

Dianetics and Scientology

Dianetics and Scientology are two movements created by the American science fiction writer, L. Ron Hubbard (1911-1986), in the early 1950s. While Dianetics was first presented in 1950 as a form of self-help therapy, with no particular religious pretensions (Hubbard 1950), Scientology was established in 1953 as a "church" with an explicitly "religious" label and mission (Church of Scientology International 1999; Urban 2010; Lewis 2009). Today, Dianetics as a basic therapeutic technique serves as a kind of introduction to Scientology, leading one to an optimal state of well-being in this lifetime so that one may advance to the more esoteric knowledge revealed in the upper levels of Scientology (Urban 2010).

Born in Tilden, Nebraska in 1911, L. Ron Hubbard emerged as one of the most – if not the most -- prolific authors of sci fi, fantasy, and adventure tales during the Golden Era of Science Fiction during the 1930s and 40s. As various scholars have observed, many of the themes that appear in his early science fiction later resurface in his writings on Dianetics and Scientology (Urban 2017a; Raine 2015). During the late 1940s, Hubbard was also briefly involved in a series of magical rituals performed by the enigmatic rocket scientist and amateur occultist, Jack Parsons. Inspired by the writings of the infamous British magus, Aleister Crowley and his esoteric order, the →Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.), the rituals were designed to identify a woman who would serve as "Lady Babylon" and become impregnated with a "magical child" who would become the messiah of a new age (Parsons 1946; Urban 2012; Bogdan 2015). Although Hubbard soon parted ways with Parsons, many observers have noted the influence of Crowley and the O.T.O. in the later development of Scientology (Pendle 2006; Urban 2012).

In 1950, however, Hubbard turned his attention from magic and sci fi toward a new "science of the human mind" called Dianetics, which was first published in an issue of the

magazine *Astounding Science Fiction* in May, 1950, and then released as a book later that year (Hubbard 1950). In developing his new science, Hubbard claimed that he had explored a wide array of different religious, philosophical, psychological and occult techniques, including automatic writing, clairvoyance, spiritualism, mysticism, "the cults of Los Angeles" (likely a reference to Parsons' magical group) and even a "Hindu who could hypnotize cats" (Hubbard 1950: 48). Derived from the Greek *dia* ("through") and *nous* ("mind") the basic idea of Dianetics is that all of our problems come through the mind, and therefore, all of the solutions to our problems also come through the mind. Using a process called "auditing", Dianetics involves a trained therapist called an "auditor" who works with an individual asking various questions in order to identify negative memories of pain and loss (called "engrams") that have been burned into the mind. Once all of the negative engrams have been identified and "relived", the individual achieves the state of "Clear", which is described as an optimal state of physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

To aid in the auditing process, Hubbard also began to employ a device called the Electro-psychometer or E-meter. Working on the basic principles of the lie-detector (a device also being intensively explored and developed by the U.S. and other governments during the 1950s), the E-meter is designed to measure galvanic skin response in the one being audited in order to pinpoint where specific engrams lay (Hubbard 1968). After some slight technical innovations, the E-meter is still used as a core part of Dianetics and Scientology auditing to this day.

Dianetics was initially but only briefly successful in the United States. The book *Dianetics* itself was a huge best-seller, and inspired a kind of "Dianetics craze" across the U.S. and U.K. However, the movement quickly fizzled and entered into bankruptcy by 1952. From the ashes of Dianetics, Hubbard then established the →Church of Scientology, which was incorporated in California in 1953 and soon achieved tax-exempt status as a religious organization in the U.S. (Urban 2010; Lewis 2009). In his early Scientology lectures of the 1950s, Hubbard developed a more explicitly religious belief system, which included the notion of an eternal spirit (called the Thetan), a doctrine of past lives, and an extremely

complex "space opera" narrative of the past history of the universe and civilizations on other planets (Hubbard 2006; Bromley 2009; Raine 2015; Urban 2010; Urban 2017a).

In the late 1960s, Scientology also evolved an increasingly esoteric series of levels of training, codified in the "Bridge to Total Freedom", which is the roadmap of the Scientologist's path to full self-realization. The upper and most confidential of these levels are called Operating Thetan or OT, which reveal secret events in the past history of the universe and unleash the full, liberated power of the Thetan, who becomes increasingly free of the limits of the material world (the MEST universe of matter, energy, space and time; see Hubbard 2006, 2007a, 2007b). Perhaps the most infamous of these is Operating Thetan level III (OT III), which reveals the past history of the universe going back 75 million years and an extremely complex space opera narrative involving an intergalactic emperor named Xenu (Rothstein 2009). As s/he ascends these upper levels, the individual is also said to achieve an array of supernatural abilities, including the power to "exteriorize" or travel as a Thetan outside the body, as well as telepathy, telekinesis, and the ability to heal others. Indeed, at its highest levels of attainment, the OT is said to have truly godlike powers, even beyond those of the "so-called god" who created this MEST universe itself (Hubbard 2001, 14; see Hubbard 2006; Hubbard 2007a; Urban 2018).

Various authors have noted that the higher levels of Scientology bear the influence of many other spiritual and esoteric traditions. Hubbard himself described Scientology as "Gnostic Religion" in so far as it "knows that it knows" (1976; see Urban 2018); he also suggested that its closest religious counterparts were Hinduism and Buddhism, while also claiming that the state of OT is far beyond that of Buddha-hood (Kent 1999; Urban 2010). One can also see the prominent influence of other occult traditions in Scientology, particularly the work of Crowley (whom Hubbard calls "his very good friend" [2001, 185]; see also →Thelema) and various elements drawn from →Theosophy (such as the notion of the astral body and the practice of astral projection). Overall, Scientology is perhaps best understood as a rich and eclectic *bricolage* comprised of many different religious, occult, philosophical, psychological and popular cultural influences, all woven together in Hubbard's fertile creative imagination (see Urban 2010; Urban 2012).

At the same time that he elaborated these higher, more esoteric levels of Scientology training, Hubbard also established an elite, inner core of the most dedicated Scientologists called the Sea Organization or Sea Org. Originally serving as crew on board Hubbard's ship, the Apollo, Sea Org members follow a strict military discipline and dedicate themselves full time to the protection and promotion of Scientology's mission. Indeed, Sea Org members sign a "billion year contract," vowing to return lifetime after lifetime in unwavering service to the church (Many 2009; Urban 2010).

During the 1970s and 80s, Scientology grew rapidly in numbers and wealth, particularly once it began to attract a number of high-profile celebrities such as John Travolta, Tom Cruise, Isaac Hayes, Kirstie Alley and many others (Kent and Raine 2017; Wright 2013). However, the church also became enmeshed in a series of legal battles and intense controversies, such as its protracted "war" with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service over its claim to tax exempt status. Indeed, in the mid-1970s, members of the church's intelligence bureau, the Guardians Office, even infiltrated IRS offices in Washington, D.C., in order to steal thousands of documents and even wiretap IRS meeting rooms (Melton 1999, 27-28; Urban 2010, 155-177). Beginning in the 1980s, the church also became enmeshed in a series of lawsuits surrounding the dissemination of its confidential OT materials, which were first leaked to the media and then eventually onto the internet. Despite intense efforts to prevent the circulation of the documents, the most esoteric OT documents, including the complex "space opera" history of the universe, are now easily available on thousands of websites (Urban 2010, 178-300).

Since the 1990s, Scientology has suffered a number of different attacks from multiple sides, including exposés by ex-members and a vast array of critical media accounts (Many 2009; Behar 1991; Reitman 2013; Wright 2013). Perhaps the most scathing exposé appeared on the cartoon satire, *South Park*, which revealed and mercilessly ridiculed the secret narrative of OT III for a mass audience of TV viewers. The church's initial response to such attacks was one of intense litigation, launching multiple lawsuits against sources such as *Time Magazine* and various others who had revealed its innermost secrets publicly (Urban

2010). But more recently --- particularly in the wake of its defeat in the *Time* lawsuit -- the church has adopted a different strategy, by largely downplaying the esoteric aspects such as the Operating Thetan materials; instead, it has tended to emphasize the more "exoteric" aspects of Scientology, such as its ability to build better relationships and careers, and its charitable activities, such as its Volunteer Ministers program (Church of Scientology International 2018). In sum, the more occult dimensions of Scientology have been progressively "occulted" in the twenty-first century (Urban 2017b; Urban 2018)

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