

Scientology

According to *Religions of the World, A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices* edited by Gordon Melton & Martin Baumann and published by ABC-CLIO, “Scientology is a religious and therapeutic system of ideas and ritual practices” created in the early 1950s by American writer, adventurer and philosopher Ron Hubbard (1911-1986).

The Church of Scientology International (CSI) based in Los Angeles (USA) is officially the Church of Scientology's parent organization, and is responsible for guiding its churches in other countries. At a local level, every church is a separate corporate entity set up as a licensed franchise and has its own board of directors and executives.

It is difficult to obtain reliable membership statistics. The Church estimates that 8 million people worldwide are, in some way, using Hubbard's life-improvement techniques, but not all of these people are active members. Most of them are buying books and taking courses in the church facilities on a regular basis without considering themselves devotees. Religious scholar Gordon Melton has said that the church's estimates of its membership numbers are exaggerated.

~~Some Hollywood stars joined the Church of Scientology and publicly acted as its ambassadors.~~

Teachings

During the late 1930s and 1940s Ron Hubbard developed his do-it yourself therapy, *Dianetics*, according to which every human being is suffering from severe mental and psychosomatic traumas because of the functions of what Hubbard calls the reactive mind. In the memory bank of this mind are stored the engrams, that is, all the pieces of a person's memory involving mental and physical pain. In the book *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, published in May 1950, Hubbard presents his ideas on how one can eliminate the engrams through a dianetic therapy, called auditing.

From 1951 on Hubbard carried his ideas further and began the transformation of the therapy to a fully developed religious soteriological system by including metaphysical ideas and axioms about the individual and the universe in his representations. In 1954, Hubbard announced the full transformation into a religion. The new religion was given the name 'Scientology'.

The basic idea in Scientology is that the human being, a composite of body, mind and spirit is a spiritual individual being, called a Thetan. Each individual, or Thetan, has existed through an endless number of incarnations on this and other planets through hundreds of millions of years.

Scientology, inspired by many thoughts and religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Western Esotericism, science fiction and psychotherapy, offers an individual salvation to its practitioners. The path to salvation, to ultimate spiritual salvation, called the Bridge to Total Freedom, represents an extensive soteriological hierarchy of ritual steps to which each individual is gradually initiated in a codified prescribed sequence. Through these initiations, one can move oneself into higher and higher states of awareness and orders of existence toward an ultimate recognition of oneself as a spiritual being and of the universe.¹

Controversies

Though it has attained some credibility as a religion in many countries, Scientology has also been described by its detractors as both a cult and a commercial enterprise.

The organization has been accused of controlling its parishioners financially and mentally, as well as of having an opaque organizational structure and using shady financial transactions between the different organizational units. For years, a number of former members and anti-cult organizations have organized campaigns against the Church of Scientology.

Many cases regarding a variety of issues against national branches of the Church of Scientology have been brought to court. In Europe, the Church won important cases in Belgium (2016)², UK (2013)³, Spain (2007 and 2001)⁴ and Italy (1997)⁵.

In 2013, the Church of Scientology in France was charged with gang fraud and was condemned to heavy fines. Moreover, suspended prison sentences were imposed on five of its members. Although this was a final judgment in France, the case is still being examined by a supra-national jurisdiction.

¹ *Religions of the World, A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices* edited by Gordon Melton & Martin Baumann and published by ABC-CLIO, 2002

² <http://www.scientologyreligion.org/landmark-decisions/belgium-trial-court-dismisses-all-charges-against-church-of-scientology.html>

³ <http://www.scientologyreligion.org/landmark-decisions/uk-supreme-court-issues-landmark-decision-regarding-the-scientology-religion.html>

⁴ <http://www.scientologyreligion.org/landmark-decisions/national-church-of-scientology-of-spain-officially-recognized-as-world-religion.html> -

<http://www.freedommag.org/english/canada/vol004i1/page07.htm>

⁵ <http://www.scientologyreligion.org/landmark-decisions/italian-supreme-court-ruling-recognizing-the-scientology-religion.html>

In two cases concerning Russia, the European Court of Human Rights issued a decision in favor of a Russian branch of the Church of Scientology. In the first case, the Church of Scientology of Moscow, which had first been registered as a religious association and granted a legal status in 1994, was denied re-registration after a new Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations was promulgated in 1997. In 2007, the European Court considered that the Church had been a victim of a violation of Article 11 of the European Convention in the light of Article 9, and ruled that Russia was to pay 10,000 EUR to the applicant.

Another case in Russia concerned the application for registration of the Church of Scientology of St Petersburg. After the application was rejected several times, the Church and six of its members filed a complaint with the European Court. In 2014, the Court ruled there had been “a violation of Article 9 of the Convention, interpreted in the light of Article 11” and Russia was to pay 7,500 EUR to the applicants.

Despite the opposition of anti-sect movements and some states, the Church has been recognized as a religion, has been registered as a religious organization, or has gained some form of state recognition as a religious community in quite a number of countries, for example: Canada, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, the United States⁶, etc.

Scientologists in Prison

Russia

On 6th June 2017, **Sakhil Aliev** was arrested alongside **Ivan Matsitskiy**, **Galina Shurinova**, and **Anastasia Terentieva** in St. Petersburg and charged with participating in an extremist organization, illegal business, inciting hatred, and violation of human dignity. They were charged under article 171 of the criminal code, which prohibits commercial activity without registration and under articles 282 and 282.1, which punish participation in an extremist organization or carrying out related activity. On 7th June 2017, they were sentenced to two months in pre-trial detention. As of 31st December 2017, they were still in prison as their pre-trial detention had been repeatedly extended.

Conclusions

In over thirty countries, the Church of Scientology has been recognized as a religious organization. In the cases “*Church of Scientology of Moscow v. Russia*” and “*Church of Scientology and Others v. Russia*”, the European Court confirmed that the Church had

⁶ <http://www.scientologyreligion.org/religious-recognitions/>

been a victim of a violation of Article 9 of the European Convention, which constitutes an official recognition of its religious nature.

If a national branch of the Church of Scientology International, its leaders or its members have (allegedly) violated articles of the civil code or the criminal code, they must be treated as any other religious or non-religious organization or as any other individual.