Sruthi Sundaram

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Understanding Religious Intolerance

Challenging Assumptions

Scientology: The True Story

Religious intolerance often arises from ignorance about the religion toward which the intolerance is directed. When asked to look into my own knowledge of religions in terms of mistaken assumptions I might possess, my mind immediately fell on the Church of Scientology. Out of all the religions I have some basic knowledge about, Scientology was the only one to which I had no inside contact. However, as I delved further, I realized that I had actually heard quite a fair amount about Scientology, albeit from outsiders. Naturally, I sought to research Scientology so that I could uncover the facts about the religion under unbiased scrutiny away from the media that displays much of the propaganda that stirs conflict.

It would be impossible to narrow my initial outlook toward this religion down to one assumption. I have had several assumptions, all of which have to be addressed to fully resolve the matter. My assumptions basically centered around three areas: Scientologists are anti-religion in the sense that they are intolerant toward all others, they hypnotize people into joining them, and they steal their members’ money. I knew that the first and third assumptions are existent among haters of any religion, but the second assumption about hypnosis gave me a certain fear that I often felt ashamed to admit. As a Hindu, I have a very broadminded view of other religions; there is no doctrine in Hinduism that condemns any other religion or places its own values above others’. However, even with my accepting attitude, I had qualms about venturing too deeply into studying Scientology. I do believe in certain humans possessing higher hypnotic capabilities and was loathe to exposing myself to any potential harm to my mental health. At the same time, I realized that the second assumption was also the most ungrounded of the three; I had no personal experience nor did I know anyone who had been taken in unnaturally by Scientology. In fact, I did not actually know anyone who belonged to the Church of Scientology or even anyone who knew others that belonged to the Church. My fears were based fully off of what I heard circulating around society and in the media. After much debate with myself, I decided to take the step forward and attempt to separate truth from misconception.

To begin my research, I first took steps to read about Scientology. The official website for the Church of Scientology consists of a plethora of information presented in multimedia, with biographical essays, links to associated movements, and many videos (Scientology). Through this website, I obtained most of the factual information which I will attempt to summarize. The Church of Scientology is a New Religious Movement of the 20th century, founded by L. Ron Hubbard. Hubbard was born in 1911 in Tilden, Nebraska. At the age of six, he developed a close relationship with a Blackfoot medicine man known as Old Tom who imparted tribal lore to him at that young age. Hubbard was then ushered into tribal ranks as a blood brother. In his teenage years, Hubbard traveled across the Pacific with his father, who was a naval officer. Upon returning, Hubbard decided to dedicate his time to traveling and learning about Asian cultures. For his collegiate studies, Hubbard attended George Washington University to study engineering and nuclear physics and also became a literary scholar, authoring many works of fiction and nonfiction. Hubbard was commissioned as a Lieutenant of the US Navy Reserve during World War II and served in the Pacific front. At this time, he began to explore of his most prominent teaching areas, Dianetics. In 1950, he published *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, which is to date one of his most prominent works. In the next decade, he wrote many works that encompass the teachings of the Church of Scientology, giving many presentations in nations throughout Europe and Asia. He continued to travel to many developing nations in Asia and Africa, seeking to spread the ideas of Scientology and Dianetics through various education programs. Hubbard died in 1986, and since this time, over ten thousand churches dedicated to Scientology have been created throughout the world (L. Ron Hubbard: A Chronology).

Scientology is derived from a Latin root *Scio* “knowing” and a Greek root *logos* “study of”. Literally translated, it is the study of knowledge. The single belief around which Scientology is centered is that man is a spiritually immortal being with abilities beyond those he normally utilizes. If man can recognize those abilities underneath the layer of trivialities that generally mask them, he can ascend to a new level of awareness (Scientology Definition). At the core, there are three concepts that all Scientologists base their actions on: man is basically good, he seeks to survive, and his survival depends on himself, his peers, and his brotherhood with the Universe (The Creed of the Church). Scientology does have a concept of one Supreme Being who is expressed as the Eighth Dynamic (infinity). One can increase his spiritual awareness through coursework and auditing to reach the Seventh Dynamic (spiritual) and from there he will be able to recognize his relationship to the Eighth Dynamic and the Supreme Being (Does Scientology Have a Concept of God?). To reach the Seventh Dynamic, a person has to undergo auditing. Auditing is a one-on-one counseling session involving a counselor, known as the auditor, and a preclear, the person being counseled. Preclears are those who are yet to achieve full spiritual awareness and are in the learning process heading for that goal (What Is Auditing?). Auditing is performed through the use of an E-meter. An E-meter is an electropsychometer that uses a very small electric potential, 1.5V, to recognize areas of brain activity that need to be addressed in auditing. It is not a counseling device; it simply identifies the subjects that need to be addressed in counseling by measuring brainwave activity when the preclear ponders various subjects (What Is the E-Meter and How Does It Work?).

After reading about Scientology, I reassessed my assumptions and recognized some connections between those assumptions and certain concepts within Scientology. However, I wanted some firsthand information from a knowledgeable individual within the religion, so I contacted the Church of Scientology in the Greater Cincinnati area, located in Florence, KY. Because of logistical issues, I was unable to attend the Church for a tour, but I did manage a phone interview with two ministers in the Church who were very open to discussing the assumptions I wanted to address. When I asked about Scientology’s views on other religions, I was surprised to learn that Scientology is a completely non-denominational religion. In fact, one of the ministers I spoke to was actually Muslim. The concept confused me; I could not understand how one person could belong to two religions at once. When I addressed the issue, the minister explained that the religion was simply an individual-based methodology for living life to the fullest capacity. He described the methods as the “science of life […] an account of what [one] was doing before [he] forgot”. The religion did not promote any single set of spiritual beliefs; consequently, it was open to people from any religious background. I then asked him to give me an overview of the practices and beliefs of Scientology because I wanted to see if they coincided with my own research. He actually referred my directly to the Church of Scientology website as it was the best source for understanding L. Ron Hubbard’s teachings and very effectively summarized his writings. I then moved on to my second assumption about hypnosis, which, after my research, I realized likely stemmed from the auditing process. Both the ministers were very enthusiastic to discuss the subject with me. They described auditing as a kind of personal development program in which one recognizes his or her weaknesses and learns how to solve them. They specifically emphasized that the E-meter was only a diagnosis tool and was not an actual instrument in the counseling process. One of the ministers pointed out that in L. Ron Hubbard’s *Modern Science of Mental Health*, he specifically cited the harmfulness of hypnosis and did not condone it. Finally, when I arrived at my last assumption about the financial corruption, I learned about a certain source that was the root of many of the media hype about Scientology. When I was reading about Scientology, I had seen some links regarding an anti-drug policy promoted by the religion but I had not looked too deeply into it. However, in the interview, I learned that drug abuse and addiction was one of the Church of Scientology’s greatest concerns and that they were affiliated with many other special interest groups throughout the world, funding reform and education programs. Scientology has a very strong anti-drug stance that has come in odds with drug companies over the years. During the interview, the ministers I spoke to informed me that the rumors and bad hype was initiated by psychotropic drug companies in reaction to the Church’s anti-drug campaigns, especially regarding psychiatric drugs. When I asked about necessary prescription medication, one of the ministers said that he was actually under blood-pressure medication himself. The Church was not against medicine; it was against medicine that could be deemed unnecessary if one were to resort to alternative methods.

After completing my research I was able to draw some conclusions about Scientology that put my previously troubled mind at ease. I realized that there are always two sides to a story. Having grown up in a society outside of the religion, I had been exposed only to the negatives. While I definitely do not espouse many of the Church of Scientology’s practices and beliefs, I have learned to recognize it as a valid and humane view of the world. Furthermore, I know that religions are so complex and layered that even with my research I have likely grazed only the surface of this area of study. A more thorough understanding could be attained by talking to several different churches, analyzing differences in practices by geographic location, and perhaps arranging an actual visit to a Church of Scientology. These are steps I will definitely take if I decide to further study Scientology in my future academic endeavors.

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