

Scientology or Christian Science?

By Shirley Paulson

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I was seated at an interfaith dinner next to someone I didn't know, who asked me to explain my religion, Christian Science, to her. She said she was unfamiliar with it and wanted to understand some of its basic ideas. After about ten minutes, she asked quite sincerely, "So then, do you ever get to see Tom Cruise?" Oh dear. I realized that when many people hear the words *Christian Science*, they process *Scientology*. I think it will help Christian Scientists, Scientologists, and those who perhaps don't know much about either, to explain the distinction a little more clearly.

In trying to explain someone else's religion, I turn to the Golden Rule for guidance. I want to treat others as I would like them to treat me. As a non-Scientologist, I can't claim that I can talk about the faith fully, but my hope is to be fair and informative. We all benefit by learning about our similarities and differences.

Starting with the most obvious differences, Christian Science was founded in 1879 as a Christian denomination, by a woman—Mary Baker Eddy. Scientology was founded in 1953 as an independent religion, by a man—L. Ron Hubbard.

Christian Science is a response to Jesus' mission—to be modern-day disciples bringing forth the blessings of the kingdom of God on earth today. Scientology is a religious response to the human cry for therapeutic help. ¹ These two perspectives indicate the different premises upon which they stand. The basis for the theology and practice of Christian Science is the centrality of God. The basis for the reasoning and religious structure of Scientology is the fulfillment of the human potential. ² Christian Science sees God as the only creator, whereas in Scientology the "thetan," or the person

completely freed from his or her imprisoning ways, is a creator. While God, or a Supreme Being, exists in Scientology, the doctrine of God is of minimal importance for the entire Scientology system.³

Starting from these two opposite positions, it is understandable why their theologies, practices, ethics, language, and purpose are radically different from each other. In many ways, they concern themselves with similar issues confronting humanity, but different premises make practices difficult to compare.

For example, both have churches, but . . .

A Christian Science church holds an hour-long congregational Sunday service patterned after traditional Christian services, as well as a Wednesday testimony meeting. A church of Scientology is open and staffed every day of the week, from morning until late at night, primarily for two reasons: for “auditing” and for study on a training course. In the auditing system, the auditor is one who is trained in Scientology methods (known as “technology”) and who listens to the parishioner—or learner—for the purpose of restoring his or her abilities and achieving full potential.

Both offer a path to salvation, but . . .

The differences between Scientology and Christian Science in language and direction toward salvation complicate the comparison. People who may have been familiar with Hubbard’s popular Dianetics movement from the 1950s would recognize the special vocabulary used in its successive religious movement, Scientology. In order to follow the meaning of salvation, some of the basic vocabulary terms are necessary. Beginners in Scientology are known as “preclears” who need to achieve two benchmarks along the “Bridge to Total Freedom.”⁴

The first benchmark is the accomplishment of the state of “Clear,” which means being “unrepressed and self-determined.” To “clear” means “to release all the physical pain and painful emotion.”⁵ The second benchmark was made available in the advancement

from Dianetics to Scientology, in which an individual could become an “Operating Thetan.” An O.T. operates totally independently of his body and of the universe around him. He believes he will have restored himself to his original, natural states of being ⁶ and experience his essential identity, including being the source of creation. ⁷

In Christian Science, salvation involves an individual’s willingness to awaken to the grace of God, or Christ’s command to be perfect (see [Matthew 5:48](#)). Sin, disease, and death are destroyed through a spiritual understanding of divine Life, or God. But it is the Christ, or the Word of God, working within human consciousness that provides the strength and wisdom to follow. The earthly spell of material pains and false pleasures is to be broken here on earth, as death is not an escape to heaven. Christ Jesus indicates through his crucifixion and resurrection the meaning of eternal Life. ⁸ It is through this awakening and spiritual understanding that we are able to discern and prove the powerlessness of mortality.

Both seek healing through mental means, but . . .

In Christian Science, God, or divine Love, is the center of the healing experience. God, also understood as divine Mind, is acknowledged to be the single cause and creator of the universe, and maintains loving control over all. On that basis, Mind reveals the continuity of good, and the human sense of suffering dissipates through the action of the Christ (God’s loving message to humans). The two cardinal points of Mind-healing in Christian Science are “the nothingness of material life and intelligence and the mighty actuality of all-inclusive God, good.” ⁹

In Scientology, the individual is being delivered from “engrams,” or unremembered pain of earlier traumas, but the emphasis on the power of healing comes from the godlike nature of the human person. The auditor uses an electro-psychometer, or E-Meter, to determine what needs to be cleared out of the “reactive mind” of the individual seeking the auditing service. This person, the preclear, is still learning about himself or herself properly. ¹⁰ God is too far away to be understood, especially for the earliest levels of

Scientology training. But the distance of God is not particularly a problem for healing in Scientology, since the knowledge of God is not a necessary element in the healing process. Scientologists neither need to know God, nor claim to know God. The ultimate understanding comes through the Eighth Dynamic, the farthest of the concentric circles of existence;¹¹ and healing therapies are achieved through the technologies (“application of Scientology principles”) of Hubbard.¹²

Both confront “sin” or “antisocial personality,” but . . .

Mary Baker Eddy’s concept of sin is that it is a delusional state of human thought. One needs to first awaken to the proper knowledge of evil, which brings on repentance, which in turn must be severe enough to cause reformation. Freedom from sin can only take place through the Christ, because it is the Word of God that communicates our original spiritual perfection and guides us out of the temptations and delusions of sinful beliefs.

Scientology, on the other hand, holds that while “man is basically good,” about two and a half percent of the population “possess characteristics and mental attitudes” that are violent or that oppose good for others. The Scientology justice system is administered by duly authorized Scientologists and for all levels of crimes and offenses.¹³ It is ultimately the application of Scientology’s technology that frees someone from the imprisoning engrams and tyranny of matter, and individuals must claim the state of “Clear” for themselves.¹⁴

Both are skeptical about the use of drugs, but . . .

Hubbard became quite concerned in the 1960s with the fast-growing consumption of drugs of all types. He believed that drugs affect the human mind adversely and therefore obstruct the work of auditing (clearing the mind). In response, he designed a “purification program” using auditing practices to solve the mental and spiritual harm from drugs.¹⁵ Scientologists consider their efforts to eradicate drugs as a public service.

Mrs. Eddy's concern with drugs is based more on their tendency to act as a substitute for the power of God.¹⁶ Christian Science denies any power from a source other than Mind, God, and therefore drugs have no real power to heal or harm. Therefore, freedom from the use of drugs is based on confidence in God's abundant love, goodwill, and power to liberate. Despite the negative light Christian Science theology places on drugs, the Church respects the rights of everyone (including church members) to make their own choices regarding the use of medicinal drugs.

These examples of the mutual concern with drugs illustrate again the surface similarity of issues, but there are fundamental differences between Christian Science and Scientology that make them almost impossible to compare. Christian Science theology and practice begin with God; Scientology begins with the freeing of the human mind. There are many other facets of religious practices that reinforce this contrast between surface similarity and fundamental difference. Further examples include their relationship to the term *science*, their devotion to serve humanity, and the personal sacrifices involved. The deepest distinction between the two stems from the fact that Christian Science accentuates the close relationship with God, and Scientology highlights the human potential.

¹ James R. Lewis, ed., *Scientology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5.↑ ² Mary Bednarowski, *New Religions and the Theological Imagination in America*. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 63.↑ ³ Bednarowski, 28.↑ ⁴ Lewis, 92.↑ ⁵ Bednarowski, 61. Bednarowski quotes from L. Ron Hubbard, *Basic Dictionary of Dianetics and Scientology*. (Los Angeles: Bridge Publications, Inc., 1983.)↑ ⁶ Lewis, 92.↑ ⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.↑ ⁸ Mary Baker, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, (Boston, MA: The First Church of Christ, Scientist), 497.↑ ⁹ Eddy, 52.↑ ¹⁰ *What is Scientology?* Compiled by the staff of the Church of Scientology International, (Los Angeles: Bridge Publications, Inc., 1992), 156-161.↑ ¹¹ Bednarowski, 33.↑ ¹² *What is Scientology?* 142–146, 155.↑ ¹³ *What is Scientology?* 245.↑ ¹⁴ Bednarowski, 63.↑ ¹⁵ *What is Scientology?* 190–193.↑ ¹⁶ Eddy, 146.↑

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