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A Closer Look at Scientology - The Celebrity Cult

By Tal Davis

We're all looking for it. Some of us have been looking our whole lives.

"Hmm ..." I'm thinking as I watch the TV commercial unfolding with beautiful music, scenes of people with searching eyes, and a warm sounding male voice over. "I wonder what this is about."

Some think they can buy it. Some think they can wear it.

"It must be an ad for Christianity," I'm surmising. "Maybe it's presented by some evangelistic association or Christian church. It's very well done."

Some travel the world in search of it. Most don't even know what they are looking for, but we all feel it.

"Whoever made this ad must surely be Christian," I am saying to myself. "God is what we are all looking for."

That aching desire ... that unexplainable emptiness that can only be filled by one thing ... The Truth.

"Yes!" I am thinking. "This is great ... so tell them how to find Jesus, whoever you are."

But, my balloon burst.

Scientology: Know yourself ... Know life.

"Scientology?!" I said out loud incredulously.

Yes, Scientology. This short ad and a number of other well-made TV commercials are now running nationwide on various cable TV networks and online, challenging viewers to investigate the "life changing" system of the Church of Scientology.

Over the past couple of decades Americans have become more aware of this controversial religion primarily because of the involvement of prominent Hollywood celebrities including Tom Cruise, John Travolta, Kirstie Alley, Priscilla Presley and a host of others. So what is Scientology and what should Christians think about it?

In my 30-plus years of studying cults and sects, few have given me more cause for trepidation than the Church of Scientology. This bizarre movement was founded in 1954 by Science Fiction writer and self-proclaimed adventurer L. Ron Hubbard. Hubbard claimed that, as a boy and young man, he traveled the world searching for the answers to life's greatest questions. According to his own story, which has been widely disputed, he eventually discovered the secrets to real life. This self-revealed epiphany led him to create a new system of enhanced mental functioning he called "Dianetics." He publicly disclosed this fanciful scheme in his 1950 book "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health" which quickly became a best seller. Soon after that, he coined the term "Scientology" as a brand name for his novel ideas.

Consequently, Hubbard's theories were strongly condemned by the mental health establishment as unscientific and dangerous. Undaunted, he looked for more effective ways to market his concepts, so he decided to create a new religion. In 1954 he established the

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Church of Scientology, over which he reigned as a living Messiah-like figure until his death in 1986. Today, Hubbard is still remembered with reverence by Scientologists, and his books are regarded virtually as inspired scripture.

So, you ask, what does Scientology teach? What is its appeal, and why is it so controversial? In Hubbard's early works he described what he construed as the reasons for all of mankind's problems. He originally taught that we are all born with a clean slate mind which, beginning at infancy, becomes infected with negative subconscious impulses he called "engrams." These engrams, the result of negative traumatic events in our childhood and youth, adversely determine our mental and physical health the rest of our lives. Hubbard did not have a personal concept of deity, so in his system mankind's problem is not moral sin against a Holy God, but bad programming, so to speak.

Hubbard designed a system of therapy ("Dianetics") which he claimed could, over the course of time, completely expunge all negative engrams from our minds, leading to a full and happy life. The goal of the Dianetics process is to attain a state of being he called "Clear." Learning and practicing this process, called "Auditing," is the basis for the Church of Scientology.

Scientology, as do most non-Christian religions, gives patronizing credit to Jesus Christ. He is not the unique Son of God, just an example of someone who has reached "Clear." Hubbard maintained that, through ancient mental processes similar to modern Scientology, Jesus discovered his latent superhuman potential, as did other great teachers, philosophers and heroes in history.

Hubbard eventually realized that his Dianetics treatments were not always (if ever) successful. Therefore, he concluded that the Hindu concept of reincarnation is true. Thus, he asserted, not only do we have to deal with engrams from this life, but we also carry in our minds and bodies negative influences from our many previous lives. Hubbard maintained that, even if we reach "Clear," we will still need additional Auditing to gain victory over those still extant negative forces. What the commercials fail to state, of course, is that, as one progresses through the process, the Auditing sessions get increasingly expensive and must continue throughout one's life.

For some reason, this never-ending quest for perfection appeals to many intelligent and talented people. Thus, a number of show business luminaries regularly visit the church's Celebrity Centre International in Hollywood, Calif. The Centre features a first class hotel, fine dining, musical concerts and shows, and, naturally, special Auditing designed for its wealthy clientele.

You may ask, "So what? Scientology, though certainly not a usual form of mental health therapy and while maybe a bit strange, doesn't sound all that bad. Why should Christians be concerned about it? After all, there are lots of other ideas out there that sound crazier than that."

Maybe so, but Scientology goes much further than its basic ideas as outlined above. For one thing, once someone reaches the basic state of "Clear" and begins further study and auditing, she slowly learns Hubbard's advanced teachings about the creation of the human race, the nature of mankind, the history of the universe, etc. To say Hubbard's ideas on these points are bizarre is, at best, an understatement.

For instance, Hubbard taught that about 75 million years ago the galaxy was once under the control of an evil

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ruler named Xenu who sent rebellious subjects to a prison planet called "Teegeeack" (now called Earth) where they were destroyed by H-bombs. Their spirits, called "Thetans," still survive and attach themselves to living persons who must work (using Scientology, obviously) to remove their influences from their lives.

"Whoa," you say. "Where did all that come from?" The answer is simple, from the highly active Science Fiction imagination of L. Ron Hubbard. Yet,

committed Scientologists believe it is true. The Bible, of course, presents a far different story of man's history and way of salvation.

Yes, Scientology has beautiful commercials and lofty promises. But the truth is far from the paradise they portray. The real answers to life's questions are not in some faddish therapy, SciFi religion, or "knowing yourself." They are only found in the One who claimed to be "The Way, the Truth, and the Life," Jesus Christ.

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