

freedom, thus gaining control over matter, energy, space, time, thoughts, form, and life. This freed state is called Operating Thetan, or OT for short.

The central practice of Scientology is "auditing" (from the Latin word *audire*, "to listen"), which is a one-on-one communication with a trained Scientology counselor or "auditor". The auditor follows an exact procedure toward rehabilitating the human spirit. Most auditing uses an E-meter, a device that measures very small changes in electrical resistance through the human body when a person is holding onto tin cans and a small current is passed through them.

The auditing process is intended to help the practitioner (referred to as a preclear or PC) to unburden himself or herself of specific traumatic incidents, prior ethical transgressions and bad decisions, which are said to collectively restrict the preclear from achieving his or her goals and lead to the development of a "reactive mind". The auditor asks the preclear to respond to a list of questions which are designed for specific purposes and given to the preclear in a strictly regulated way. Auditing requires that the preclear be a willing and interested participant who understands the questions, and the process goes more smoothly when he or she understands what is going on. Per Church policy, auditors are trained not to "evaluate for" their preclears; i.e., they are forbidden from suggesting, interpreting, degrading or invalidating the preclear's

answers. The E-meter is used to help locate an area of concern.

Scientists have claimed benefits from auditing including improved IQ, improved ability to communicate, enhanced memory, alleviated dyslexia and attention deficit problems, and improved relaxation; however, no scientific studies have verified these claims.

The Roman Catholic Church has not made official doctrinal pronouncements specifically related to Scientology. The Catholic Church has refused to recognize Scientology weddings as valid. Certain beliefs that are widely associated with Scientology, such as reincarnation, are specifically rejected by the Catholic Church as being incompatible with Catholic belief and practice. Scientology is also, according to a number of religious scholars, a form of gnosticism, which would make it hard to reconcile with Roman Catholicism and other denominations that regard gnosticism as a heresy.

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Scientology is an extensive belief system created by American author L. Ron Hubbard in 1952 as a self-help philosophy, an outgrowth of his earlier self-help system, Dianetics. Now described as an "applied religious philosophy," Scientology was at first secular; Hubbard began to characterize Scientology's beliefs and practices as a religion in 1953, and by 1960 he had redefined it as a "religion by its basic tenets". Scientology claims to offer an exact methodology to help individuals achieve awareness of their spiritual existence across many lifetimes and to, simultaneously, become more effective in the physical world. According to the Church of Scientology, Scientology's ultimate goal is to "rehabilitate" the thetan (roughly equivalent to the soul) to regain its native state of "total freedom."

The name "Scientology" is also used to refer to the Church of Scientology, the largest organization promoting Scientology, which is itself part of a group of affiliated corporations that claim ownership and sole authority to disseminate Dianetics and Scientology.

The Church of Scientology presents itself as a religious non-profit organization which provides spiritual counseling and community-betterment programs. Church spokespeople

attest that Hubbard's teachings (called "Technology" or "Tech" in Scientology terminology) have saved them from a plethora of problems and complaints.

Outside observers have often come to conclusions about Scientology that are sharply at odds with the Church's self-representations. Lawmakers, including national governing bodies of several countries, have characterized the Church as an unscrupulous commercial organization, citing harassment of critics and exploitation of its members. Scientology's therapeutic principles have been characterized as pseudoscience by scientists and medical doctors. Although many religious scholars do consider Scientology a religion, it has also frequently been described as a cult or a pseudoreligion.

The Church of Scientology claims a worldwide total of around 10 million members as of 2006, but actual membership figures it has released indicate that there may be only 500,000 Scientologists worldwide, while some critics estimate total Church membership at less than 100,000. According to a 2001 survey published by the City University of New York 55,000 people in the United States would, if asked to identify their religion, have said Scientology.

Beliefs and practices

Scientology's doctrines were established by Hubbard over a period of about 34 years, beginning in 1952 and continuing until his

death in January 1986. Most of the basic principles of the Church were set out during the 1950s and 1960s. Scientology followed on the heels of Dianetics, an earlier system of self-improvement techniques laid out by Hubbard in his 1950 book, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*. The Church says that Scientology is concerned with "the study and handling of the spirit in relationship to itself, others and all of life," but they say that Dianetics is only concerned about getting rid of the reactive mind. Scientology also covers topics such as ethics and morality (The Way to Happiness), drug and chemical residues as they relate to spiritual well-being (the Purification Rundown), communication, marriage, raising children, dealing with work-related problems, educational matters (study technology), and the very nature of life (The Dynamics).

Scientology practices are structured in a certain form of series or levels, because Hubbard believed that rehabilitation takes place on a step-by-step basis; for example, that the negative effects of drugs should be addressed before other issues can be addressed. According to Hubbard, these steps lead to the more advanced strata of Scientology's more esoteric knowledge. This is described as a passage along "the Bridge to Total Freedom", or simply "the Bridge," in which each step of the Bridge promises a little more personal freedom in the area specified by the Bridge's definition.

Some central beliefs of Scientology:

- A person is an immortal spiritual being (termed a *thetan*) who possesses a mind and a body.
- Through the Scientology process of "auditing", one can free oneself of "engrams" and "implants" to reach the state of "Clear", and after that, the state of "Operating Thetan". Each state is said to represent recovering the native spiritual abilities of the individual, and to confer dramatic mental and physical benefits.
- The thetan has lived through many past lives and will continue to live beyond the death of the body.
- A person is basically good, but becomes "aberrated" by moments of pain and unconsciousness in his or her life.
- What is true for you is what you have observed yourself. No beliefs should be forced as "true" on anyone. Thus, the tenets of Scientology are expected to be tested and seen to either be true or not by Scientology practitioners.
- Psychiatry and psychology are evil and abusive.
- Humans retain many emotional problems caused by early stages of evolution (see Scientology History of Man).
- Scientology claims to offer an exact methodology to help a person achieve awareness of his or her spiritual existence and better effectiveness in the physical world. "Exact" methods of spiritual counseling are taught and practiced which are claimed to enable this change. According to the Church, the ultimate goal is to get the soul (thetan) back to its native state of total