



Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief Discussion Guide

Director: Alex Gibney

Year: 2015

Time: 119 min

You might know this director from:

Sinatra: All or Nothing at All (2015)

Steve Jobs: Man in the Machine (2015)

Mr. Dynamite: The Rise of James Brown (2014)

The Armstrong Lie (2013)

We Steal Secrets: The Story of WikiLeaks (2013)

The Last Gladiators (2011)

My Trip to Al-Qaeda (2010)

Taxi to the Dark Side (2007)

Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room (2005)

FILM SUMMARY

“My conclusions were that man was a spiritual being that was pulled down to the material, the fleshy interests, to an interplay in life that was in fact too great for him to control. I concluded finally that he needed a hand,” stated Scientology founding father L. Ron Hubbard. That helping hand became a clenching fist around the throat of many a devout member, which director Alex Gibney reveals in his investigation behind the curtain of Scientology.

Having read “Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief” by Lawrence Wright, Gibney signed up to create a film for HBO on the mysterious religion, addressing the numerous allegations of human rights abuses for which it was under attack. With Gibney’s track record of probing power abuse in its many forms, the disputable practices of Hubbard and his enigmatic successor David Miscavige made for prime material.

A number of credible ex-members are interviewed, including filmmaker Paul Haggis and John Travolta’s former representative Spanky Taylor, and their journeys up “The Bridge” of Scientology and subsequent rejection of the organization that had promised them spiritual freedom - along with with a hefty financial and personal price tag- serve as the film’s focal point. A careful balance of talking heads, archival material, and reenactments makes for captivating viewing, and at two hours, GOING CLEAR races by at galactic speed.

Although numerous “Operating Thetans”, “Suppressive Persons”, and “Potential Trouble Sources” refrained from being interviewed, they are featured nonetheless through Scientology propaganda film footage, FBI accounts, and the high-profile lives they live. Think Kidman, Cruise, and Travolta. If you’ve ever wondered how a mysterious religious organization has claimed such notorious individuals as followers, GOING CLEAR reveals the unknown through its strong and emotionally captivating format.

FILM THEMES

The subject of Scientology is highly controversial. *GOING CLEAR* confronts the dark secrets of this otherworldly organization by allowing former followers to unearth their troubled pasts.

SCIENTOLOGY

The religion of Scientology was born from the fantastical science-fiction writings and imaginings of Hubbard. *GOING CLEAR* traces the organization back to its beginnings, delving into the raucous ramblings of Hubbard, the hundreds of thousands of pages he wrote, his bestselling book "Dianetics" - a pseudoscientific escapade into the human mind - the allegations of abuse, the rise of Hubbard's successor Miscavige, and the continued cloudy confusion surrounding Scientology. Just what are the beliefs of Scientologists? What do they practice? The more that is uncovered, the more Scientology as a form of self-therapy for Hubbard and a method of absolute control for Miscavige becomes clear.

RELIGIOUS QUALIFICATION?

When Scientology received religious qualification in the U.S. in 1993, making all its earnings tax exempt, an empire was born. Religious status was translated into a carte blanche for the Church to amass large sums of money from its followers, both through mandatory level fees and tax-free donations. Burrowing beneath the First Amendment's blanket of protection, the Church of Scientology has passed the wealth on to its own celebrity club, tailor-making luxuries for Cruise, padding Miscavige's existence, etc., while the most devout, hard-working minions are treated as slave labor. The First Amendment is intended to protect religions that help, not harm, and Gibney places Scientology on the chopping board.

POWER TRIPPING

With no checks and balances on his control, Miscavige runs rampant, allegedly getting away with human trafficking, child labor, psychological and physical abuse, and bullying beneath the banner of Scientology. As a tyrannical leader, he has been reported to dictate over the lives of Scientologists, keeping a close and violent watch. An organization getting away with numerous allegations of human abuses within a Western nation such as the U.S. brings into question how this power tripping can be protected under law.

REFLECTING BACK

The majority of the testimony in *GOING CLEAR* is provided by previous adherents and believers of Scientology. However, once they had separated themselves from the Church they felt it was their duty - not only to themselves but to others ensnared in the religion's web - to come out and tell their tale. Everything becomes more clear in retrospect, yet it's difficult to deny the good intentions of individuals initially attracted to the joy based self-help teachings that Scientology offers. The people they become are not the people they were when they initially embraced Scientology.

"Scientology is really good at making you think that you are a scoundrel."

Marty Rathbun, former Scientologist

"Name me another philosophy, religion, or technology where joy is the operative concept."

John Travolta, current Scientologist

"When you're in the organization, all the good that happens to you is because of Scientology. Everything that isn't good is your fault."

"Spanky" Taylor, former Scientologist

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. How much did you know about Scientology before watching **GOING CLEAR**? Do you feel more knowledgeable on the beliefs of the religion having seen the film?
2. Do any aspects of the belief system of Scientology appeal to you? Have you ever had any involvement with Scientology?
3. Why do you believe Scientologists maintain such secrecy regarding their religious beliefs?
4. Do you believe Scientology should continue to be eligible for tax-exempt status? Discuss your thoughts on the payment system of Scientology, that adherents must pay to climb through levels.
5. Are you/have you ever been a member of an organized religion? Were you raised in a religious or non-religious family/community? Has this impacted your adult life in any way?
6. In some countries, Scientology is classified as a cult or non-profit organization. In the U.S., however, Scientology has been a legally recognized religion since 1993. Is there something in the American psyche that gravitates towards and easily embraces a movement such as Scientology?
7. What are your thoughts on modern psychiatry? Do you think it is a healthy way for people to work through personal issues, or a fabricated system?
8. Why do you think certain individuals are drawn to Scientology? Do you consider yourself to be more of a seeking, embracing individual or a more cautious, wary person?
9. Does **GOING CLEAR** offer a fair perspective on Scientology? What is the film's greatest strength/weakness?
10. Was there any one person/scenario in the film that had more of an impact on you more than the others? Discuss.

NOTES:

FILM FACTS:

- Prior to working on GOING CLEAR, director Gibney had completed a documentary on clerical sex abuse in the Catholic Church (“Mea Maxima Culpa”). Having previously turned down an offer to create a film on Scientology, once he read Lawrence Wright’s book “Going Clear,” he finally felt he had something strong to work from. Many of Gibney’s films deal with abuses of power.
- The Church of Scientology has sent numerous legal letters to Gibney, HBO (who produced the film), and many other individuals involved in the making and release of the film. Wright’s book “Going Clear” has still not been published in the U.K., Canada, and Australia for this reason.
- Scientology carries different religious status across the world. Since 1993, it has been an official religion in the U.S., but it was not until late 2013 that it was considered a religious institution in the U.K. In Sweden, it is a “religious community,” in Norway a “non-profit,” in Chile a cult, and in France a sect. In many countries, Scientology is not officially recognized, for example in the Czech Republic, Ireland, Denmark, Germany, and Russia.
- The greatest following of Scientologists is in the U.S., Australia, and South Africa.
- Some of the countries where Scientology carries religious status includes Argentina, Australia, Austria, Croatia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, and Taiwan.
- The Scientology cross contains 8 sides, which represent the varying dynamics of the religion: the self, family, community, humankind, life forms in general, the physical universe, the spirit, and the supreme being.
- The term “clear,” as used in Scientology, was taken from early computer science, when a computer was cleared of flawed data. Hubbard considered that the human mind too needed to be cleared of incorrect data.
- Medication is a highly controversial topic to Scientologists, who only believe in using it when physically ill. The practice of taking psychiatric medications is highly forbidden within the Church, and the entire field of psychiatry is considered a scam by Scientologists. Founding father Hubbard created the Purification Rundown to help people recover from the “harmful mental and spiritual effects of drugs,” as explained on the official Scientology website. Actress Kirstie Allen credits Scientology with helping her kick a cocaine habit.
- Free Zone Scientologists do not require members to pay money to advance through the levels of the Church.
- In Scientology, there is no praying and there is no hell. When a person dies, the body goes to a landing station on the planet Venus, and is then redirected. Non-Scientologists are referred to as WOGS, or Well and Orderly Gentlemen.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** this film. Give other the chance to learn from this story.
2. **Read** Lawrence Wright’s “Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, & the Prison of Belief”, published in the United States in 2013, upon which the film was largely based.
3. **Support** [the Church of Scientology](#), [Escape International](#), a Christian ministry offering counseling and assistance.
4. **Learn** more about Scientology. There is a wide array of resources on the Internet offered by both supporters and critics. [Independent Scientology](#) claims to be a non-profit resource.
5. **Sign** petitions to revoke the tax-exempt status of Scientology. There have been petitions in place at [Change and petitions.whitehouse.gov](#).

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Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.