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Scientology – In Two Scholarly Perspectives

In 1950, author and explorer L. Ron Hubbard announced the discovery of Dianetics, which he said was a new science of mental health, and four years later he established Scientology, a new religion dedicated to human spiritual advancement. Although Scientology builds upon some of the same spiritual principles common to traditional religions, it was developed during the scientific era and thus takes advantage of extensive research and technological development.

A clear distinction must be drawn between Hubbard's fiction and his Scientology writings, because his stories are free imaginative explorations rather than religious scriptures. However, two themes connect his science fiction to his work in Scientology: a conception of the Earth as one planet among many in a vast universe of nature, and the conviction that ordinary people can accomplish great things if they seek to gain knowledge and serve humanity. Occasionally the fiction touches upon important environmental issues, such as natural resource depletion in the novel *Battlefield Earth*.

The Church of Scientology considers humans to be spiritual beings, not merely animals, systems of chemical compounds, or stimulus-response mechanisms. Nonetheless, the condition of a person's body is an important factor in that individual's awareness and ability. A body polluted by toxic chemicals, radiation, or other harmful factors can prevent the individual from achieving spiritual betterment. Therefore, an important part of Hubbard's religious research was the discovery of methods for purifying the body.

Scientists believe that radiation and chemical toxins become lodged in a person's body, chiefly in fatty tissue, and can affect the person adversely even years after the original exposure. The purification program has three chief elements: exercise to stimulate the circulation, sauna to sweat out the accumulated toxins, and a nutritional regimen including specific vitamins, minerals and oils.

The nutritional regimen does not radically alter the individual's usual diet, but supplements it with vegetables and sufficient liquids to offset the loss through exercise and the sauna. Over the course of the program, a precise mixture of vitamins is gradually increased, with close monitoring especially of the niacin ingested. In addition to other minerals, a calcium-magnesium drink called "Cal-Mag" is an important part of the program. The intake of oils is required to replace some of the toxin-ridden fat that the program aims to clear out of the body.

In the view of Scientologists, the use of non-medicinal drugs is unnatural and harmful, and drug addiction is a highly destructive force in contemporary culture. A rehabilitation program called Narconon has been based on Hubbard's

purification and communication technology, designed to handle problems of withdrawal and assist people in overcoming the effects of addiction.

Scientists believe that spirit is potentially superior to material things and can accomplish miraculous changes in the physical universe if freed from the continuing effect of past traumas, transgressions and aberrations. Drugs, radiation, and toxic chemicals not only leave physical traces in the body, in their view, but also affect the individual's mind through powerful memories called mental image pictures that can cause harm when restimulated by later experiences. Thus, the body-oriented purification program is a preparation for a comprehensive series of Scientology processes intended to deal with problems of the mind in order to liberate the spirit.

In its regimen designed to achieve total spiritual freedom, Scientology employs a form of counseling called *auditing* to move the individual up a gradient toward advanced states of *clear* and *Operating Thetan* (OT). A Clear is a person who no longer suffers the ill effects of a reactive mind, that portion of the mind which works on a purely stimulus-response basis. In OT, a Clear becomes refamiliarized with the abilities that belong to his or her fundamental nature.

Scientists consider psychiatric practices to be unnatural and harmful, especially psychosurgery, electroshock, and drug treatment. Thus, the Church of Scientology has been active in efforts to reform the mental health professions and to make people aware that human beings are not mere biological mechanisms but are by nature spiritual.

Over the half-century of its existence, the Church of Scientology has grown into a worldwide movement, communicating its religious beliefs in more than fifty languages and active in over a hundred countries.

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If one believes comments by Scientology's founder, L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), the creation of Scientology's forerunner, Dianetics, related directly to his efforts to improve the success of people who explored nature. The “original goal” of Dianetics, he stated in *The Explorers Journal*, “was to provide expedition commanders and doctors with a therapy tool which would increase the efficiency of personnel and reduce incidence of personnel failure” (Hubbard 1950: 52). Hubbard himself had undertaken several questionable marine explorations, but by 1950 he was claiming that the realm of the human mind was the last great frontier “capable of producing some adventures scarcely rivaled by [African explorer David] Livingston[e]” (Hubbard 1950: 1).

The mind, it seems, replaced nature as an exciting realm for Hubbard's exploration. Nevertheless, in Dianetics and Scientology, Hubbard did develop a set of concepts (called “dynamics”) that supposedly identified urges or drives of life. In Dianetics, Hubbard identified the fifth of seven dynamics as being concerned with an individual's affinity for life. By 1956 he refined the dynamics to include eight dimensions, with the fifth one involving “the urge toward existence of the animal kingdom,” which includes all flora and fauna (Hubbard 1979: 37). The sixth dynamic involved “the urge toward existence of the physical universe,” what Hubbard called “matter, energy, space, and time” (Hubbard 1979: 38). Consequently, in the context of these two dynamics, Scientologists are able to place themselves within an environmental framework.

Throughout his corpus, Hubbard frequently discussed what he called the “environment,” but he used the term in the broadest possible sense to refer to “all conditions surrounding the organism from the first moment of present-life existence to death, including physical, emotional, spiritual, social, educational, [and] nutritional” (Hubbard 1951: II, 293). Hubbard rarely discussed the natural world in his major ideological works, unless one includes his lectures and writings about possible radiation poisoning from the environment caused by nuclear bombs. This material reflected widespread fear during the 1950s of nuclear war and contamination, and Hubbard claimed that he had developed a program that would reduce the effects of radiation on the body.

In 1959 and 1960, Hubbard carried out a series of “experiments” (although they were never scientifically published), which “proved” that plants felt pain and feared death. He also experimented with the effects of heated soil on plant growth. For years afterward, media accounts about Scientology carried a picture of a pensive Hubbard looking intently at a vine-ripening tomato that he had hooked up with clamps and wires to the galvanometer (called an E-meter) reputedly used by his organization to identify negative incidents in members' current or past lives. These experiments, however, did not become part of Hubbard's lasting contributions to Scientology.

One of the few lasting images of the natural world in his ideology involved volcanoes, which appeared in Hubbard's 1967 cosmological statement about how soul-like entities (called thetans) forgot previous negative experiences from past lives as they were about to enter new ones. According to Hubbard, 76 million years ago an evil warlord named Xenu (or Xemu) rounded up people on the overpopulated planets that he controlled, sent them to a planet called Teegeeach (which was Earth), placed them in (or near) volcanoes, and exploded hydrogen bombs in craters. Their souls (thetans) survived, but out of fear these thetans grouped together as clusters and continue to attach themselves to bodies. Upper-level Scientology courses supposedly allow people to detach these “body clusters” and thetans from themselves, which is supposed to advance their own developmental progress.

As environmental awareness grew in society-at-large, Scientologists received media attention for their clean-up efforts on beaches, along roadsides, and in urban centers – activities that the Church of Scientology International praises on its own website. In 1998, for example, one special Scientology project in Clearwater, Florida, involved relocating a 100-year-old oak tree. Moreover, in September 2001, The Church of Scientology was among approximately 65 “customers” named by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power for having made “green power” purchases from renewable energy sources (Los Angeles Department of Water and Power 2001).

While acknowledging that Scientologists share concerns about nature and the natural environment with the wider society, it remains true that the organization attempts to use members' environmental efforts to extend Scientology's “technology”

into society. For example, in a secular booklet of moral aphorisms that Hubbard wrote in an attempt to gain recognition of his name, Hubbard instructed his readers to “Safeguard and Improve Your Environment.” Yet the unsophisticated level of his thinking about the environment and the natural world resulted in simplistic advice: “There are many things people can do to help take care of the planet. They begin with the idea that one should. They progress by suggesting to others that they should” (Hubbard 1981: 38, 45). Nevertheless, Scientologists hope that non-Scientology organizations will reprint this booklet and distribute it widely, thereby attracting attention to its author (i.e., Hubbard) and stimulating interest in Scientology and his other works. Along these same lines, Scientologists and a Scientology organization had close connections with an environmental group named “Cry Out,” and the principal of a Los Angeles-area elementary school canceled the group's planned activities for her students when she realized that its booklet was printed by Hubbard's literary agency, Author Services, Inc., and contained a song that Hubbard wrote.

It seems unlikely that “nature” or “the natural environment” ever will be a significant aspect of Scientology's ideology. A stated purpose of the organization ostensibly is to remove the impact of negative experiences (called engrams) from people, and in many instances their removal (so the group claims) has medical benefit. Concerns, therefore, about nature are secondary (at best), since they are far outweighed by counseling and health issues.

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See also: NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS; SCIENCE FICTION.

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