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In 1950, L. Ron Hubbard—the founder of Scientology—published his bestselling book “Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health.” Though he originally conceived of Dianetics as a “science of the mind,” Hubbard later adapted his theories into a more religious approach, calling it the Church of Scientology. Founded in 1954 on Hubbard’s teachings, and now led by David Miscavige, Scientology has spread from its origins in Southern California throughout the United States and the world, generating a lot of debate along the way.

L. Ron Hubbard and “Dianetics”

Born in 1911 in Tilden, [Nebraska](#), Lafayette Ron Hubbard left [George Washington](#) University, where he was studying civil engineering, after two years. He later launched a successful career writing stories for “pulp” magazines in the 1930s, ultimately focusing on science fiction.

During [World War II](#), Hubbard served in the U.S. Naval Reserves, and he later claimed to have healed himself of several serious war-related ailments using the techniques he explained in his 1950 book “Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health.”

As laid out in “Dianetics,” each human individual has an analytic mind, which (like Freud’s concept of the conscious mind) is normally in charge of making the daily decisions and judgments necessary for survival.

In times of stress, pain or other trauma, however, it is the reactive mind (similar to the Freudian subconscious) that takes over. According to Hubbard’s “mental science,” the lasting scars from those negative experiences on the reactive mind are known as engrams. To get rid of these engrams, Hubbard prescribed a new type of therapeutic process called “auditing.”

In one-on-one meetings with a counselor, or auditor, an individual would answer a series of questions designed to purge these unconscious memories and allow the analytic mind to regain control.

What Is Scientology?: From Dianetics to Religion

Post-World War II audiences proved receptive to Hubbard’s claims of the healing powers of the mind, and the book quickly became a bestseller. Dianetics groups spread across the country and abroad, even as the American Psychological Association and other organizations questioned Hubbard’s claims regarding the scientific nature of his approach.

In 1952, Hubbard introduced a new aspect of the auditing process: a device he called the electropsychometer, or E-meter, which measures the strength of a small electrical current that runs through the body as an individual answers the auditor’s questions.

The introduction of the E-Meter helped mark Hubbard’s transition from Dianetics to Scientology, a term he said derived from the Latin *scio* (study) and the Greek *logos* (knowing). This new “science of knowledge” employed the principles of Dianetics in a different framework: Rather than an approach to mental health, Hubbard’s ideas would now become the basis for a new religious movement.

On February 18, 1954, incorporation papers were filed in Los Angeles for the Church of Scientology of [California](#), the first official Scientologist organization.

Scientology Beliefs: Going “Clear” and Beyond

The shift from Dianetics to Scientology included a focus on humans as immortal souls (thetans, in Scientology terminology) that are trapped within multiple bodies through various lifetimes. After purging the reactive mind of past trauma scars through the auditing process, an individual can become “clear”—a concept from Dianetics that represents a major goal in Scientology.

Those who go “clear” are believed to reach a higher level of ethical and moral standards, greater creativity and control over their environment and even less susceptibility to disease.

Individual Scientology churches and missions, known as “orgs,” began using Scientology materials to teach the faith’s basic tenets and conduct auditing procedures in order to help members reach the “clear” state.

Each local org was set up to process clients, including discussing their needs, recommending a product (usually a package of auditing sessions, known as an “intensive”) to fit those needs and accepting payment for that product. After reaching “clear,” members could go on to the more advanced levels of the church, and become “Operating Thetans,” or simply “OTs.”

David Miscavige and Death of L. Ron Hubbard

Since its origins, Scientology has faced opposition and controversy, including long-running complaints from the medical and scientific communities over Hubbard’s claims regarding mental health and the science behind the E-meters, as well as complaints over its status as a religion. As it grew, Scientology became involved in multiple legal battles, including lawsuits filed by former members claiming serious mistreatment by the church.

Though Hubbard himself headed up the Church of Scientology in its early years, in 1966 he resigned all offices and focused on developing post-Clear, Operating Thetan levels. He spent most of his time during this period aboard a fleet of seagoing vessels staffed with young, particularly devout Scientologist volunteers. The Sea Organization, or Sea Org, as they called themselves, became the elite of the Scientology movement, the church’s equivalent of a religious order.

Amid increasing scrutiny of the movement he founded, Hubbard disappeared from public view in 1980. After his death in 1986, at the age of 74, Sea Org member and Hubbard protégé, David Miscavige, took over leadership of the church.

Hollywood and Headquarters in Clearwater, Florida

Scientology opened its first Celebrity Centre in Hollywood in the late 1960s, followed by satellites in [New York](#), [Las Vegas](#) and Nashville and international outposts in cities like Paris, London, Vienna, Düsseldorf, Munich and Florence.

Among Scientology’s most visible adherents over the years have been Hollywood stars like [Tom Cruise](#), [Kirstie Alley](#), [John Travolta](#), [Isaac Hayes](#) and others.

Despite its strong connection with California, and particularly Hollywood, the church’s spiritual headquarters are located in Clearwater, [Florida](#). Since the mid-1970s, the Flag Service Organization there has been the destination for those seeking instruction in the highest levels of Scientology.

Scientology Today

The United States, home to the majority of Scientologists, has recognized Scientology as a religion, with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) reaffirming the church's tax-exempt status in 1993 after a long-running investigation. In 2013, Britain's highest court similarly affirmed Scientology's status as a religion by ruling that the group could conduct weddings at its church in London.

Other countries have refused to legitimize the faith: Germany has barred Scientologists from holding public office, while in 2009 a French court found the church guilty of fraud, but stopped short of banning it altogether.

According to the official Church of Scientology [website](#), there are now more than 11,000 churches, missions and groups in 184 nations, and the movement welcomes more than 4.4 million new people each year. But scholars and outside observers of the movement say the number of practicing Scientologists may be lower than the church claims, possibly numbering in the hundreds of thousands worldwide.

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