

SCIENTOLOGY ITS HISTORICAL= MORPHOLOGICAL FRAME

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I. INTRODUCTION

Scientology is a “prophetic” religion, born out of the teachings of a charismatic founder, L. Ron Hubbard, who holds the place that Gautama, the Buddha, has in Buddhism, Christ in Christianity and Muhammad in the Islamic religion (the three great religions of today). Unlike Christ and Muhammed, Mr. Hubbard did not claim godhood or that he was visited with divine revelation. Like Gautama, Mr. Hubbard claimed to be a man who had discovered a path to spiritual enlightenment, salvation and freedom.

L. Ron Hubbard published in 1950 the successful book *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*. The book promised “self-achievement” (or achievement of “static life”) against the frustrations of the exterior world (chaos), with axioms supported by socio-anthropological, historical-religious, philosophical-religious arguments. It is a fact that this book’s success generated a religion, Scientology, in which Dianetics is now subsumed. One should not be fooled by the scientific premises the name “Scientology” derives from. It is a modern religion which, just by virtue of being modern (or fit for the people of today), introduces itself as scientific. In this regard I will cite two similar cases, on whose religious consistency there are no doubts: Bahaism in the Islamic realm, and Christian Science in the Christian realm.

Bahaism started during the last century; it took its name from the title of its founder, *Baha'Ullah* (“Splendor of God”), who had already been a follower of Babism, a religious movement in Islamic Persia. Among the most important soteriological propositions of Bahaism is the unity between science and religion.

Christian Science was founded around the end of the last century by the American prophet Mary Baker Eddy. This religion originates with psychosomatic medicine. As in the case of Mr. Hubbard’s popular book on “mental health,” Christian Science also started with a popular book written by Eddy and published in 1875 as *Science and Health*. “Health” is the same thing as “salvation” for these prophet authors who, in this way, more or less resume the Latin concept of “salus.”

The first Scientology religious community was founded as a church in 1954, with the name Church of Scientology of California. In this way the religion perfected itself, organizing itself on the Christian ecclesiastical model. The Churches of Scientology spread in various towns in the English-speaking world (Canada, Australia, South Africa, England and the United States); as well as to France, Germany, Denmark, Holland, Italy and Sweden. Other European countries (Belgium, Austria, Ireland) and extra-European countries (Japan, Korea, India, Israel, Mexico) were reached by Scientology missions and churches.

II. DOCTRINAL CONTENT

1. In Christian culture the whole of the doctrines concerning the basic religious values takes on the name of theology, because everything is related to the knowledge of God and his Will. Here, the term and concept of Scientology substitutes for “theology.” Instead of being the study (-logy) of God (theo-), we have the study (-logy) of knowledge (sciento-). In both cases, though, the real aim of knowledge is the absolute; in fact this “knowledge” is absolute. Although it seems to require study and application, it is spiritual and transcends empiric knowledge of the physical universe, even though it is believed to be able to make an intervention in it.

The doctrinal content of Scientology is born out of the tendency to look inward, which can also be found in the Christian research of “God in yourself”, which is typical of mystical insurgences. A proposition of the Church of Scientology — expressed in its constitutive act in California — is that: “The best proof of the existence of God is the God that man finds inside himself.” However, the explicit and implicit model of the Scientology inward search is the process of the Vedic religion, which started with the meditation on the *Upanishad*.

The *Upanishad* model is devised in the following way: the sub-

stance of the universe, *Brahma*, identifies itself with the substance of man, *atman*; so man can contact the universe through the acknowledgement of his own *atman*, without turning to the gods who, as in any polytheistic religion, are the universe itself in its various forms and aspects. In Scientology, in the place of the atman we find the *thetan* in the function of “immutable essence” which transcends any contingent form.

2. The notion of thetan is basic for the Scientology faith, as much as the notion of soul is for the Christian faith. But because of the need to distinguish the concept of thetan from that of the soul, Scientology created the new word, *thetan*, as more fitting for a new religion.

The new word answers to two opposing needs: 1) to achieve a complete renewal, free from any semantics; thus a non-existent word, without any meaning in any existing language; 2) the limiting of the arbitrary of the invention, so that the new word would not be without a meaning even if it didn't have a meaning in the existing languages. In sum, it was wanted to give the new word a necessity which would overcome the contingency of artifice. The Greek letter *theta*, which by itself does not mean anything, was chosen. It is also the first letter of *Theos* (God) and of *Thymos* (soul) and has been chosen as the root for a word which phonically is similar to the Indian *atman*.

The morphological connection between atman and thetan, which we would objectively judge as due to the derivation of the second term from the first, is instead viewed by Scientology as an Indian anticipation of the Hubbardian concept; so that we find in the Scientology books: “The Eternal Indestructible Self (Atman) in the *Upanishad* is a precocious anticipation of the Scientological concept of thetan.”

3. Scientology follows the *Upanishad* model with the aim of looking inward to find a correct relationship between self and the universe: “Little by little, while the thetan progresses in the knowledge about himself, his ability to relate with the universal forces (dynamics) operating on the level of becoming (as opposed to the level of being, where the thetan becomes recognizable) increases.”

The *Dynamics* are eight and they are the urges toward survival of the individual as oneself; through sex and the family; the group (extending from the community to nationality); mankind; life forms (including animals and plants); the physical universe; the spiritual universe (symbolized by the letter *Theta*, as in the *thetan*, or spiritual being; and the Supreme Being.

4. From the relationship between the thetan and the eight dynamics, there are psychosomatic, ethical, parascientific and ritual consequences. In Scientology terms, the relationship is understood as the reduction of the chaos to the orderly reality constituted by the thetan.

We could understand it all in historic-religious terms, finding the typical function of any religion in conferring a metahistorical value to the historical realities. Here, as elsewhere, the object is to overcome with the metahistorical “being” the chaotic historical “becoming” — history itself, seen as a personal history, national history, the history of mankind, natural history, supernatural history (the creation of the world, the action of the Creator, his intervention on the created). All these “histories” trap and destroy the individual who does not know how to orient himself (and orient them) because the thetan has lost awareness of himself. But when the thetan has reached his full awareness, everything is in order again, with these consequences:

Psychosomatic consequences: The thetan precipitates mental and physical health, giving the best possible direction to the activity of the body and the psyche.

Ethics: The thetan directs family relationships, along with social and generically human relationships.

Scientific: The thetan illuminates scientific and technological research in all fields. Apart from the technical and scientific production, it also favors artistic and literary production. The teacher Hubbard is exalted both as a writer and as a scientist, who was especially talented in seamanship, photography, music, mineralogy, agronomy and communication systems.

From this viewpoint, we can notice how the parallel with the *Upanishad* is brought to its extreme consequences: the Tantrism, the ultimate product of that religious evolution, promises powers which, related to that time and environment, we would define as “magic”; Scientology promises powers which we call artistic-literary or scientific or technological; but in both cases, one can speak about the mystical opening of the world to any intervention by the being who has discovered in himself the mystical ability to intervene.

III. RITUAL PRACTICE

1. The theoretical formulation of the thetan also has ritual consequences. With all reservations, we could speak about a true and real cult of the thetan, considering that the concept of thetan is the concept that gives Scientology its uniqueness. In other words: liturgical formalities, religious services, ministers, symbolisms, etc., all constitute what we might define as accessories compared to the thetan, where the rite of recognition of the thetan (the “auditing” that I will speak about later) is fundamental. These “accessories” we can also consider as simply borrowed from the Christian religion, although the Scientology tendency is toward “comparative religion.”

These are not actually two different roots because “comparative religion” is just the unconscious reduction of non-European or pre-Christian cultural expressions prior to the Christian religious thematic (at least in the use that Hubbard makes of the term “comparative religion”). Concerning the Eastern image of the religious subject which emphasizes the thetan (oneself) instead of a God or any extra-human power, Scientology is yet validated and found legitimate in a phenomenological sense both due to the “divine” character given to the thetan (which in any case *is* superhuman) and from the formal and substantial analogies that do exist with other (particularly Eastern) religions and with Christianity itself.

In any case, Scientology rituals also comprise the practices of namings (instead of baptism), weddings and funerals, in addition to the practices aimed at recognizing the thetan and his universal relationships (auditing, especially, and partially the Church service).

2. Auditing is phenomenologically an initiating rite even though it is practiced at all levels of the Scientology religion. It is the entrance rite for Scientology where one first gains knowledge of the thetan. The *subjective* judgment in Scientology can be different than the *objective* judgment of the religious phenomenology; in fact the Scientology literature prefers to represent auditing as more like “pastoral counselling” than as a rite, to compare to Christian religion; as more similar to the action of a spiritual counsellor (even though within the realm of Catholic confession) than the more “sacramental” of a priest. This is because everyone must be able to know himself as a thetan and know this subjectively. The process vaguely reminds one of psychoanalytical treatment, but Scientologists prefer to compare it to Zen practices.

The auditing rite is done in “sessions” with a fixed duration (ritual, as we said). The minister is called an “auditor”; the one audited is called a “preclear.” The terminology based on auditing removes as much as possible the initiation sense of the rite, as if, instead of an initiation rite, it were informal counselling, even though cathartic. The designation of the initiated arises again in the meaning of the word “preclear”—one who is not yet Clear but aspires to be.

The initiation is gradual, as in the ancient mystic religions and in Christianity itself, where the perfection happens gradually: baptism, confirmation, eucharist, for example; similarly to the entrance in Christianity and its confirmation and the admission to the pastoral feeding which also physically unites the human body with the body of Christ.

The process of bringing one from the first level of preclear to the level of Clear and beyond is conceived as a freeing process (“release”), and “release” is the designation of the person who is doing this process, of

which each step is called a “grade of release” up to the state of Clear.

The Clear is the “saint,” or aspirant to “sainthood” that the Scientologists prefer to compare to the Buddhist Arhat (the “venerable”) and the Bodhisattva, the one who has reached Buddhism but stays in worldliness to help others reach it. But the Clear is also understood in the analogy of a “computer” in the sense that he has acquired the ability to dispassionately resolve any problem if all the data is given. The image of the computer is used throughout the writings of Scientology — which they define as the “religion of the space age.”

They also speak of the “electrometer” invented by Hubbard, which we might consider as a liturgical instrument of the modern age characterized by electronics. It is an electronic measuring device which indicates objectively the spiritual travail and subsequent degree of release reached by a preclear in an auditing session.

3. The religious service given in Scientology Churches is not very different from the services in the various Protestant denominations which operate in America. The Scientologists show their uniqueness not so much in the format as in the contents. The Scientology sermon, which constitutes the nucleus of the service, does not impose dogma nor threaten hell-like penalties; it is a kind of rational exposition. It replaces dogma with the axioms of Hubbard, and the only “threat” is the “hell in life” resulting from failure to apply Scientology principles. The Scientology service also includes a prayer of petition, the formal address to a superhuman destination which is believed to be able to grant the requests. This action, recommended by the liturgical manuals in Scientology, calls on the author of the Universe 1) to enable all men to reach an understanding of their spiritual nature and to come to know the author of the Universe, to the end of reaching “total freedom” (this prayer is called “A Prayer for Total Freedom); 2) to preserve human rights so that all may believe and worship freely and have freedom from war, poverty and want. The prayer ends with an “Amen” where God is explicitly named: “May God let it be so.”

4. Neither the wedding nor the funeral, which appear in various forms in the Scientology liturgy, derive from the theoretical need of the thetan. Only in the rite of naming the newborn, which has the same place as baptism in the Christian religion, does one find in the Scientology literature its function in direct relation to the thetan.

This is the textual justification for the rite: “The main purpose of the Naming Ceremony is to help get the thetan oriented. He has recently taken over his new body. He is aware that it is his and that he is operating it. However, he has never been told the identity of his body. He knows there are quite a few adult bodies around, but he has not been told that there are specific ones who will care for his body until it has

developed to where he can manoeuvre it thoroughly.” In other words, it is the rite for introducing the thetan to his body, his parents, godparents, and the congregation.

5. In alignment with its religious nature, Scientology has adopted distinctive marks — such as the Scientology Cross worn by ministers of the Church and displayed in the Churches — which immediately communicate that one is dealing with a religion.

IV. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present report is aimed at answering the question of whether, in historic-religious scientific terms, Scientology should be considered as a religion under all circumstances. It did not deal with a certain lack of the “divine” and “eschatology,” nor with the presence of a codified ethics and of a reform politics. This is because neither the lack nor the presence of these characteristics is useful for the aim of scientific judgment.

In the founding of a science of religions, E.B. Taylor excluded from the definition of religion “the belief in a supreme divinity or in judgment after death.” Concerning this, we could add that in the case of Scientology there are no disparaging omissions, but omissions edifying a religious structure which factually transcends both theology and Christian eschatology.

To illuminate this, I will give the example of a specific divergence from the traditional eschatological line: With the concept of the thetan as an immortal being, completely outside the limitations of a historical period, or lifetime, eschatological discussion of “the end” has no meaning.

In conclusion, what makes Scientology recognizable as a religion is first its resemblance to other religions (already established in this report). Further, and especially in light of the Western distinction between the “civic” and the “religious,” everything which is said or done in Scientology can and must make sense in our culture only if understood as a religion.

For this, the present report answers any possible juridicial question by unequivocally stating that Scientology is a religion — for its theoretical contents with the element of salvation; for its de-historifying ritual; for the proselytizing impulse of a prophetic kind; and for the ecclesiastical organization which, among other things, determines its own relationship with the organization of the states where it is welcomed among the citizens.

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