humanity. On one side, they would offer explanations for them giving them meaning. On the other, they would propound methods and programs of action directed to overcome these problems.

From the current functionalist perspective a religion is therefore a combination of beliefs giving meaning to fundamental problems such as injustice, suffering and the search for the meaning of life and a combination of practices through which such problems are faced with the intent to overcome them. To ask if Scientology fits this definition is therefore to investigate if it presents a combination of practices designed to overcome these fundamental problems of life and a system of beliefs that serve to explain them.

In this respect it is possible to observe, in the first place, that the *central practice of Scientology, auditing, is presented in effect as a way to overcome suffering*. It affirms that through active and voluntary participation in auditing one's ability to face the problems of existence, resolve them and achieve each time higher levels of consciousness and spiritual well-being, will be improved. Scientology services strive to raise the individual to a point in which he is capable of putting the factors of his own life in order and resolving his problems. According to Scientology the tensions of life cause the individual to fix his attention on the material world reducing his awareness of himself as a spiritual being and of his environment. This reduction of awareness would have as a consequence that problems would arise, such as difficulty in relations with others, suffering, illness and unhappiness. The objective of Scientology is to revert the reduction of awareness, awakening the individual. It therefore propounds solutions to the fundamental problems of life through procedures which cause the individual to increase his awareness and freedom and to rehabilitate his decency, power and basic abilities. Individuals who are more aware and alert would be capable of better comprehension and greater capacity to handle their lives. Through auditing and training in Scientology, people would come to know that life is something valuable and that they could live satisfactory lives in harmony with others.

Scientology postulates that through its practice and training persons will free themselves from suffering such as irrational fears and psychosomatic illnesses, become more calm, more in a state of equilibrium, more energetic and communicative, will repair and revitalize their relations with others, achieve their personal goals, discard their doubts and inhibitions and acquire certainty and confidence in themselves, feel joy and clearly understand how to achieve happiness. In summary, Scientology presents itself as a means of overcoming suffering and the inequalities of individual ability.

Another of the elements which is included in the current functional definitions of religion is the giving of a meaning or explanation for the fundamental problems of life. Through the explanation of the reasons for human suffering, most religions alleviate in an indirect manner the tensions which such suffering produces. For those who are followers of such religions the problems of life become less perceived as senseless, unjust and inexplicable through acquiring a meaning. The doctrinal explanations for suffering give a foundation at the same time for the justification of religious practices designed to overcome such suffering: the postulating of the causes of the problems of life may be regarded as the basis for the development of programs of actions to overcome them.

In this respect it can be observed that *Scientology also propounds answers to human suffering by giving an explanation*. The doctrine of Scientology expounds particularly in describing the

reasons for suffering. According to this doctrine the individual is basically good and happy and the reasons for suffering are found in the “reactive mind” which is clearly differentiated from the analytical mind and is made up of “engrams.” In *Dianetics: The Original Thesis*, the founder L. Ron Hubbard states:

“Man is not a reactive animal. He is capable of self-determinism. He has willpower. He ordinarily has high analytical ability. He is rational and he is happy and integrated only when he is his own basic personality.

“The most desirable state in an individual is complete self-determinism....

“The *reactive mind* consists of a collection of experiences received during an unanalytical moment which contains pain and actual or conceived antagonism to the survival of the individual....

“When injury or illness supplants the analytical mind, producing what is commonly known as ‘unconsciousness,’ and when physical pain and antagonism to the survival of the organism are present, an *engram* is received by the individual....

“By stripping the reactive mind of its past painful content, the analytical mind may be placed in complete command of the organism.

The moment a man or a group becomes possessed of this ability, it becomes possessed of self-determinism. So long as these possess reactive minds, irrationalities will persist.” (Hubbard, pages 34, 39, 40, 72)

In Scientology, therefore, the human being is basically good, happy and integrated and the root of his unhappiness is found in engrams. Thus, the practice of auditing is propounded as the only suitable means of removing the individual’s engrams and enabling him to become a “Clear,” which is to say, returning him to his state as “basic individual.” Both terms mean: “the unaberrated self in complete integration and in a state of highest possible rationality. A *Clear* is one who has become the *basic individual* through therapy.... The basic individual is invariably responsive in all the dynamics and is essentially good.... The virtues of the basic individual are innumerable. His intentional vices and destructive dramatizations are non-existent. He is cooperative, constructive and possessed of purpose. In short, he is in close alignment with that ideal which Mankind recognizes as an ideal. This is a necessary part of an auditor’s working knowledge, since deviations from it denote the existence of aberration

and such departures are unnatural and enforced and are no part of the self-determinism of the individual.” (Hubbard, pages 33–34)

In summary, Scientology furnishes an answer to human suffering giving it, like the majority of religious traditions, an explanation and postulating, from this explanation, a means of solution. The explanation of human suffering lies in “engrams.” Engrams are described as unknown, powerful and influential mental image pictures which have mass and energy. The main solution proposed to overcome suffering consists of the practice of auditing which permits the location and conquest of engrams. Auditing is presented as a way to overcome suffering since it postulates that through the active and voluntary participation of the individual he will succeed in bettering his ability to face the problems of his existence, resolve them and achieve continually higher levels of awareness and spiritual well-being.

Scientology also *gives an answer to the experience of injustice* when perceived as an unequal distribution of abilities among men, postulating that the loss of abilities is due, at least in part to transgressions and irresponsibilities of the past. At the same time it gives a solution to this loss presenting itself as a way to regain these abilities. Additionally, Scientology *provides an answer to the experience of life lacking meaning and the experience of death* postulating that man is an immortal spiritual being whose experiences extend beyond one life and affirming that death is a transition through which the individual makes his passage while continuing to be aware. As stated by the Church of Scientology:

“Needless to say, ethics is a subject the Scientologist takes very seriously. As he moves up the Bridge and becomes more and more himself, he likewise grows more ethical, but he also views it as a matter of personal responsibility that extends well beyond this life. For unlike the materialist who believes death to be an end to life, conscience and accountability, the Scientologist sees it as a transition through which one carries his past—a past for which one continues to be accountable.

“He also knows that the abilities he is regaining were, in part, lost because of transgressions and irresponsibilities. Thus, honesty, integrity, trust and concern for his fellows are more than just words. They are principles to live by.” (*The Scientology Handbook*, lxxxviii)

Consequently, Scientology fits the concept of religion as it is currently defined from a functionalist perspective constituting a body of beliefs by means of which a group of people



gives meaning to fundamental problems such as injustice, suffering and the search for the meaning of life and a body of practices through which they confront such problems and intend to overcome them.

#### IV. SCIENTOLOGY AND THE ANALYTICAL DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION

Another of the forms in which religion is currently defined in the social sciences is in the *analytic* manner, that is, characterizing it by the different ways in which the religion manifests itself. From this perspective there is considered to exist considerable consensus among all religions regarding the forms through which the religious person expresses his religiosity, by which it becomes possible to establish those aspects which constitute such religiosity. These aspects include:

- a) Sharing the beliefs which constitute the body of doctrine of the group;
- b) Participating in rituals and acts of devotion;
- c) Experiencing direct contact with ultimate reality;
- d) Acquiring religious information and
- e) Experiencing changes or results in quotidian life derived from the other aspects of religiosity (Stark and Gluck 1985).

From this point of view to ask if Scientology constitutes a religion is the equivalent of investigating if the Church of Scientology as an institution expects that its adherents will be religious, which is to say that they manifest religiosity in the different ways which are considered universal.

##### IV.I. SHARING A BODY OF DOCTRINE

It has been maintained that religious institutions expect their adherents to share their doctrinal principles. (Stark and Gluck 1985:256) In this respect it can be observed that the Church of Scientology propounds an interrelated whole clearly structured so that its adherents acquire its body of doctrine. In effect, the practice of Scientology is composed in equal parts of auditing and training in its principles. The Church affirms that while auditing permits one to see how something happens, training teaches why.

The material used in the courses of training consists of books, publications, films and recorded lectures of the founder of the Church which are studied in a pre-arranged order. This material has the equivalent status of scriptures of traditional religions: It is not interpreted or explained.

On the contrary, considerable attention is placed on the disciple receiving the word of the founder in its “pure form.” Scientologists believe that Mr. Hubbard found an exact and workable path to spiritual salvation: If following one of the procedures of the founder of Scientology does not achieve the expected results it is because it was not understood or applied correctly. Thus, the possibility that there could exist an error in the original version of the word of Mr. Hubbard is not considered.

Those who direct training in Scientology are called “supervisors” and are recognized as experts in the technology of study and skilled at finding and resolving the obstacles that the students may encounter. The role of the supervisor is also defined as ensuring that the doctrine is properly imparted and does not produce different versions or divergent interpretations. The supervisor does not give lectures and does not propound to the students his own version of the subject. It is scrupulously forbidden that the supervisor propound any type of verbal interpretation of the materials to prevent any alterations of the original.

#### IV.II. PARTICIPATION IN RITUALS AND ACTS OF DEVOTION

Another of the forms through which religions seem to expect that their adherents demonstrate their religiosity is through participation in rituals and acts of devotion. In this respect, it is possible to observe in the first place that the Church of Scientology celebrates the same rituals as other religious institutions such as Sunday services, weddings, funerals and naming ceremonies for newborn children.

However, these are not the only activities which are ritually structured in Scientology. Auditing, the central practice of Scientology, is a ritual activity in the sense that an anthropologist gives to this term: a highly structured procedure which fits rigorous rules and is repeated meticulously. In effect, auditing is accomplished through a series of carefully established steps developed by the founder of the Church which are to be followed without variation. For the Church of Scientology, auditing demands a precise path, an exact route to reach higher states of awareness. Auditing is defined as a precise activity, precisely codified and which follows exact procedures:

“Auditing uses *processes*—*exact* sets of questions asked or directions given by an auditor to help a person find out things about himself and improve his condition. There are many, many different auditing processes, and each one improves the individual’s ability to confront and handle part of his existence. When the specific objective of any

one process is attained, the process is ended and another can then be run to address a different part of the person's life.

“An unlimited number of questions *could*, of course, be asked—which might or might not help a person. The accomplishment in Dianetics and Scientology is that L. Ron Hubbard isolated the *exact* questions and directions to invariably bring about improvement.” (*What Is Scientology?* 1992:156)

It can thus be observed that auditing is an exact ritual and the repeated participation in this rite is a condition for an individual to be considered a Scientologist.

#### IV.III. DIRECT EXPERIENCE OF ULTIMATE REALITY

It has been suggested that most traditional religions expect that their adherents will reach at some moment a more or less direct experience of ultimate reality. This dimension of religiosity relates to the substantive definitions of religion and we have expounded on this in reviewing the substantive definitions of religion. We therefore mentioned that religious experiences which are not ordinary or quotidian have a central place in Scientology. As with other religions such experiences are encouraged in accordance with and interpreted under the doctrines of the religion and are also taken as evidence of the correctness of the group's cosmic vision.

Scientology presents itself as a gradual, clearly defined and certain route to improve awareness guiding individuals from a condition of spiritual blindness to the happiness of spiritual existence. It promises to its adherents that such increased awareness will enable them ultimately to become aware of their own immortality, achieve total freedom, omniscience and understand directly the meaning of life, death and the universe.

The stated aim of Scientology is to achieve the complete and total rehabilitation of the innate capabilities of the individual as an immortal spiritual being. Such capabilities would put him at cause, with full knowledge, over matter, energy, space, time, thought and life. By reaching this state, the individual would be capable of a direct understanding of the infinite:

“At the level of Operating Thetan one deals with the individual's own *immortality* as a spiritual being. One deals with the thetan himself in relationship to eternity; not to the eternity that lies *behind* him, but to the eternity which lies *ahead*.” (*What Is Scientology?* 1992:222)

We can note therefore that the Church of Scientology expects that its adherents, through their participation in its practices and training in its doctrine, attain a gradual improvement of awareness resulting ultimately in a direct experience of ultimate reality.

#### IV.IV. RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

The analytical definitions of religion hold that religious institutions expect that their adherents have a modicum of information about the basic postulates of their faith, its rites, its scriptures and traditions. In relation to this expectation we note that the practice of Scientology consists of equal parts of auditing and training. The commitment expected of its adherents includes that they acquire knowledge of its principal doctrines. In this respect the Church states:

“Through auditing one becomes free. This freedom *must be* augmented by knowledge of how to *stay* free. Scientology contains the anatomy of the reactive mind in its axioms and the discipline and know-how necessary to handle and control the laws of life. The practice of Scientology, then, is composed in equal parts of auditing and training in Scientology principles which includes the technology of their application. Knowing the mechanisms by which spiritual freedom can be lost is itself a freedom and places one outside their influence.

“Auditing lets one see *how* something happened, training teaches one *why*.” (*What Is Scientology?* 1992:164)

It can be noted therefore that, like most religious traditions, imparting the teachings of the movement is viewed favorably by the Church of Scientology. The acquisition of religious information is assured by the same doctrine through the symbolic reward for those who grasp for it: Whoever acquires knowledge of its principles can control the laws of life and be free of the dangers which threaten his spiritual freedom.

#### IV.V. CONSEQUENCES IN QUOTIDIAN LIFE

It has been noted that most religious institutions expect that their religious beliefs, the participation in rituals, religious experience and knowledge of the principal doctrines will have consequences in the daily lives of their adherents. As discussed in referring to the functional definitions of religion, Scientology postulates that through its practice and training people free themselves from irrational fears, psychosomatic illnesses, become more calm, achieve a better state of equilibrium, energy, communicate better, repair and revitalize their relationships

with others, achieve personal goals, discard their doubts and inhibitions acquiring confidence in themselves, feel joy and clearly understand how to achieve happiness.

Another change which the Church of Scientology expects of its adherents is that they will help others to change conditions that they wish to improve, urging them to become auditors:

“The need for auditors is great since it is plain that individuals can be salvaged only one at a time. Unlike congregational religions, this salvation ultimately occurs in Scientology in the one-on-one relationship between auditor and preclear. Many Scientologists train to become auditors, and anyone who wishes to help his fellow man can do the same. But of no less importance, one can gain greater skill in handling life than he ever thought possible. There is no more worthwhile purpose than helping one’s fellows and no better way to accomplish this purpose than by becoming an auditor. Auditors apply what they have learned to help others with auditing and to change conditions wherever they find that conditions need improving.

“This is the mission of the trained Scientologist, and it is in his understanding, his compassion and his skill that the dreams of a better world reside.” (*What Is Scientology?* 1992:169)

It can be observed therefore that like most religious institutions, the Church of Scientology expects that sharing its beliefs, participating in its rituals, directly experiencing ultimate reality and knowledge of its principal doctrines will have consequences in the daily lives of its adherents. These consequences include improvement of the ability to handle their own lives, improvement of their own abilities and an improved disposition and ability to help others.

In summary, it can be observed that the Church of Scientology expects that its adherents will be religious persons, in the sense that the analytic definitions of religion give to this term. In effect: It provides a framework so that its adherents may share in its principal doctrines and expects that those who participate achieve a direct experience of ultimate reality, acquiring information on the principles of their faith and experiencing consequences in their daily lives. Therefore, per the analytical definitions of religion, the Church of Scientology constitutes a religious institution, since its expectations in relation to its adherents correspond to what such institutions expect of religious individuals.

## V. SCIENTOLOGY AND THE EMIC DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION

The “emic” point of view in anthropology is that which gives attention to the classification of ideas of those who participate in a given culture. This is opposed to the “etic” point of view which is that derived from the conceptual classifications of one of the theories of the social sciences. Until this point we have employed definitions of religion taken from the theoretical viewpoint, which is to say from the viewpoint of social scientists who participate in current discussion regarding what constitutes a religion and what are its characteristics. In this section we will consider the *emic* point of view of the participants in society.

To ask if Scientology is a religion from the *emic* point of view is to ask if it is considered as such in the specific cultural contexts in which it conducts its activities. As the Church of Scientology is an international institution, these contexts are found in many countries. Because these are complex societies this includes numerous subgroups: The Scientologists themselves, governmental institutions and students of religious subjects are included among those who have made public pronouncements on this subject.

In the first place it is possible to observe that *Scientologists themselves* present Scientology as a religion in their writing and public documents. (See for example, *The What Is Scientology?* 1993:1, 7, 141, 147; LRH Book Compilations of *What Is Scientology?* 1994:iii).

With regard to *governmental institutions*, Scientology has been found to be, for legal purposes and tax exemption, a religion in the countries in which it has carried out its activities. The governmental organizations which have explicitly declared that Scientology is a religion include:

### ***Organizations of the Executive Branch:***

Ministry of Education and Culture of Bavaria, 1973; Department of State of the United States, 1974; Social Security Agency of Angers, France, 1985; National Office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, United States, 1986; District of Schöneberg, Berlin, Germany, 1989

### ***Tax Organizations:***

Department of Administration and Finance of Zürich, Switzerland, 1974; Tax Department of Florida, United States, 1974; Australian Tax Office, 1978; California

Franchise Tax Board, 1981; Department of Taxes and Customs of Canada, 1982; Tax Service of Pau, France, 1987; Corporate Tax Inspector of Amsterdam, Holland, 1988; Utah Tax Commission, United States, 1988; New York City Tax Commission, United States, 1988; Federal Office of Finances, Germany, 1990; Tax Commission of Monza, Italy, 1990; Tax Commission of Lecco, Italy, 1991; Internal Revenue Service of the United States, 1993; California Employment Development Department, United States, 1994.

***Judicial Bodies:***

Appeals Court of Washington, D.C., United States, 1969; Court of the District of Columbia, United States, 1971; Court of St. Louis, Missouri, United States, 1972; Australian Court of Perth, Australia, 1970; Court of District of Stuttgart, 1976; Court of Munich, Germany, 1979; Appeals Court of Paris, 1980; Appeals Court of the State of Oregon, 1982; District Court of the United States in Washington, 1983; Superior Court of Massachusetts, 1983; Attorney General's Office of Australia, 1973; High Court of Australia, 1983; District Court of Central California, United States, 1984; Appeals Court of Vancouver, 1984; Court of the District of Stuttgart, Germany, 1985; Appeals Court of Munich, Germany, 1985; Court of Padua, Italy, 1985; Court of Bologna, Italy, 1986; Regional Court of Hamburg, Germany, 1988; Court of Berlin, Germany, 1988; Court of Frankfurt, Germany, 1989; Court of Munich, Germany, 1989; Court of Hannover, Germany, 1990; Court of Milan, Italy, 1991; Administrative Court of Hamburg, Germany, 1992; Superior Court of Germany, 1992; Court of New York, 1994; Tax Court of Italy, 1994; District Court of Zürich, Switzerland, 1994; Supreme Court of Italy, 1995.

Finally, *studies carried out by social scientists* usually refer to Scientology as a religion, considering it part of the growing group of *new religious movements*.

One of the first studies on Scientology, an article by Harriet Whitehead in the book *Religious Movements in Contemporary America*, places it within the “growing collection of religious movements totally outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition.” (1974:547)

In a similar manner, the monograph by Roy Wallis, “The Road to Total Freedom: a Sociological Analysis of Scientology” (1977) which analyzes the historical development and doctrinal and organizational transformations which occurred during the transition from Dianetics into Scientology, clearly places the object of the study within the new religious groups. Wallis considers Scientology to be a religion particularly adapted for

the religious market of contemporary Western society—as Wilson would state years later. The emphasis on the benefits which the members will receive from their religious practice in this world, the utilization of distinctive rhetoric and a bureaucratic and rationally constructed organization reflect contemporary Western values, since “the rationalization of life in the world has brought the institutions through which salvation is obtained to rationalism.” (1976:246)

Frank Flinn, in his paper “Scientology as Technological Buddhism” included in the volume *Alternatives to American Mainline Churches*, affirms that Scientology is “the most interesting of the *new religious movements*” (1983:89) and because it “bears many close resemblances to Buddhism” (93).

In a chapter of his 1990 book *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism*, Bryan Wilson affirms that Scientology would be a “secularized religion” and then shows that it fits a list of 20 items usually characteristic of religions, suggesting that “Scientology must indeed be regarded as a religion, and this in respect of the metaphysical teachings it canvasses (and not because it describes its organization as a church), but it is a religion which mirrors many of the preoccupations of contemporary society.” (1990:288) He completes his analysis asking: “If one had to propose what would be a modern religion, perhaps Scientology would not appear as fitting in the secularized world in which it operates, and from which it takes the greater part of its organized structure and therapeutic preoccupations.” (1990:288)

Scientology is included as one of the groups reviewed in some of the most important books studying new religious movements: *New Religious Movements: a Practical Introduction* by Professor Eileen Barker (1992) as well as in both the *Encyclopedia of American Religions* and *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America* by J. Gordon Melton (1992). It is also discussed, together with other new religious groups, in *Cult Controversies: Societal Responses to the New Religious Movements* by James Beckford (1985); in *Cults, Converts and Charisma: the Sociology of New Religious Movements* by Thomas Robbins (1991) and in *L'Europe delle Nuove Religioni* by Massimo Introvigne and Jean-Francois Mayer (1993).

In summary, adopting an experiential point of view, we can observe that Scientology has been considered a religion in the cultural contexts in which it has carried out its activities, including the pronouncements of government agencies, by members of the Church and by social scientists conducting studies of new religious movements.



## VI. CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the analysis undertaken here, we can conclude that Scientology is a religion from all perspectives which exist in the current discussion of the definition of this term in the social sciences and which we have reviewed in the present work.

Like most religions which internationally constitute the “religious ferment” of the last several decades (the religions of Eastern origin, Pentecostalism, and the Afro-American religions among others) religious experiences which are not ordinary and not quotidian have a central place in Scientology. Just as with the other religions such experiences occur in part motivated, regulated and interpreted by doctrine and in part taken as proof of the correctness of the cosmic vision held by the group. Consequently, Scientology fits the *substantive* definitions of religion currently in use in the social sciences.

Scientology also fits the concept of religions as it is currently defined from the *functionalist* perspective, constituting a body of beliefs through which a group of people give meaning to fundamental problems such as injustice, suffering and the search for the meaning of life and together with practices through which they face these problems and intend to surmount them.

Like most religions, Scientology claims to have revealed the mystery of life. It does not propound an avowedly arbitrary meaning for the life of man; it claims to have discovered the true meaning. In doing so, it differentiates itself from the humanist perspectives: It does not propose or suggest values and ethical norms to give meaning to human life; on the contrary it claims to know what man *truly* is and what is *the* meaning of his life. At the same time, and because of using a similar vocabulary to the sciences, it is clearly different from them, given that it does not intend exclusively to describe how things happen, does not formulate questions nor present hypotheses for their opposition and eventual modification but asserts to have discovered the true causes and offers to share its knowledge. Therefore, Scientology fits the *comparative* definitions which characterize religion, distinguishing it from the humanist perspectives.

The Church of Scientology expects that its adherents become religious persons, in the sense which the *analytical* definitions of religion give to this term. In effect: It provides an interrelated system of beliefs so that its adherents may share its principal doctrines and expects that they

will participate in ritual activities, achieving a direct experience of ultimate reality, acquire information about the principles of their faith and experience results in their everyday lives. Therefore per the analytical definitions of religion, the Church of Scientology constitutes a religious institution, since its expectations with respect to its adherents correspond to what such institutions expect of religious people.

Finally, adopting an *emic* point of view, it is observed that Scientology is considered a religion in most of the cultural contexts where it has carried out its activities, including the pronouncements of governmental institutions, of the members of the Church and of social scientists who have studied new religious movements.

In this paper we have considered the correspondence between Scientology and the modern definitions of religion employed in the field of the social sciences. However, Scientology also seems to fit the definitions of religion considered “classical” in both anthropology and sociology.

In the field of sociology, Max Weber, considered the “father” of the sociology of religion, preferred not to define the term (Weber 1964:1). Rather, he minutely classified the known religions into a large number of different types divided according to a large number of criteria. Scientology seems to correspond to a certain type of the “salvation religions” which are presented as a path to the freedom of the spirit from reincarnation or the cycle of birth and death (Weber 1964:146). Among salvation religions Scientology would be classified according to Weberian criteria among those which:

- have been founded by a prophet who instituted a doctrine directed to making possible the salvation of mankind (Weber 1964:46)
- possess systemized rituals in a body of comprehensive laws the knowledge of which requires special training (Weber 1964:154)
- affirm that salvation can be reached through a religious endeavor directed at self-perfection (Weber 1964:156)
- have developed a procedure intended to reach the religious consecration of the personality (Weber 1964:156) and

- assert that the consecration of the personality implies the acquisition of superhuman powers and the possibility of accomplishing superhuman actions (Weber 1964:157).

The correspondence between Scientology and this type of salvation religion specified in accordance with the categories of Weber is clearly expressed in the following paragraph of the *What Is Scientology?*:

“Contrary to those who teach that man cannot improve and that some seventy years in a body are all one can expect, there are states higher than that of mortal man. The state of OT does exist and people do attain it. Like any other gain in Scientology it is attained gradiently....”

“Some of the miracles of life have been exposed to full view for the first time ever on the OT levels. Not the least of these miracles is knowing immortality and freedom from the cycle of birth and death.

“The way is true and plainly marked. All one needs to do is to place his feet upon the first rung of the ladder and ascend to Clear and then walk upward to the level of Operating Thetan.

“Auditing enables the individual to span the distance from *Homo sapiens*, with his drugs, his pains, his problems, upsets and fears, to higher states and freedom as a spiritual being. Such states are obtainable only through auditing. But they do exist and they are attainable and they fully restore a being to his native potential.” (*What Is Scientology?* 1992:222–223)

In the field of anthropology the definition of religion considered most classical is that of Sir Edward Tylor who characterizes it as “the belief in spiritual beings” (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 14–15). In relation to this definition and as already stated, the central belief of Scientology is that man is a thetan, that is to say, a spiritual being. In this respect the Manual of Scientology says to its readers:

“You are a thetan, a spiritual being. Not your eyes, not your brain, but you. You do not *have* a thetan, something you keep apart from yourself; you *are* a thetan. You would not speak of *my* thetan; you would speak of *me*.

“Although much of what Scientology holds true may be echoed in many great philosophic teachings, what it offers is entirely new: An exact route through which anyone can regain the truth and simplicity of his spiritual self...” (*The Scientology Handbook* 1994:iii)

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