

GOING CLEAR: SCIENTOLOGY, HOLLYWOOD, AND THE PRISON OF BELIEF

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We all know religious devotion has declined precipitously in America. Most of what religion remains is Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, which is the sherbet of religions, an unsatisfying imitation of the real thing. No doubt this decline is temporary, since the human religious impulse, toward transcendence and final meaning, is too strong to remain unsatisfied. The success, or at least the visibility, of Scientology, a scam with falsifiable and internally incoherent beliefs, shows this clearly enough. I'm not going to beat up on John Travolta and Tom Cruise, though. I instead want to explain the religious principles and structure of a well-run state, and in particular, of the Foundationalist state.

As everyone knows, Scientology was founded by L. Ron Hubbard, who died in 1986. Hubbard was an archetypical cult leader: an inveterate fantasist who at some level probably believed his own lies, and who had the charisma to hoodwink those who wanted to believe and were willing to suspend common sense. In short, Scientology claims that it is the path to universal peace and happiness, a cure for everything that ails the universe. As its name implies, Scientology tries to have it both ways. For tax purposes, and for the avoidance of government interference, it claims to be a religion. But internally, it claims to be a set of scientific discoveries, and its cosmology is purely of this universe. There is essentially zero concept of God, or of an afterlife other than a reincarnated one. Its theology, notoriously, is essentially a science fiction story, and it offers its adherents the chance to enter that story.

The core goal of the devout Scientologist is to be "clear." Scientologists believe the brain is split into the "analytical" brain and the "reactive" brain. The latter absorbs and reflects traumas and similar bad events, clouding the abilities of the former. (As with one hundred percent of Scientology's scientific claims, this is one hundred percent provably untrue.) When a Scientologist is clear, he is freed of the influence of the reactive brain, and when his analytical brain is thus freed, he gains the potential to exercise superpowers, such as the ability to manipulate time and space, and to leave his body entirely, to "go exterior." Although,

infamously, actually acquiring those powers requires innumerable sessions of instruction offered on the “Bridge to Total Freedom,” a device used to free Scientology members of their hard-earned cash, by achieving various levels of “Operating Thetan” status. Needless to say, nobody ever evidences actual superpowers (although the endless guided introspection on the Bridge does seem to often lead to a high degree of mental discipline, even if that discipline isn’t used for anything useful).

On the surface, Scientology is a very modern belief system. It claims that the truth is relative, trumpeting to potential converts that “If it is not true for you, it isn’t true.” I don’t think this is actually a core Scientology principle; it’s just presented to possible initiates because it resonates with modern man. Devout Scientologists don’t say anything of the sort; they are convinced that they are crucial participants in the most important work in the universe, about the truth of which there is no doubt. That is to say, as with all religious believers, Scientologists seek transcendence—both internal, but even more the feeling that they are “the vanguard of the struggle to save humanity.” Not just now, but for trillions of years into the future. Scientology gives them purpose and mystery, and apparently offers not infrequent psychedelic experiences, which, as Michael Pollan notes in *How to Change Your Mind*, are achievable without drugs. It is not all that surprising that a slick belief system packaged for and targeted to a certain demographic, in essence those seeking secular apotheosis, attracts some adherents.

Going Clear is a fairly standard exposé. It’s well written, if a bit dry, and the reader is suitably appalled. The author, Lawrence Wright, seeks to appall, but there are really two distinct lines of appalling behavior. The first is the scam element, the lust for money, power, and control, represented by David Miscavige, “Chairman of the Board,” Hubbard’s successor, and proud owner of an extreme Napoleon complex. The second is the lengths to which church members will go to abase themselves to earn salvation, signing billion-year contracts to perform menial labor at forty cents an hour, spending years in de facto prison for imaginary “ethical violations,” and severing ties with any person not supportive of Scientology, “Suppressive Persons.”

But these are pretty standard cult manifestations, and as I say, I’m not here to abuse Scientology. Wright will do that for you, as will innumerable websites run by Scientology apostates. And Scientology

has a lot of apostates. Most just have an epiphany that they have been hoodwinked. Some have a substantive dispute with the Church. For example, *Going Clear*, and the subsequent documentary by the same name (which I also watched), is organized around the time in Scientology of screenwriter Paul Haggis, who joined in 1975 and left in 2009. As a celebrity, he was highly desirable in Scientology's eyes. By his own admission an extreme progressive, he was attracted by the "what's true for you is true" shtick offered him in the 1970s, but he departed over a political dispute, when two of his daughters decided they were lesbians and the Church, to its credit, refused to follow the current political winds by endorsing their choice (though several years later, claiming their very own Satanic Verses, the Church apparently began to argue that Hubbard's repeated condemnations of homosexuality were somehow inserted in his writings by his enemies). Regardless, the net effect seems to be that the Church has a lot of money and relatively few members. It is unlikely to give Mormonism competition as a successful modern religion; no doubt it will go the way of most cults.

What struck me reading this book is that there really hasn't been a successful new religion since Christianity. What about Islam? Nope. It's for good reason that Islam was originally considered by Christians another Christian heresy—the doctrines and stories of Islam are just a mashup of Christianity and Judaism, combined with associated folktales and various already-existing pseudo-gospels, with Muhammad's imaginings acting as glue. (It's also fairly obvious that Islam only took on a closer resemblance to an complete alternative religion when the Qur'an was cobbled together two hundred years after Muhammad's death, when variants within the religion were suppressed, no doubt with wholly new writings added at that time and passed off as originals, in order to better differentiate Islam from its obvious sources.) As Hilaire Belloc said, what Muhammad "taught was in the main Catholic doctrine, oversimplified. . . . [H]e, like so many other lesser heresiarchs, founded his heresy on simplification." Islam is not new in the way Christianity was new, or even more so that Judaism was new—which is, surely, why Muhammad claimed not to be new, but to be the perfection, or clarification, of those earlier Abrahamic religions.

Since then? Not much. In the modern era, we have, for example, Mormonism. But Mormonism is in this way similar to Islam—it's

remixed Christianity with fantasy elements added by Joseph Smith. As with Scientology, many core claims of Mormonism are overtly falsifiable, but that does not deter believers. Scientology is just another example of something that seems like a new religion, but isn't. Rather, it's the science fiction Hubbard churned out to earn money in the 1930s, mixed up with the 1950s feeling that science was our new savior, combined with, as Wright says, "Buddhism, Hinduism, magic, General Semantics, and shamanism," along with a generous dose of Hubbard's fantastical and self-contradictory imaginings to stick it all together. I suppose one could argue that it's a new religion, because people believe in it and its actual doctrines are mostly new as a belief system. True enough, the dividing line is blurry. What if I decided today to worship my dog, claiming he was the sun god Ra and gave me the ability to turn lead into gold? Is that a new religion? I suppose so, although I'd also be importing Egyptian concepts, so it's also a mashup. But it's not a successful new religion. Nor, really, is Scientology—its numbers are inflated, and it probably has only a few thousand adherents. The celebrity focus and the controversy is what makes it seem successful.

You can always find a small group of people to believe nearly anything; that proves nothing. Perhaps the only successful new religion since Christianity, as Hilaire Belloc wrote in *The Great Heresies* (though he denominated it a heresy), is Modernism, in essence the worship of Man himself. But Modernism isn't truly a religion, because it fails to satisfy the human desire for transcendence, which is why adherents to Modernism inevitably fall either into aimless anomie or into vicious ideologies, from Communism to environmentalism, that do offer transcendence in precisely the same way as a religion. Properly viewed, Modernism is simply the philosophical ground of all modern ideologies, from the French Revolution onward, not an independent belief system—although certainly, as many have noted, those ideologies are often largely indistinguishable from religions in many of their aspects. Will there be a successful new actual religion in our future? I doubt it. But I am quite sure that religiosity will return in the West, though my bet is that there will be a great deal of upheaval before that happens, and the new society will not much resemble the old, but the dominant religions will likely be very old indeed.

In America, it is said we have freedom of religion, guaranteed by the First Amendment. This is false. In practice the Constitution has long protected mainstream religion only, which, given human nature, is really no surprise. Ask the Mormons, or for that matter, the Catholics. America, until sixty years ago or so, was a very successful society, and you can't run a successful society without a dominant religion, especially among the ruling class. In this, as in all things, diversity is the opposite of our strength. A society without a dominant religion is necessarily a low-trust society, and therefore incapable of being successful.

That's fine by me; as I discuss below, the state shouldn't permit all religions, and should prefer some to others. But the practical problem for me, and for my political project, is that we already have a new, and bad, dominant religion in America, or rather a dominant religion of the ruling class—the Modernist cult of globohomo. That cult is exalted today by state and society, and other, incompatible religions, most of all by a huge margin Christianity, are attacked and suppressed. Christians, in an ironic twist, are the new Mormons.

Suppression of Christianity has always been a core project of the Left (we can ignore silly people who see the modern Left as itself Christian in inspiration). In the past fifty years, Christian freedom of both belief and worship has been successfully attacked (even more so in Europe), such that the space outside our own minds for any belief that contradicts the premises and goals of globohomo is now forcibly limited by state and quasi-state action. The latter is really more important, in a new departure in America—yes, there is effective formal erosion of the First Amendment (which would be completely a dead letter if one more leftist was on the Supreme Court), but even more suppression of religious belief is outsourced to corporate America. Nobody can deny that if anyone working a white-collar job at nearly any large business in America, or in academia, expressed, even in personal, outside-of-work communications, the unexceptional Christian belief that homosexual activity is a sin, he would be immediately severely punished, and likely fired. On social media and other forms of private communication controlled by the new common carriers, it is the same. Public Christian belief that contradicts globohomo is anathema to today's ruling classes. No aspirant to the ruling classes or the professional-managerial elite can even belong to a church if it is known to hold unacceptable opinions, regardless of

what the individual expresses (though a mosque is a different question). The persecution is open and unapologetic, and it is a mistake to think it will not increase to violence when scapegoats are needed for some future catastrophe. Hatred of Christianity already leads to jail time for Christians who say the wrong thing in Europe, and the Scots just this week proposed a law with a seven-year jail term for blasphemy against globohomo. Remember the Mormons, and buy guns, and practice with them.

The Right, or at least the Right as currently organized and led, refuses to recognize this project of their enemies, as always hobbling themselves and dooming their goals to defeat without even a battle. For example, the magazine *First Things* recently published a long article parsing Supreme Court cases on school prayer. It was erudite and accurate, and correctly pointed out that the Constitution is now bizarrely interpreted to forbid any religiously-based rationale for a public policy (or at least it's bizarre if you maintain the delusion that Left interpretation of the Constitution has anything to do with interpretation). It criticized the relevant Supreme Court decisions as incoherent, which of course they are. But so what? As with all Left court decisions that impose policy, by which we are largely ruled today, it is the end achieved, and the power the Left can wield, that matters, not coherency, and to spend any time at all talking about coherency, as if that was what mattered to the Left or as if a demonstration of their incoherence might turn them from their evil purposes, is dumb. Rather, such articles, and action, should be focused on what pressure and punishment can be put on Supreme Court justices, and judges and legislators at all levels, in order to ensure that they impose our views and suppress the views and desires of our enemies. We should stop pretending that the Constitution is anything but a fig leaf used as propaganda while the stronger side imposes its will; the Left stopped pretending a long time ago, and we just cripple ourselves by pretending there is any value in originalism or, for that matter, Constitutional jurisprudence of any sort.

What we need is a religious establishment, not just informal as we used to have in America (something on which Matthew Schmitz has some thoughts in another recent excellent article in *First Things*, though I don't think he wants to take his thoughts where they inevitably lead), but formal. Why pretend, especially when our enemies have

already destroyed the original American system, and imagining that we can return to a time of ruling class virtue without a prior fracture is fantasy? There is not going to be a Great Awakening and subsequent renewal as long as we allow our enemies to rule. We need a new ruling class, neutering the old entirely and permanently, and a new system of government. We need my pet project of the Foundationalist state. So, the question is—what religious structures will replace Modernism in the Foundationalist state, and how should its religious goals be accomplished?

True, Foundationalism is crucially not a rigid confessional state. Its core principle is that it does not offer an ideology; it is a state of limited ends with unlimited means, and transcendence is not offered through the state. Yes, neither is it a minimalist state. Achieving virtue in the people, both the ruling classes and the masses, though especially the former, along with driving accomplishments that will echo down the ages of Man, are among its ends, and right religion is a key component of both. Only one religion, Christianity, has ever been associated with success in both areas—and, of course, it's true, which is a bonus. Therefore, the Foundationalist state will explicitly favor Christianity.

Its overarching goal in favoring Christianity will be to seek the common good and a realistic amount of virtue and flourishing. The state, very much a non-liberal state, will directly and deliberately encourage and enforce standards of virtue, but not on a purely confessional basis—even if most of those standards will be derived from Christianity. Christianity will be explicitly preferred, certainly, because on average Christian belief leads to the best outcomes for the state and society. For example, teachers in any state-supported lower school or high school will be required to be practicing Christians (just as now they are effectively required to be practitioners of globohomo), and Christians will, all else being equal, receive state preferment, as well as, no doubt, preferment in the private sphere, from jobs to social status. Personal advancement in the state and society would thus certainly benefit from conversion to Christianity—a feature, not a bug. It might be objected that the result will often be Christians in name only, but that's fine—the goal is to weld together a society, and most of all a ruling class, and while there will always be variability of belief, over time a strongly dominant

religion will do the welding, and that welding will lead to an increase in devout belief, in a virtuous circle.

But the Foundationalist state is not a policer of the practice of belief. Rather, it will encourage and incentivize moral behavior, with punishments when necessary, not of disbelief, but of actions that corrupt virtue. Thus, it will forbid most divorce, not because it is a sin, but because it destroys society. It will frown on adultery and homosexual acts, and disincentivize both, but not criminalize either. It will punish graft, theft, and sharp practice; the unfettered free market will no longer be thought of as some special good or moral in itself. Gambling will be mostly illegal; there will be no lotteries. The state will corral and curb prostitution; it will flog pornographers; and it will execute abortionists and other murderers. (In general, crimes will only be the crimes recognized at common law, *malum in se*. Crimes that are merely *malum prohibitum* will almost completely disappear.) And so forth, in organic development that will depend on what can be accomplished at any given point while maintaining a proper balance of cost and benefits. (An interesting question is the role of social media and other related platforms, such as Amazon, now used to suppress Christianity, advance Modernism, and defend the ruling class—will they instead, under their new owners and administrators, be used to suppress the enemies of Christianity, or returned to their original promise of free speech and free use? I will let you know.)

At the same time, freedom of religious exercise for all will be allowed to the extent not actually in contradiction with virtue. Thus, any non-pernicious religion, any religion that is not a proxy or bridgehead of external enemies of state or society, will be permitted freedom of worship, without any attempt to make worship difficult (such as Islam has always imposed on Christianity in the lands it has temporarily conquered). Paganism and polytheism will be allowed, and even preferred to the extent that virtue is their focus (I subscribe to the Orthodox view that paganism does not worship fake gods, rather real entities who are not deserving of worship, but as I say the Foundationalist state is not a rigid confessional state). Naturally, wholly pernicious belief systems, such as Satanism, will be directly suppressed. Open atheism will be strongly discouraged and socially anathema. This is what I call “pluralism lite.”

In pluralism lite, what of religions that are not pernicious enough to be directly suppressed, but are corrosive of the body politic? If the people aren't moral, the state cannot make them so; you can't impose a culture from the top down, although you can certainly influence it from the top down. So, Scientology and similar not-overtly-destructive religions will be permitted to exist, despite strong arguments they are destructive. But the state will confiscate all their assets above a certain basic amount—as Wright notes, Scientology has amassed billions of dollars, all tax-exempt, which it uses to attack its enemies. If a religion can exist as a house church, or storefront church, and is not affirmatively evil, it makes little sense to suppress it, and it is likely difficult to suppress. Yet we can do without the massive, gaudy palaces that Scientology uses to advertise its silly beliefs.

Of course, getting from here to there is a big challenge. Still, it's important to have a good idea of where we're going—without trying to answer all questions of structure in advance. Broad strokes, then organic implementation, not ideological implementation. That will be the order of the day, in religion as in all other matters, coming soon to a state and society near you.