Scientology is a high profile movement. Its celebrity members and litigious nature keep it in the press.\(^1\) When most people think of new religions, they probably think first of Scientology. This is in many ways testament to its success. Very few people, however, will know exactly what the practice of Scientology, or rather Dianetics, involves.

While it is known as the *Church* of Scientology, it is not religious in a prototypical sense, or indeed in a legal sense at least in the United Kingdom.\(^2\) It is, however, accepted as a religion in Australia\(^3\) and its religious status for tax purposes at least has not been questioned in the US (Kent, 1999: 147).

Scientologists practice Dianetics, which is a therapy developed by L. Ron Hubbard. The movement has been the subject of sociological investigations as well as accounts by ex-members (for example, Atack, 1990). In this chapter I will be examining a speech, ‘The Story of Dianetics and Scientology’ (hereafter ‘The Story’) given by the founder, L. Ron Hubbard.

Unfortunately, it is only possible to show very limited extracts from this text.\(^4\) The lecture itself is easily procured through the Church of Scientology.

**Background**

The Church of Scientology is an administrative re-casting of a school of therapy which began life as Dianetics.\(^5\) Now the two terms are used interchangeably. Strictly speaking, however, the Church of Scientology practices Dianetics. L. Ron Hubbard always mentions the two together. The sociologist Roy Wallis has written considerably on the sociological aspects of Scientology. He describes its transition from ‘cult’ to ‘sect’:

... in the course of its development Scientology has undergone a transformation from a loose, almost anarchic group of enthusiasts for

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A. Mooney, *The Rhetoric of Religious ‘Cults’*
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a lay psychotherapy, Dianetics, to a tightly controlled and rigorously
disciplined following for a quasi-religious movement, Scientology
(1976: 5).

Wallis’s terminology needs some clarification in this context. He holds
with Glock and Stark’s definition of ‘cult’ as something defined by its
content of belief, in particular the deviant nature of these beliefs. The
transition to ‘sect’, as Wallis sees it, is not a transformation of belief but
of organisation.

The transition from cult to sect, therefore, involves the arrogation of
authority. ... This centralization of authority is typically legitimized
by a claim to a unique revelation which locates some source or sources
of authority concerning doctrinal innovation and interpretation
beyond the individual member or practitioner, usually in the person
of the revelator himself (1976: 17).

Dianetics was originally a therapy. It was not seen as the only path to
‘salvation’ even though it might contribute to some higher purpose or
enlightenment. Its professed purpose was to improve one’s functioning
in the world. There was no central authority and individuals and groups
were quite at liberty to experiment with other therapies and ideas.
While Hubbard was credited with being the founder of the therapy,
he was by no means considered omniscient at this originating point

This all changed when Hubbard, returning to the organisation after
an absence, decided to take over. (In the following, an E-meter is a device
used by Scientology in the process of auditing. Auditing is a kind of
therapy; E-meters measure skin’s resistance to electricity and have been
compared to polygraphs.)

First, he generated very rapidly numerous new techniques. The prac-
titioner, wishing to satisfy a clientele which desired the best and
therefore the newest techniques, was forced to keep abreast of devel-
opments. He was thus rendered more dependent upon the organiza-
tion. Second, Hubbard sought to standardize practice. Only certain
techniques might be used, and used only in the precise manner
established by the organization. From the diffuse skills required in
Dianetics auditing, processing with the E-meter particularly took
the form of stereotyped delivery of standardized commands and
acknowledgements. The potential charisma of the practitioner was