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Cults and Conspiracies

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Accusations of Abuse in Scientology

Katie Holmes planned to go into labor silently as she and Tom Cruise believed that making a noise would negatively affect the baby. According to their belief, speaking and making noise under stress are recorded by the subconscious mind so that memories can become triggers in the future. Scientology is a controversial new religious movement started by L. Ron Hubbard based on a book he wrote, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (1950). The book emphasizes that people can overcome past traumas and mental blockages through “auditing.” Hubbard claims that people are infected with “engrams,” which are traumas that stop them from reaching their full potential. The religion teaches that people are spiritual beings called “thetans.” They believe in reincarnation as thetans are immortal beings with past lives that gather negative experiences throughout their lives. The goal of the religion is to “clear” their engrams (Westbrook, 2018). Though these teachings seem harmless, many critics believe that the religion is abusive to its members, and they operate like a cult. Family members claim that their loved ones joined Scientology and never went back to how they were.

Scientology is a controversial religion; many believe that it mistreats its members and is harmful to those in it. People all over the world are aware of the controversy of Scientology and often look down upon people who talk about it. According to Rigal-Cellard, “‘Scientologie’ has definitely become synonymous with [sorcery]. More so than any other minority religion, it is held as THE tentacular cult that has infiltrated the major levels of government, the judicial

system, and because of people like myself, the education networks.” This exclaims how Scientology is an infamous religion that is known to be manipulative to its members. Additionally, Scientology is known to receive enormous donations from its members. In fact, they are known to collect more money from members than any other cult. Monetary contributions are necessary for the members to receive auditing and training, which are the main practices in Scientology. Members are known to “take auditing sessions that cost as much as \$1,000 an hour, or \$12,500 for a 12 1/2-hour "intensive"” (Behar, 1991). People believe that these therapy sessions cause a drug-like addiction that lures people into coming back. These donations go up to \$130,000 for services. When former members sued the church, judges labeled Scientology as “schizophrenic and paranoid” and “corrupt, sinister and dangerous” (Behar, 1991). Lastly, some lawsuits have been filed against Scientology for abuse and the mistreatment of its members. According to Alex Johnson, a woman who goes by Jane Doe became a member of the Sea Organization. The Sea Organization is the higher levels of the church for its devoted members. After 12 years of being in the group, she was put in a seclusion program called “the Hole” because she was too aware of Miscavige’s marital issues. She was banished to Los Angeles, forced to publicize the church just before she escaped in a car trunk.

Others may argue that Scientology is not abusive to its members as it causes no physical harm to them. Scientology members claim that they donate money for the value of their spiritual journey; they say it is “worth every penny” (Westbrook, 2018). The donors do not care about the money they are donating since most of them are upper class, but they choose to donate large amounts of money and believe it is good for their spiritual journey. Additionally, Roux made a point that members of Scientology are still being disrespected by scholars who wish to learn about them. He states that Westbrook made a great monograph that shows mutual respect to the

members. Researchers are usually biased and unsympathetic when writing articles or papers about Scientology, which keeps them from digging deeper into the church's practices. Lastly, when Laurie Hamilton was interviewed, a second-generation member, she exchanged money for labor to move up to the highest levels of Scientology. Members are not forced to pay large amounts of money, but they would have to do work to reach the highest levels. However, members choose to pay or work for their enlightenment. Either way, Hamilton claims, "Anyone who really wants to do it can do it" (Lynch, 2012). People claim that it is not hard to move up in Scientology; money is not required to rise. Some people choose to do labor to contribute to the religion, but since it is easier, people prefer to donate money.

People may argue that Scientology is not abusive to its members because it is their choice to join and abide by the group. The Church of Scientology is shown to be a religion that guides members to spiritual enlightenment and self-mastery. However, behind these practices are members being forced into manual labor, psychological, and financial abuse that is harmful to their members, even if they are not aware of it. The need to donate large amounts of money to reach the "Bridge to Total Freedom" is not morally right when considering other religions that do not require money. Though members may afford to pay these amounts, it does not make it any more correct for them to collect. The religion also forces members to participate in its harsh disciplinary program to punish members of the group for any wrongdoing. Others, mostly members of the group, claim that membership and donations are voluntary and part of an exchange for something much bigger: spiritual freedom. However, these claims disregard the abusive patterns that this group clearly shows. They ignore the pressure placed on members that forces them to conform. The accusations of abuse in Scientology are real and believable, whether or not they are coming from a current or former member.

In conclusion, while Scientology is a religion claiming to help members remove their past traumas, or “engrams,” many former members, legal cases, and reports suggest that the religion is harmful to the members. Though all the members are voluntarily part of the group, they must follow a strict hierarchy of rules and expectations that may result in punishment if not followed. They are obligated to donate money or perform manual labor for their spiritual growth and to advance in the church. Current members of the group defend the church’s practices, but often ignore the serious harm that the organization is causing them.

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