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Scientology Analysis: A Movement of Spirit Science

Religion is one of many components in the large, complex machine that is civilized culture. Every piece itself is important, but how people view and understand that which they cannot see or understand is a big part of how they interact with the world around them. In this way, religion can be the lens by which many see the world(whether it is through a belief in a deity, or a lack thereof). An important question to ask, thus, is what exactly makes up a religion in contemporary society? According to Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a religion is any belief that concerns itself with “ultimate ideas” about things such as the creation of life, one’s ultimate purpose, and/or what comes after death(*What Is “Religion” under Title VII?*). More often than not, religions employ a particular set of beliefs concerning the nature of the world’s functioning as well as particular views on morality, that are often maintained through a set of practices or rituals often particular to that religious belief. Whereas some religious beliefs spread into the realm of the supernatural, others can take a more methodological or “scientific” approach. A select few, however, find ways to meld the two. This is where the new religious movement of “Scientology” lies.

Scientology, overall, follows all of the structural components of an organized religion. It has an organizational structure(with places of worship), written doctrine(Dianetics), and founders

which serve as figures of reverence(L. Ron Hubbard). To start with, the Church of Scientology serves to present an alternative to traditional psychiatric medicine. Whereas psychology believes that mental illnesses are caused by natural things like imbalances in biochemistry, cultural environment, and individual experiences, Scientology says the opposite. Whereas psychology is grounded in the interpretation of the mind, Scientology says that mental illnesses are derived from the spiritual aspect of a human, and that the spirit supersedes the body and mind in importance(without the spirit, we would not have the mind or the body). According to the Church of Scientology, human beings themselves are immortal spiritual beings, whose experiences extend well past a single life. Scientologists believe that the soul is not a separate concept or entity, but rather the core of who one is. What they inhabit is their body, what they perceive the world through is their mind, and what breathes life into both of those(a person's very consciousness, or being) is called a "thetan". ("Parts of Man, Thetan, Body & Mind, L. Ron Hubbard, Human Spirit"). To further elaborate on the concept of thetans, Scientologists say that the reason why we have emotional dysfunction is because millions of years ago, the thetans that we are today once inhabited an ancestral alien race. This was until an alien conqueror named "Xenu" froze this ancestral race and transported them to Earth, where inevitably their souls were extracted from their bodies and infused with "false beliefs"(such as religion and sexual perversion) meant to stray them from spiritual enlightenment and wipe their memories of what Xenu had done. Those thetans then went on to inhabit early humans, where they would then cling on to them as vessels and cause all emotional issues to this day(*The Scientology Story - Part 1B: Defining the Theology*). While Scientology generally hides this knowledge from the public, this creation myth is sprinkled throughout their principles and serves a core to their practices and beliefs. Where this branches into the harmful, however, is in how the information is

only offered to those more progressed into Scientology. Those who are at higher levels of spiritual enlightenment are told that their bodies actually contain multiple thetans, independent of the one that the person themselves is. All physical and mental illnesses, accordingly, are prescribed as being a result of instability of these thetans (a belief confirmed by a former member of Scientology in an interview) (*Ex-Scientologist Explains Xenu*). To shun conventional medicine, generally, can result in dire consequences. Not to mention the rejection of things like chemotherapy or radiotherapy which can save lives in favor of a pseudoscientific belief with plenty of loopholes and conjecture. When it comes to the dismissal of empiricism, religions can delve into the restrictive and manipulative, which also comes with its own set of consequences. An important question to ask, though, is how these ideas are formed and where they take their inspiration.

Scientology has elements of numerous other old religions, as is expected for a new religious movement. Generally, the concept of the immortal soul has origins in Eastern philosophy, mainly in religions like Hinduism and Buddhism. Hubbard himself has stated that both Hinduism and Buddhist concepts are at the core of Scientology. The immortality of the soul and reincarnation, for example, is prevalent in both Buddhism and Hinduism. Hubbard also posited that the Veda, or ancient Hindu sacred texts, contained evidence of the ancestors of Scientology, and attempted to also claim that Buddhist texts also prove this concept (in an attempt to legitimize Scientology as a religion, to the detriment of blending two opposing beliefs). He also claimed that Sidhartha Gautma himself was not a higher spiritual being, but was rather living proof that purifying (or auditing) one's thetans was a source of good and a way to attain better well-being (*Scientology's Relationship With Eastern Religious Traditions*). In this way, he depicts the focus on the spirit and self-improvement as a higher purpose, which was majorly

derived from and loosely incorporates Eastern philosophical thought. In addition, it is shown that Hubbard's beliefs has roots in the esoteric work of Alistair Crowley, an infamous English occultist. Scientology's practices, in essence, are a "cycle of action used to produce a desired effect". Scientologists spend their time being audited, or cured of bad thetans, and then themselves auditing any remaining thetans in an attempt to reach a higher form of existence. As described by Crowley, he himself considered his ritual magic practices an exemplification of a cycle of action. Additionally, in Crowley's book called "The Book of Lies", he claimed that the greek letter "Theta" was originally a circle with a dot in its center, which is claimed in Egyptian mythology to be a symbol representing the sun, or "the center of the universe". Alistair then concluded that "theta", is the center of everything(a sentiment also shared in Hubbard's own creation of the concept of the thetan in Scientology)(Urban). While L. Ron Hubbard did derive the principles of Scientology from the works of science fiction, it was undeniable that Scientology as a whole had roots in many other religious traditions and schools of thought. As a new religious movement, Scientology is undeniably varied and nuanced.

Scientology's appeal to the masses is much like other new religious movements in that it focuses on adapting to the modern world, while still maintaining and revering the traditional beliefs on the spiritual. With things like online marketing, the incorporation of things like mental illnesses(which are a relatively recent discovery in human history), and appeals to self-improvement and guides to modern society, it is no wonder that Scientology has the number of believers that it does. Whereas many outsiders and critics see an esoteric religion associated with malaise and information censorship with roots in the occult, its own practitioners see an ideal way to live their lives. Connection with the immaterial, self-care and improvement, and a layer of armor to protect against the ambiguity of the modern world generally draw people to

Scientology. For people who feel as if they have been cast aside or mistreated incidentally as a result of psychologists, they feel as if they can effectively utilize Scientology to gain back control over their lives and to protest their own mistreatment. Though it is not the most rational of religions, and though its practices are dubious at best, when a person is struggling emotionally with something like a misdiagnosis, cons are the last thing on their mind. The definitive truth is the primary appeal. An ideal way to live one's life for someone who's life, they feel, "has spun out of control" is more important than the risks it might pose. Modernity further adds to this draw, as people begin to argue that the beliefs are "adjusted with the modern times, and as such contain answers that are pertinent to me now". This appeal, generally, is not specific to Scientology. Many new religious movements lead to the same conclusions or results for many people. Pentecostalism, for example, provides the vulnerable and destitute answers they need through the Bible and the teachings of Jesus(a figure who is seen as loving), which in turn gives those people a sense of community and a feeling that their life is outside of their control, and therefore not as bad as it once seemed. For many it gives them a grander sense of purpose, but with any new idea these would always be watched with a keen eye. In every religion(Scientology is no exception) certain practitioners can exercise their beliefs to the harm of those around them, leading to things like violence, alienation, and misinformation. To make this distinction, the most important thing to do is to deconstruct a belief at its core, and then to look at the person themselves. All religions are twofold, in that the person influences the religion as much as the religion influences the person. This, combined with a holistic view incorporating the intersection between the past and present, is the key to comprehending new religious movements.

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