

Illness and Medical Treatment from Scientology and Christian Science Perspectives: A Contrast and Comparison of Views

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It appears to be no coincidence that Christian Science and Scientology are often confused because their names are so similar. But research shows us that not only are their names similar, but so are several of their founding principles as sciences of the mind which practice mind over matter where illness is deemed psychosomatic. The religious movements of Christian Science, founded by Mary Baker Eddy in the 1800s, and Scientology, founded by L. Ron Hubbard in 1950, each function as a science of the mind which also calls itself a religion. Each is based on a religious philosophy that offers a solution to mental health and physical illness, both of which are viewed as psychosomatic by Christian Science and Scientology. This article uses a sociological perspective to explore how these religions view illness, how these views affect social life for the members of the religions, and what their teachings or their religious texts say about illness and medical treatment. These two groups and the backgrounds of the founders are also briefly explored to discuss common denominators between them and how these points affect the lives of their members.

Brief descriptions of Christian Science and Scientology

What the world knows today as The First Church of Christ Scientist (TFCCS) was founded as the Christian Science Church in 1879 by Mary Baker Eddy in Boston, Massachusetts. Eddy formulated Christian Science based on the Bible, the acknowledgement of God as creator, and the existence of Jesus Christ as the son of God, but teaches that man is

able to function like God if they can understand her divine writings in *Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures*. Today, Boston's mother church continues to serve as headquarters for 2,300 Christian Science branches in 68 countries. Branch churches offer a midweek "testimony" meeting, where Christian Science members bear witness to experiences of physical healing through the power of meditation and prayer to battle the "non-reality" of sin, illness and physical mortality. Christian Science practitioners help people with their progression to a more divine state of mind by dealing with the "false reality" of illness, since Christian Scientists prefer not to use doctors, medicine, or immunizations. Traditional preachers are replaced in TFCCS churches by "readers" who read prescribed passages from the Bible with interpretive readings from materials written by Eddy, primarily *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. In place of church pastors, TFCCS says Eddy named the Bible and *S&H* as the Pastor for worldwide Churches of Christ, Scientist (2007).

TFCCS utilizes mainstream media to disseminate its beliefs to society through *The Christian Science Journals*, *The Christian Science Sentinel*, *The Herald of Christian Science*, *Christian Science Quarterly*, WQTV Radio and Television in Boston, and its most well-known publication, *The Christian Science Monitor*. Eddy founded the Christian Science Publishing Society in 1896 which became the publishing home for all her materials. She launched *The Monitor* in 1908 which, to date, is the recipient of seven Pulitzer Prizes. To a great extent, TFCCS exercises great social control over its members and its media presence through actual ownership of media channels to pump out its propaganda. Eddy earned a fortune through the sale of her religious materials and Christian Science training courses.

Hubbard founded Scientology in 1950 following his release of his first book, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*. Dianetics focuses on what the mind is doing to the body and claims that *all* illness is psychosomatic. The process of Dianetics therapy claims to enable people to contact the portion of their mind that contains “engrams” (moments of pain and unconsciousness caused by an accident or traumatic emotional incident). By regressing through all of one’s memories back to one’s birth, recalling all stored incidents of engrams, one can clear the engrams and eliminate one’s psychosomatic illnesses. Hubbard denounces the use of medications to cure illness, and claims that Dianetics can cure illness. Scientology picks up on Dianetics theory but claims to help people look into their memories from past lives. Based on the belief that being in contact with one’s past lives is a spiritual issue, Hubbard calls Scientology a religion. He based Scientology on principles of Buddhism in terms of human ability to know oneself as a spiritual being who has always lived. Hubbard does not acknowledge God as creator or Jesus Christ as savior of mankind and provides the theory that as spiritual beings before the beginning of time, we possessed all the power and knowledge we needed in order to create the universe, and did so (1988). The Church of Scientology has more than 100 church organizations on five continents, and claims 10 million followers despite the fact that ex-staff report less than 100,000.

Hubbard followed suit to Eddy’s establishment of her own publishing company. He founded Bridge Publications in Los Angeles in the 1950s to publish his written material. He claims to have published millions of words, hundreds of books and taped lectures that heal the mind and soul which heals the body. He also established another media channel, Golden Era

Productions, located in the desert between Los Angeles and Palm Springs. Approximately 400 dedicated staff have forsaken a public life with the freedom to run their own lives, to instead subjugate themselves to the totalitarian authority of Scientology's senior management, who control everything from how and when they work and sleep, to condoning abortions, to prevention of staff watching television or having Internet access. At Golden Era, the staff work in slave-like conditions to manufacture copies of Hubbard's taped lectures, copies of training films he produced, his Hubbard E-Meters (electrometer instruments used in Scientology auditing sessions), and translate his books into 25 different languages. Golden Era staff get paid \$50 per week, while Scientology management grosses more than \$7 million per week. This indicates the degree of social control that the Church of Scientology exerts over its members, like puppets on a string. They have been indoctrinated into believing that Scientology holds the keys to their immortality, and that Scientology is the only answer to the ills of planet earth. For this, they have sold their soul and dedicated their lives to the Scientology cause. Hubbard became a millionaire from the sale of his books, audio/visual materials, and Scientology training courses. All of his materials address the individual as a spiritual being who can disagree with illness and mental shortcomings, and learn to be "causative" over them.

In order to discover the "truths" of Christian Science and Scientology and eliminate illness from one's life, followers must involve themselves in a deep study of these religious materials. Christian Scientists must read all of Eddy's books and learn the text of *Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures*. This requires intense devotion of time to attend classes, events and services. It also requires a considerable expense of money to purchase the books

and materials at every new reprint which contains “corrections” and updates. Scientology customers are also required to devote 12 ½ hours per week to sit in a Scientology classroom to study the “source” materials written by Hubbard, and learn how to become a 100% standard Scientology auditor (counselor who uses the electrometer in a spiritual counseling session with another Scientologist). In the cases of Christian Science and Scientology, the members are intensely involved in more than just a religious belief; it is an all-encompassing lifestyle. In this way, Eddy and Hubbard provide social cohesion for their followers who believe they must accomplish “mind over matter”, and gives them a means to overcome illness through the science of the mind that both of these practices teach. A member becomes extremely dependent on these teachings and materials in order to obtain their goal of mind over matter to be free of psychosomatic illness or the need for medication.

What their teachings say about illness and medication

Christian Science consists of physical healing through its educational system. Most branch churches maintain Christian Science Reading Rooms, community centers for spiritual discovery and exploration, offering a wide variety of books, magazines, and audio products on healing through spirituality, including Eddy’s central book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. The word “Key” in her book title is in reference to her being the woman of Revelation 12, that she is the key to unlocking the Bible, which she called a dark book. Other writings by Eddy include *Retrospection and Introspection*, *Miscellaneous Writings 1883-1896*, *Rudimental Divine Science*, *Christian Healing*, *Christian Science versus Pantheism*, *No and Yes*, and *Manual of the Mother Church*. Each of Eddy’s books includes

the Christian Science seal, the design of the Cross and the Crown, surrounded by the circle of words, "Heal the sick ~ raise the dead ~ cleanse the lepers ~ cast out demons."

By the mid-1960s, TFCCS membership declined at a steady rate, and worsened significantly after scandal rocked the church from charges of corrupted finances, morals and spiritual leadership. In the late 1980s and early '90s, TFCCS continued to receive negative media coverage from court battles involving church members and leaders in charges over manslaughter, murder, and child abuse for choosing prayer over medical treatment for illness (Martin 1997). Studies comparing control groups of patients suffering from illness show that while the Christian Science approach to healing is not scientifically demonstrated to be effective with real illness, it may help psychosomatic illnesses. But according to a 1989 *Journal of the American Medical Association* and a 1991 *Morbidity Weekly Report*, death rates among the Christian Scientists were significantly higher than any other group (Watchman 2007).

Research is lacking in the area of studies on Scientology members or ex-members comparing control groups of patients suffering from illness or resulting in death from Scientology practice, although reports do exist of individual cases which have resulted in lawsuits filed by family members. One recent high-profile case occurred from the death of former Scientology staff member Lisa McPherson, who died while in the care of Scientologists at the Scientology headquarters in Clearwater, Florida. She had become mentally deranged as a result of maltreatment from Scientology auditing processes, was kept isolated for seven days in a locked up room, and died of dehydration and other causes. The court case dragged on for five years. Other reports show that Scientologists have committed

suicide after not taking prescribed anti-depressants because of being told by Scientology practitioners not to take them. Recent media coverage has exposed the incident between celebrity Tom Cruise who made critical statements about actress Brooke Shields after she discussed how she was dealing with her post-partum depression. Cruise claimed that post-partum depression didn't exist and criticized her for taking anti-depressants.

Some research has been done on the mental health effects of Scientology membership using correlations between length of time in Scientology and scores on a number of measures of personality (Ross 2001). He used various personality scales and tested for things like independent functioning, stress tolerance, and commitment to goals in life. In summary, the results suggest that increasing time in Scientology gives rise to greater social ease and an increase in goal-directed, organized behavior, controlled for changes with age. Ross refers to Kilbourne's research (1986) which suggests that positive and therapeutic effects may accrue to long term cult members.

The Church of Scientology engages in an ongoing rampage against psychiatry for issuing "psych drugs" like Ritalin to children. This is a good example of how religion can cause social conflict. It seems that the Church of Scientology is attempting to take on a symbolic interactionist role by hoping to cause social change. Scientology is attempting to wipe out psychiatry as the nation's solution to mental health, hoping to take psychiatry's place and monopolize the mental health industry. They developed the social activist organization, Citizen's Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) to defame the psychiatric profession, and even conducted an anti-psychiatry museum in Hollywood. CCHR members call themselves "psych-busters" and strive to shut down mental health facilities that use or have used electro-

shock therapy for mental health treatment. Scientology will not accept customers into Scientology auditing services who have ever taken LSD, Ritalin, or had electro-shock therapy, because they say these people have been ruined by those drugs or treatment and cannot be helped. From a sociological perspective, Scientology can be considered a religious fundamentalist group as per how they are intolerant of social functions such as mental health treatment and other medical treatment.

This is also a good example of how Scientology and Christian Science can be considered a deviant social group, because of their rejection of traditional medicine and medical treatment, which has resulted in social conflict. University of Washington professors of Religion, Wellman and Tokuno (2004), argue that it is a part of the nature of religious movements to gain their identity through conflict and tension with out-group cultures.

Commonalities shared between Eddy and Hubbard

It makes for interesting sociological exploration to look into the background of the founders of these new religious movements and discover several common denominators between them. It is especially interesting to note that Hubbard formulated Scientology about 50 years after Eddy died, and seemed to repeat or use many things Eddy had done in Christian Science. It's as if he used her successful actions as a model to formulate a profitable organized group which he called a religion, like she had done. Following are several observations of common denominators between Eddy and Hubbard:

> Eddy and Hubbard each experienced illness in their past or a severe injury, which they claim led them to spiritual revelation which resulted in their findings that they formulated into a religion. Each deviated from the religion of their family and turned to

metaphysics, occult practices, and hypnosis to try to treat their illness or injuries, prior to formulating their religion.

Mary Ann Morse Baker was born in 1821. Her youth was marked by chronic illnesses, including paralysis, hysteria, seizures, and convulsions. She rebelled against her parent's Calvinist doctrine of predestination at an early age. At 22, she married her first of three husbands, George Washington Glover, who died seven months later from yellow fever, three months after the birth of their son, George, Jr. Still suffering from the bouts of illness, Mary left her son in the care of her family's former nurse. Baker-Glover avoided treatments of conventional 19th-century medicine and sought relief from alternative treatments of the day. According to a 1906 edition of *New York World*, Mary Baker-Glover turned to morphine to ease her emotional ailments after her husband's death (Martin 1997) when she also began her involvement in hydropathy (water cures), homeopathy, mesmerism (hypnosis), and occult practices including spiritualism and clairvoyance (Martin 1997). In 1853, Baker-Glover married homeopathic practitioner and dentist, Dr. Daniel Patterson. Before she divorced Dr. Patterson, she had become acquainted with Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, a mental healer from Portland, Maine who believed that illness and disease could be cured by changing one's beliefs through positive thinking about health. In the 1850s, Quimby's theories were used as the basis for the Unity School of Christianity where his system of mental healing was referred to as the science of health. He coined terms like "the science of Christ" before she adopted them into her own practice. She thought Quimby had rediscovered Jesus' healing method, and in time, concluded that Quimby's technique depended largely on his vigorous personality and his training in hypnosis rather than on some divine principle, which she thought lay

behind Jesus' healing work. Nevertheless, she developed a psychic dependence on Quimby's spiritual presence, believing in his visitations by apparition. Though she continued to be chronically ill through her years of knowing Quimby, she claimed to suddenly improve through Quimby's cure of her, though her symptoms later returned. Quimby served as the major influence in her development of Christian Science philosophy. Devastated after his death in 1866, she realized she could proclaim his healing message, determined to carry on his work. To the extent she is known as the mother of Christian Science, Quimby is its father.

In 1867-1870, she used Quimby's manuscripts while she taught Christian Science in Stoughton, Massachusetts. Yet, the *Christian Science Journal* of January, 1901 states that she maintained that she *alone* "discovered and founded" Christian Science through Divine import and copied only what God Almighty spoke. In 1875, she published her book, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (S&H) and later founded the Massachusetts Metaphysical College in Lynn, Massachusetts. Her book and practice of Christian Science "made a religion of Quimby's theories, which she claimed as her own. In the 381 revisions that followed, she gradually altered Quimby's teachings and linked them to portions of the Bible. On July 10, 1904, *The New York Times* illustrated her plagiarism of Quimby's writings when they printed a comparison of her writings in *S&H* to Quimby's.

When she was 56, she wed one of her students, Asa Gilbert Eddy, in 1877. He provided strong support to her during the formative years of establishing Christian Science. According to the Longyear Museum in Chestnut Hill, Mass., Asa Eddy was the first one to advertise publicly as a Christian Science practitioner.

Eddy's defining moment in the creation of Christian Science occurred in February 1866. She had a near fatal fall on icy pavement, but claims she was miraculously healed. "The healing of Truth dawned upon my senses," when she said she gained the certainty that "all causation was Mind, and every effect a mental phenomenon" (1896:24). (Scientologists: Does that sound familiar? Now we can see he copied Mary Baker Eddy and claimed it as his own breakthrough in Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health). She claimed to be instantly healed which gave way to her subsequent divine healing ministry.

Hubbard's past is not filled with chronic illness like Eddy's. He experienced his first major medical problem while in the Navy during World War II. While some stories say he was injured during battle that nearly led to blindness, other reports say he never engaged in battle and was hospitalized for intestinal disease. Whatever the true cause of his medical problems, he was laid up in the Oak Knoll military hospital base on the west coast. There he had the time to research the psychological and spiritual effects of not only his injury, but of the injuries of other military people in the Oak Knoll hospital. He claims he tested the recall of the sailors as to what happened, how it affected them, and the like. He had the time to read books on hypnosis and practiced hypnosis techniques on bed-ridden patients. He claims he documented these results and began to formulate theories about how one's state of mind can overcome the effects of one's injury and illness. He took his proceedings into civilian life and began to develop what became Dianetics counseling processes, which are similar to regression therapy of recalling one's past.

Hubbard's son, Ron Hubbard, Jr. co-wrote the controversial book, *L. Ron Hubbard: Messiah or Madman?* (1987), revealed his estranged father as a different man than the one

known to his faithful followers in Dianetics and Scientology. This book reveals the effects of Hubbard's religious claims and theories on his family. Ron Jr. and his stepmother, Sara Northrup Hubbard (Hubbard's second wife) were witness to a very different man from the one known to Scientology's zealous followers. "Indeed they probably know him better than anyone. They had stepped inside a very private and secret universe and stepped out again. And lived to talk about it" (Corydon, Bent and Hubbard Jr. 1987). Hubbard mentions hypnosis (a psychological technique) throughout Dianetics though discourages its use in favor of his newly created Dianetic techniques of bringing patients into "reverie" and the use of "amnesia trances" in order to overcome psychosomatic illness (1950). Ron Jr. reported that his father had an obsessive interest in hypnosis, self-hypnosis, and unconscious states in general, and practiced drug-induced hypnosis on himself, and on him and his mother. He believed that Hubbard's theories in Dianetics and Scientology were his father's written account of what was mentally and physically wrong with himself, and attempted to resolve it by writing. Ron Jr. stated that the main sources for what became Dianetics were actually psychoanalysis, abreaction therapy (regression into memories), and general semantics, all psychological techniques.

Ron Jr. also reveals his father's obsession with Aleister Crowley, a British occultist, self-proclaimed "Beast 666", and author of *The Book of the Law*, Crowley's occult bible. Crowley wrote, "...it is a sublime synthesis of all science and all ethics. It is by virtue of this Book that Man may attain a degree of freedom hitherto never suspected to be possible, a spiritual development altogether beyond anything hitherto known" (Corydon, Bent and Ron Hubbard Jr. 1987). In a later writing, Crowley said, "The

whole and sole object of all true magickal training is to become free from every kind of limitation.” This included limitations caused by physical impairment, illness and disease. Crowley’s “Messiah” was the Antichrist who would overthrow Christianity: Babalon the Great. Writings from Jon Atack, Bent Corydon, and Ron Hubbard Jr. all include references to Hubbard’s late 1940s participation in dark “magick” at the Ordo Templi Orientis in Los Angeles with his friend Jack Parsons, where they conjured up images of the Antichrist and believed they could change the condition of physically ill bodies through their magic. Hubbard’s last wife, Mary Sue Hubbard, and (former LRH Biographer) Gerry Armstrong’s lawyer Michael Flynn, said if Scientologists “read these documents they would leave the organization five minutes later” (Atack 1990). So, while Hubbard’s religion claims to be focused on eliminating physical pain, accidents and illness, and using Dianetics and Scientology to achieve mind over matter, his critics say it is occult black magic that is actually at the basis of this religion. Ron Jr. wrote that Crowley was perhaps the most important book in the life of L. Ron Hubbard. After Crowley’s death, Hubbard believed himself to be the one who came after as Crowley’s successor and took on the mantle of the ‘Great Beast,’ with Scientology actually beginning December 1, 1947, the day Aleister Crowley died. (1987). Crowley’s theme of “freedom from limitations” is seen throughout Hubbard’s writings as his main theme, and especially in Scientology’s goal of “total spiritual freedom” from the entrapment of physical and mental illness.

> Both founders hold deity positions within their religions, suggesting a collective conscience among the members comprised of common sentiments, ascribing the founders the

status of sacred symbols. It seems that Eddy and Hubbard have influenced their followers into believing that they acquired deity positions due to their divine revelations. Eddy is known as the Discoverer and Founder of the secret of “Divine science” (Longyear 2007). When Mrs. Eddy died in 1910 the CCS Board of Directors assumed leadership over the CCS, though Eddy retained her status of spiritual authority over the church. A stained glass window in the original edifice of CCS Boston is a permanent reminder of Eddy as church founder and spiritual head. The image shows a woman ascending into heaven; her status in CCS is comparable to Jesus Christ. Hubbard is known as the “Source” of Scientology, Source meaning the one and only individual that has ever discovered the one and only truth that has helped to save mankind (1991). Bronze busts of him are found throughout Scientology organizations. At the end of every class period or event, the Scientologists all stand up together in a ritualistic manner, face the bust of Hubbard, and applaud him for about three minutes and shout hip-hip-hooray.

The Church of Scientology exerts a great deal of social control over its members through the enforcement of Hubbard’s writings as being god-like. They hold all his written materials to be the scriptures of Scientology. Scientologists are not allowed to alter or depart from ‘source’ materials. Source materials comprise the core beliefs of Scientology which is referred to as ‘standard Tech (technology).’ All Scientologists are mandated to use 100% standard Tech in their life. They are required to learn source materials and use them; anyone who is found behaving in a manner that violates any Hubbard policies is considered to be “off-source” and can receive a Scientology justice action for misunderstanding words with the source materials, or misapplying what he wrote, or changing the meaning or purpose of his

materials. Scientologists can even be expelled from Scientology for altering Hubbard's written materials. Locke (2004) says that for the Scientologist, "There is no division between the mystical, the practical, and the science fictional. In the mundane resides the magical, partly through the mastery of a range of techniques that facilitate everyday affairs, and partly through the cultivation of internal states that qualitatively connect them" (Locke 2004).

These discoveries suggest that Eddy and Hubbard attempted to create a social cohesion among their followers through social control and by providing opportunity to experience a collective conscience through these unified beliefs.

> Both Eddy and Hubbard were involved in controversial use of drugs or practices contrary to their own religion in the late years of their lives which caused social conflict among their members or critics.

According to an 1882 edition of the *Boston Post*, Asa Eddy's death from coronary thrombosis was contested by Mrs. Eddy. An autopsy conducted by an uncredentialed physician indicated he died of arsenic poisoning "mentally administered." Mrs. Eddy's letter to the *Boston Post* accused some of her former students of "mentally poisoning her husband with malicious mesmerism in the form of arsenic" (Martin 1997) thereby providing a public record indicating the pitiful condition of her mental condition. A believer in demonology, Eddy "blamed problems, even deaths, including that of her husband Asa, on the "malicious animal magnetism" of former disciples" (Martin 1997). Eddy has also failed to diminish her self-contradiction on the issue of autopsies, which she wrote against in *Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures* (1881). TFCCS website includes no mention of this; this information was only found in Martin's cult reference book. This implies that the group

members may have not wanted to cause conflict by stating the truth about Eddy's contradictions and decided to remain quiet about it. This suggests the Noelle-Neumann spiral of silence theory: that public opinion is a tangible force that keeps people in line through a spiral of silence from the increasing pressure people feel to conceal their views when they think they are in the minority (1997).

Hubbard's son, Ron Jr. affirmed in a sworn affidavit that his father regularly "used illegal drugs including amphetamines, barbiturates and hallucinogens, cocaine, peyote, and mescaline" (Corydon, B. and Hubbard 1987) contrary to what Hubbard preaches in his religion. Coroner's reports on file following Hubbard's death in 1986 show that Hubbard died of an overdose of psychotropic drug injections, had lung disease from long-term cigarette smoking, congestive heart disease and other medical problems, reveals that Hubbard himself was not experiencing the miraculous affects of Scientology treatment on himself. The fact that he had been receiving psychiatric drug treatment prior to his death is also contrary to Scientology's campaign against psychiatry.

Summary

It appears to be no coincidence that Christian Science and Scientology are often confused because their names are so similar. But research shows us that not only are their names similar, but are several of their founding principles as a science of the mind which practices mind over matter but also call themselves a religion. Both groups can be considered deviant because of their deviance from traditional medical practice to cure disease and illnesses, including mental illness. Both religions are animated by their members' desire to be

free from illness and the need for traditional medical care. Both religions exert tremendous social control over their members through the enforcement of ritualistic practices that substitute for traditional medical treatment. Hubbard, like Eddy, has made a fortune from the sale and mandatory purchase of materials by their followers who comply, indicating the strong collective conscience of the members. The founders of each group created a social cohesion among their followers through social control and by providing opportunity to experience a collective conscience about having the power to heal using mind over matter through these unified beliefs.

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