

## Scientology

In 1950 the American science fiction author Lafayette Ronald Hubbard (1911-1986) published the book "Dianetics". Hubbard believed he had discovered that so-called "engrams" (= unconscious negative memory traces) cloud people's minds, thus preventing them from utilising their full potential. The key advertising slogan of Scientology today is still "We use only ten percent of our mental potential".

### **The doctrine**

The organisation, which has also been active in Germany since 1976, is highly controversial. "Scientology" describes itself as a "Church", and claims to know of the only path to the survival of the individual and of all humankind. According to Scientology the human being is comprised of three parts: the body, the mind and the thetan. Each thetan, so it is believed, has existed since the beginning of the universe and migrates from person to person. When a person dies, the thetan leaves them in order to find a new body.

In the course of time, the thetan will have undergone numerous negative experiences that have left traces – the "engrams". These engrams are responsible for disease, addiction and crime. By using certain methods the Scientology organisation promises to be able to eliminate engrams, so that each individual and subsequently all humankind can be made clear. Scientologists use the term "clear" to describe the state after which all engrams have been eliminated. Only then, according to Hubbard, will a life free from suffering be possible. The method, termed "dianetics", is broken down into various procedures: auditing, clearing rundown, training routines, the study of Hubbard's writings, and a series of systematic courses.

Scientology promises to lead people to "total liberty". To begin with, a free personality test with 200 questions is often used that supposedly identifies strengths, though in actual fact identifies mainly weaknesses. This is where the offer of "therapy" comes in, in the form of psychotherapeutic courses that become more and more expensive, and that through a complex system are designed to lead to greater and greater freedom and power. People who have undergone these courses report having invested thousands, sometimes even more than 50,000 Euros in them.

These psychotherapeutic courses revolve around the so-called "auditing" procedure, which Scientology describes as a "spiritual conversation", though which former members often report as having felt like "brainwashing".

The goal of these Scientology courses is the so-called "Operating Thetan" (OT). The OT "has been made so familiar with its environment that it has reached the point of being fully able to control or operate matter, energy, space, time and thought". This ideal figure, so the teaching has it, can create and change the physical universe of matter, energy, space and time through its will. Untouched by suffering or passions, weakness or failure, an OT is no longer a victim, but only ever a ruler of its fate.

Scientology is an ideology and an organisation that stakes an unlimited claim on power. The logic is simple: "Since Scientology brings total liberty, it has also the right to demand total subordination" (Hubbard). Anyone who gets in the way of the Scientology organisation or criticises it is branded an enemy and a criminal. "We have never found critics," Hubbard is quoted as saying, "who did not have a criminal past".

In Scientology any deviation from its ideology is considered a "crime". Renegades and critics of the organisation are branded "antisocial personalities" or "suppressive persons". In

Scientology it is stated more or less clearly that such "enemies" are to be destroyed. Former members tell of "punishment camps".

### **The organisation**

Numerous sub-organisations and cover organisations make the group difficult to pin down, despite its rigid hierarchy. Far larger than the "Churches" are the educational and business divisions, which apply Hubbard's methods in organisational development ("WISE") and in the social sector ("ABLE"). This labyrinthine organisational structure makes it difficult to find an answer to the question of how the Scientology organisation is actually constituted. Formally, each Scientology mission is a registered non-profit association. Despite skilful advertising campaigns in which the Church of Scientology has presented its members in the guise of champions of human rights in psychiatry (CCHR), as emergency counsellors ("volunteer ministers") in crisis regions, or as the agents of educational initiatives, membership figures in Germany are stagnating at between 5,000 and 6,000 individuals. Experience shows, however, that the mere number of members tells us little about the real influence of an organisation.

### **Assessment**

#### *From a political perspective*

For over a decade the issue of the threat posed by the Scientology organisation has been the subject of intense debate within the public, the political parties and the responsible professional bodies in Germany. In late 1995 a legal expertise reached the conclusion that Scientology is a new form of political extremism. According to the report, the theory and practice of the organisation display all the characteristics of a totalitarian organisation: the claim to sole ideological representation, strict dogmatism, a closed organisational structure, a cult of leadership and total subordination of members, as well as an ideological jargon including some newly coined terms. This report formed a key basis for the resolution adopted by the Conference of Germany's Federal State Ministers of the Interior in 1997 to have Scientology kept under surveillance by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution. To this day, the organisation is being monitored in 11 of Germany's 16 federal states. A legal action brought by the Scientology organisation to have this surveillance lifted was rejected by the highest court in February 2008, on the grounds that the organisation was demonstrably attempting to undermine the fundamental liberal democratic order, a verdict which is legally binding.

It is not just what Scientology stands for, but also the manner in which it asserts its ideology, that invite objection. The seductive thing about Scientology is the fact that some of its training methods, which aim to desensitise and impart powers of assertiveness to the trainee are quite effective. Also seductive is the fact that its ideological strategy, which promises power, can – albeit in an exaggerated, delusional fashion – resonate with some of the accepted "values" of our performance-oriented society.

It is a known fact that many companies have put their staff through training courses with the Scientology organisation, or organisations with links to Scientology. Former members report that Scientology has plans to infiltrate the entire German business sector, widen its political influence and assume power across German society – or in the jargon of Scientology to "clear Germany". Even if this were a huge exaggeration, the idea nevertheless underlines the political ambitions of the Scientology organisation.

#### *From a Church perspective*

The conception of the human person held by Scientology is not only incompatible with the understanding of democracy enshrined in Germany's Basic Law, it is also incompatible with

Christianity's conception of the human person. Whereas Christian faith speaks of the love and devotion extended by God to the human person, who is dependent on this love, Scientology has in mind a vision of the human being who wishes to turn him- or herself into a god. Its ideology is brutal, ruthless, exploitative and dangerous. Scientology does not have the slightest thing in common with a religion or a Church, despite its repeated claims to the contrary, and its attempts to demonstrate such by means of strange reports.

Under certain circumstances the system of Scientology courses can become dangerous. This is because its staff are extremely well trained in enticing people who are in situations of upheaval or crisis with grandiose promises of success, and feeding them into the costly system of courses. It is claimed that by using special techniques, the supposedly unlimited potentials of the human mind will be made available. Who would not like to reap fame and success, and attain influence or even power over others?

The fact that crises, limitations, experiences of loss and failure are part of being human, and are to be acknowledged as such, is ignored in Scientology's ideology of unlimited potential and power. Scientologists are dangerous particularly because of their conception of the human person, which sees in every soul nothing but a machine that requires perfect adjustment. Machines have neither rights, nor intrinsic dignity.

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