The Church of Scientology

Scientology is a high profile movement. Its celebrity members and litigious nature keep it in the press. 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. It is, however, accepted as a religion in Australia 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. 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. 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...
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 (Wallis, 1976: 75–6).

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 practitioner, wishing to satisfy a clientele which desired the best and therefore the newest techniques, was forced to keep abreast of developments. He was thus rendered more dependent upon the organization. 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