

# THE CONTROVERSY OVER SCIENTOLOGY

Continued

learned sailing and navigational skills. In some ways it seemed like a grand adventure. However, there were much darker parts of the sea voyage. Disobedient converts were hurled off of the ships into water 40 feet below, and the crews of Scientologists were even involved in a coup to kill the Moroccan king. Yet Sea Org is by far not the only controversial sector of the church. So called “Celebrity Centers” in Hollywood recruit celebrities to serve as the public face of the church, including John Travolta and Tom Cruise (Yhar). However, the glamorous Scientology lifestyle that they experience is far from what most people attest to.

Scores of ex-scientologists have testified against the church. There have been many claims regarding the so called “Rehabilitation Project Force,” a sector of the church where disobedient or offending staff or church members are forced to work. It has been described as severe, abusive, and inhumane (Behar). They are forced to work 20-plus hour shifts, eat leftover food, and are shunned by other members. Claims against the RPF are just a few of the complaints against the church — families have been ruined, left broke and torn apart. There are records of suicides most likely caused by the church, but Scientology denies any and all connection. Some even go as far as to classify the organization as a cult. Amy Scobee, a former Scientologist and journalist stated in an interview that as “a religion or other group which has caused or has a high probability of causing harm to its own members or to others,” Scientology fits the definition of a cult. But along with every dramatic exposé there comes a claim that is pulled back mysteriously. An article written by Steve Cannan for the Australian Broadcasting System tells the story of Alice Wu, a Taiwanese Scientologist who claimed that she was held hostage and sustained injuries from the church. The church denied this and said that Ms Wu had only been receiving treatment for mental illness. Then, only a few hours before the court date, Wu pulled back her claims against the church and now will not comment on the situation. Was she lying, or did the church have an influence over her decision to drop the suit?

Yet with all the claims and controversy over the church, there are still a large number of people for whom Scientology is their lifeblood, providing hope, community, and security in the same way that any other religion

provides. According to Janet Reitman, an investigative journalist and author of *Inside Scientology*, although to some the church may seem cultish, it provides self-help and a place to belong for many people, and to those who grew up in the church it is the only religion they know. The two very opposing viewpoints towards the church — one advocating that it is a cult, robbing people and ruining lives, and that it is a true religion that provides warmth and love, only adds fuel to the firestorm of controversy surrounding Scientology, a fire based on the flaming coals of L. Ron. Hubbard and his legacy, the way he left the church to be run, and the scores of allegations against the organization. However, the true controversy, it seems, is over the definition of a church. Do light shows at services and billions of dollars being funneled into leader’s pockets disqualify a group from status as a religion? Is the modern day church of Scientology any different from the Roman Catholic Church of Europe 700 years ago? If people are benefiting from the organization can we take that salvation away from them? As of yet we cannot answer these questions.

## Works Cited

- Behar, Richard. “Scientology: The Thriving Cult of Greed and Power.” *Time Magazine*, 6 May 19. pp. 50-57. Accessed 22 Nov. 2016.
- Cannane, Steve. “Church of Scientology Denies Holding Woman in Isolation.” Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 26 Feb. 2013. Accessed 8 Dec. 2016.
- Reitman, Janet. “Scientology Is More than Just a Cult.” *Cults*, edited by Roman Espejo, Greenhaven Press, 2013. *Opposing Viewpoints*. *Opposing Viewpoints in Context*, Accessed 1 Nov. 2016. Originally published as “Is Scientology a Religion?” *Washington Post*, 17 July 2011.
- Scientology. Church of Scientology International, 1996, [www.scientology.org/](http://www.scientology.org/). Accessed 12 Dec. 2016.
- Scobee, Amy. “Scientology Is a Dangerous Cult.” *Cults*, edited by Roman Espejo, Greenhaven Press, 2013. *Opposing Viewpoints*. *Opposing Viewpoints in Context*, Accessed 1 Nov. 2016. Originally published as “Ex-Scientologist Reveals Details Behind ‘Dangerous Cult,’ Tom Cruise in New Book,” [www.Popeater.com](http://www.Popeater.com), 2011.
- Wakefield, Margery. “From Dianetics to Scientology-- the Evolution of a Cult.” *Understanding Scientology*, by Margery Wakefield et al., edited by Dean Benjamin, HTML ed., Coalition of Concerned Citizens, 1991.
- Wright, Lawrence. ““Going Clear”: A New Book Delves into Scientology.” *NPR Books*, National Public Radio, 24 Jan. 2013. Accessed 1 Dec. 2016. Interview.
- Yahr, Emily. “How Leah Remini Is Trying to Expose Scientology Secrets in Her New Docuseries.” *The Washington Post*, 30 Nov. 2016, Accessed 1 Dec. 2016.