

How to counter confusion between cults and religion?

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A recent example of a deliberate confusion from CS: letters to HBO about Going Clear

- All negative information about Scientology is a lie
- Witnesses are immoral or criminal
- Convictions are due to discrimination towards religions in general or Scientology as a non-traditional religion
- Harmful practices...?

A recent example of a deliberate confusion from CS letters to HBO about Going Clear

- Harmful practices of S are known, but talking about being discriminated compared to other religions is still a good strategy, as it makes sense to an open-minded public
- **My plea: stop discussing about real and false religiosity and belief,** even if they are starting the discussion. **This discussion itself is the real confusion** cults are trying to create. It shifts the focus from our real concern: harmful sectarian practices.
- Example of this strategy: 3 letters of CS to HBO concerning Going Clear

Letter to Sheila Nevins, President, HBO Documentary Films, by CSI, February 4, 2015

*You cannot hide from the truth and pretend that your film is anything but a one-sided exercise in **religious bigotry that relies on lies.***

Letter to HBO Senior Counsel S. Abrutyn, by Bisceglie & Walsh, att. at law, March 16, 2015

*But worst of all is Mr. Wright's referring to Scientology as spreading like a "virus" which may "turn lethal." This is shocking language, amounting to **hate speech** and evidencing malice. There is of course only one thing to do against a lethal virus: eradicate it. This precise analogy of a "mutating virus" has been used by **anti-religious extremists in France to advocate stamping out the "pathology of belief" in Europe.***

*The Church documented more than **1,500 cases of discrimination against its parishioners in Germany during this period [‘90]** and presented the evidence to international human rights bodies, governments and the human rights community.*

...

*On page 243 of his book, Mr. Wright states that the policy of the German government is to refuse to recognize Scientology as a religion; he then quotes Norbert Blum, the former Minister of Labor in the Kohl administration, and an official as notorious as Mrs. Caberta, for his **discriminatory utterances directed at Scientology**, who states that **Scientology “is not a church or a religious organization”**.*

**Letter to HBO Senior Counsel S. Abrutyn, by Rabinowitz, Boudin,
Standard, Krinsky & Lieberman, P.C., attorneys at law, March 19, 2015**

Mr. Wright's book proceeds from a fundamentally biased and indefensible premise: that there is a *"widespread assumption that Scientology is a cult and a fraud."* (*Going Clear*, p. xii.) Giving that premise its ordinary and plain meaning, **according to Wright, both the general public and government authorities agree (a "widespread assumption") that Scientology is a false religion, its religious beliefs and doctrine are without basis and unworthy of respect and the Church promulgates them knowing they are false (the definition of fraud), and that it, as a "cult" (as that term is used in common parlance as a term of degradation), is not entitled to the respect and constitutional protection of older and more traditional religions.** From that premise, Wright proceeds in one-sided attack against the religion and the Church based upon his discussions with a selected group of anti-Scientology apostates with an agenda to destroy the Church and the religion.

CS wants to defend itself against:

(1) Scientology is a **false religion**, its religious beliefs and doctrine are **without basis** and unworthy of respect and the **Church promulgates them knowing they are false.**

(2) it, as a “**cult**” (as that term is used in common parlance as a term of degradation), is **not entitled to the respect** and constitutional protections of older and more **traditional religions**

If we accuse CS of one of these things and go into discussions about it, we are giving them what they want.

Why do they want this?

It shifts the focus of our real concern: their harmful practices.

For an open minded and uninformed public, it is hard to put questions and concerns of discrimination aside and see them for what they are: a dishonest manipulation of discourse/discussion.

- shouting questions and concerns = choosing the subject matter
 - open-minded = postpone your judgement and listen
- = you are already thinking about what the other wants, i.e. proselytism

Even when you are critically thinking (a good **way** of thinking), you might be thinking **about** the wrong thing.

How to react against it?

Don't engage into a discussion **when you know** that what they are saying is solely a rhetorical statement without any willingness to listen to another viewpoint or debate = false or dishonest debate (ICSA)

Their outrage is orchestrated and seems like a call to be heard, but it is a call not to listen to others.

Counter-intuitive to an open minded person → information

Examples of common mistakes (my opinion)

- Scientology ≠ real religion because it is based on a one man's fantasy and commercial goals.

→ the origin of belief doesn't say anything about the religiosity of the group or the sincerity of their beliefs.

→ commercial or others purposes don't exclude religiosity and belief

→ distinguishing between right and false metaphysical beliefs is hard or impossible, unless you are accepting some unprovable premise (ex bad deed)

Don't question their religiosity, as we shouldn't of jihadist fighters and other problematic forms of 'religion'. Most of them probably are believers and religious. Anyway, engaging into this discussion can be interesting, but it is giving them what they want and **dragging away the focus of what really counts**: the harmful practices within these groups.

Problems with recognition cults as religion?

- Recognition of religious org \neq tax exemption status: respect law and fundamental rights
- pointing at such offences \neq discrimination or not respecting freedom to belief and practice religion
- But: relative respect. Relativity and balance = missing in cult rhetoric
'Our rights as a religion are not respected so stop talking about other things, because it doesn't matter.' In the mind of cult member, there is no other.
- Other problems? ...

How to counter confusion between cults and religions: conclusion

- My advice: stop talking about difference of belief or religiosity. Unless a person is willing to listen and engage in a dialogue, don't let them set the discussion topics. We have to be present in discussions, but then we should set the topics.
- They see themselves as true believers and authentic religious people? Whatever. As long as they respect the law and fundamental rights.
- If we can keep on informing the public about the offences, harm and dangers, which I think FECRIS is doing well, I think we are doing a great job.