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Tom Cruise, Phone Home

By Bob Waldrep

While promoting his latest film, *War of the Worlds* (based on H.G. Well's novel about an alien invasion), Tom Cruise seems to be declaring his own war, a war against anyone who may disagree with the beliefs of his religion-Scientology-especially as it relates to the field of psychiatry. Scientologists do not believe psychiatry to be a valid science as [Scientology](#) founder, [L. Ron Hubbard](#), taught that all "aberrations...includes all deranged or irrational behavior...and psychosomatic ills are caused by engrams."¹ "The only thing which could begin to shake these engrams was the technique [he] developed into [Dianetic](#) Therapy."² This technique includes the auditing process, that "clears" one of these engrams, as described by the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*:

"In [Scientology](#), people are considered immortal spiritual beings, known as thetans. Followers work through their past-life memories as a self-help technique to achieve perfect mental health. They eschew psychiatry and the use of drugs to treat psychiatric conditions."³

"[Scientology](#) teaches that a human is made of three parts, the body, the mind, and the "thetan," which is a spiritual being that has lived through many past lives, the memories of which can cause problems to the human. While man is basically good, his past experiences have led him to commit evil deeds. These "mental image pictures" from past-life traumas, or "engrams," can inhibit human development...A Scientologist moves up the Bridge To Total Freedom to a state of 'Clear'...and beyond by taking therapy and training sessions, called auditing."⁴

In bringing the war to psychiatry, Cruise fired the opening salvo against actress Brooke Shields after she admitted to postpartum depression. In accordance with his [Scientology](#) views on psychiatry, Cruise used this as an opportunity to speak out against the use of medication, telling *Access Hollywood* host, Billy Bush, that "Shields was misguided when she took the anti-depressant Paxil to fight her depression after giving birth to daughter Rowan."⁵

Other media outlets quickly picked up on the story and in the June 1 *People Magazine* Shields responded, "Tom should stick to saving the world from aliens and let women who are experiencing postpartum depression decide what treatment options are best for them."⁶

This however was not to be the end of Cruise's war of words. He next turned his attention to the host of the *Today Show*, Matt Lauer. During an [interview of Cruise](#), airing on June 24, 2005, Lauer brought up the Shields controversy prompting the following discussion about and insight into Cruise's views on psychiatry:

Cruise:

...you got to understand, I really care about Brooke Shields. I think, here's a wonderful and talented woman. And I want to see her do well. And I know that psychiatry is a pseudo science.

Lauer:

But Tom, if she said that this particular thing helped her feel better, whether it was the antidepressants or going to a counselor or psychiatrist, isn't that enough?

Cruise:

Matt, you have to understand this. Here we are today, where I talk out against drugs and psychiatric abuses of electric shocking people, okay, against their will, of drugging children with them not knowing the effects of these drugs. Do you know what Aderol is? Do you know Ritalin? Do you know now that Ritalin is a street drug? Do you understand that?

Lauer:

But this wasn't against her will...Aren't there examples, and might not Brooke Shields be an example, of someone who benefited from one of those drugs?

Cruise:

All it does is mask the problem, Matt. And if you understand the history of it, it masks the problem. That's what it does. That's all it does... There is no such thing as a chemical imbalance.

Lauer:

So, postpartum depression to you is kind of a little psychological gobbledygook -

Cruise:

No. I did not say that.

Lauer:

I'm just asking what you, what would you call it? ...that's what she went on the antidepressant for.

Cruise:

...all it does is mask the problem. There's ways, [with] vitamins and through exercise and various things... I'm not saying that that isn't real. That's not what I'm saying. That's an alteration of what I'm saying. I'm saying that drugs aren't the answer, these drugs are very dangerous. They're mind-altering, antipsychotic drugs. And there are ways of doing it without that so that we don't end up in a brave new world. The thing that I'm saying about Brooke is that there's misinformation, okay. And she doesn't understand the history of psychiatry. She doesn't understand in the same way that you don't understand it, Matt.⁷

But it wasn't just Shields and Lauer's lack of knowledge of the history of psychiatry that was a problem for Cruise as evidenced later in the interview when Lauer obviously attempted to calm the situation with a compliment:

Lauer:

It's very impressive to listen to you. Because clearly, you've done the homework.

Cruise:

...And you should do that also. Because just knowing people who are on Ritalin isn't enough. You should be a little bit more responsible in knowing really -

Lauer:

I'm not prescribing Ritalin, Tom. And I'm not asking anyone else to do it. I'm simply saying, I know some people who seem to have been helped by it.

Cruise:

But you're saying this is a very important issue.

Lauer:

I couldn't agree more.

Cruise:

It's very - and you know what? You're here on the "Today" show...And to talk about it in a way of saying, "Well, isn't it okay," and being reasonable about it when you don't know and I do, I think that you should be a little bit more responsible in knowing what it is...Because you communicate to people.

Lauer:

But you're now telling me that your experiences with the people I know, which are zero, are more important than my experiences...You're telling me what's worked for people I know or hasn't worked for people I know. I'm telling you, I've lived with these people and they're better.

Cruise:

So, you're advocating it.

Lauer:

I am not. I'm telling you in their case, in their individual case, it worked. I am not gonna go out and say, "Get your kids on Ritalin. It's the cure-all and the end-all."⁸

After Cruise's comments about Shields and subsequent [meltdown](#) on the *Today Show*, other celebrities apparently felt compelled to speak out. Rosie O'Donnell stated: "After watching Tom on *O (Oprah)* and then everywhere else in the free world, I think I may need to up my meds. Shout out to Brooke--stand tall girl. You saved a lot of women by telling your truth."⁹ Also entering the fray was comedian Tom Arnold, who on the July 19 airing of *The View*, said, "I just think he's [Cruise] ignorantâ€I thought that Brooke Shields is very brave, because celebrities, we wanna look cool, and (admitting) you wanted to kill yourself and maybe your baby is a very vulnerable thing for her to doâ€I think Tom is a little out of touch."¹⁰

Naturally, other [Scientology](#) celebrities like Kelly Preston, the wife of John Travolta, came out in defense of Cruise's remarks. Concerning the [Lauer interview](#), she stated it was, "very helpful because it's just raised awareness. People are talking about it now, and that's what they should be."¹¹

Shields took a different view in a July 1 op-ed piece for the *New York Times* writing, "I'm going to take a wild guess and say that Mr. Cruise has never suffered from postpartum depressionâ€[Cruises] comments are a disservice to mothers everywhere. To suggest that I was wrong to take drugs to deal with my depression, and that instead I should have taken vitamins and exercised shows an utter lack of understanding about postpartum depression and childbirth in general." She concluded, "If any good can come of Mr. Cruise's ridiculous rant, let's hope that it gives much-needed attention to a serious disease."¹²

So, why does Cruise continue to fuel this debate? Being in the midst of a promotional tour for his latest movie, it may be as simple as the old adage, "any press is good press." However, some of his actions and the interviews he has given suggest it is about more than just getting publicity or attacking psychiatry, it is also an aggressive and intentional attempt to promote [Scientology](#). He affirmed as much in the *Today Show* [interview](#) when Lauer asked, "Do you want more people to

understand [Scientology](#)? Would that be a goal of yours?" To which Cruise responded, "You know what? Absolutely."¹³

In their story on [Scientology](#), the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* noted that [Hubbard](#) taught that, "Beyond the state of Clear, Scientologists move through several auditing steps called Operating Thetan levels, or OT levels, the most sacred religious activity. An operating thetan is able to control matter, energy, space and time rather than being controlled by these things. In other words, an OT is a state of spiritual awareness in which an individual is able to control himself and his environment."¹⁴ It is, possibly, this belief that has led some to speculate Cruise's aggressive behavior and new found confidence in promoting his religion is due to his reaching a higher level in [Scientology](#).

In a recent *Salon* article, James Verini noted, "the buzz in some [Scientology](#) circles is that Cruise may have reached one of the highest echelons of the [Church of Scientology](#). While not a lot is known about this level, known cryptically as OT-VII, [Scientology](#) observers say that attaining it could explain Cruise's behavior in recent months."¹⁵ *The Sunday Paper* reports that former Scientologist Karen Schless is another of those who, "concur with media speculation that has pegged Tom Cruise as a recently confirmed OT VII."¹⁶

So, is Cruise being completely up front about the teachings of [Scientology](#)? Certainly he is concerning the groups distaste for psychiatry, but is there more to the story concerning engrams, auditing, and thetans?

After the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* ran its story on [Scientology](#), it ran a follow-up based on the Church's reaction stating, "never in our years of experience have we faced so much pressure, resistance and manipulation from an organization as we prepared our reportsâ€ we were surprised at their tenaciousness in trying to control our stories."¹⁷

What was the big concern that the Church had with the articles? The *Post-Gazette* reported:

â€Her [church spokeswoman Beth Akiyama] biggest sticking point was the mention of the purportedly secret knowledge given to Scientologists who reach advanced levels. According to widely published reports, they're taught that 75 million years ago the cosmic ruler Xenu paralyzed billions of people in our galaxy, stacked them in volcanoes and destroyed their bodies with H-bombs, though the traumatized souls survived. Those alien spirits invade human bodies today. In 1995, the church sued *The Washington Post* in an attempt to prevent the publication of such information, saying it was copyrighted. The church lost the suit, and the Xenu story since then has been widely disseminated on the Internet, in the print media and on broadcast networks.â€ ¹⁸

While Cruise is reported to be at OT VII, according to published reports, OT documents as early as the OT III level contain references to evil alien life forms, space ships, and intergalactic travel. As the Pittsburgh paper noted, this has been confirmed by investigative reports published over the years. These include reports by a number of prominent news publications such as *Time* magazine, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Boston Herald* who have persisted despite the [Church of Scientology](#) having taken draconian measures to block the publication of these materials, [suing or threatening lawsuits](#) against the media outlets, and making every effort to shut down the websites.¹⁹

Perhaps Brooke Shields was relying upon these media reports, when making an early response to Cruise's attacks on her use of Paxil, "saying she wouldn't take advice from someone who devotes his life to creatures from outer space."²⁰

At least one reporter also made this connection to Cruise during a [recent press conference](#). Gary Susman, the film critic for the *Boston Phoenix*, inquired as to any comparisons there might be for

Cruise with [Scientology](#) and his role in *War of the Worlds* stating, [since], "some of the tenants of [Scientology](#) deal with the past of aliens on this planet." Cruise interrupted the reporter at this point and said, "That's not true."²¹

In reporting on the confrontation, the paper explained, "In both H.G. Wells's novel and the 1953 film, Earth is invaded by Martians, but in the Spielberg remake, the aliens are already here, lying dormant for eons before being awakened. Susman asked Cruise whether this major change in the story had been influenced by the tenets of [Scientology](#), which has a similar 'storyline.'"²²

Only Cruise can answer whether he personally believes it to be true or not, but clearly there are many former Scientologists, reporters, academic researchers and others who are convinced that there is a connection with the teachings of [Scientology](#) and space aliens.

In commenting on this story, *ABC News* interviewed Stephen Kent, a sociology professor at Canada's University of Alberta, who though never having been a Scientologist "says he's studied church materials that are not widely circulated—the space invasion story bears some similarities to the [Scientology](#) teachings of the 'Marcab Confederacy,' which he says is described in a church document as a group of planets. It is a vast civilization that has spaceships, but is worse off than Earth in many ways."²³

Similar to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *ABC News* reported, "Kent and others say that Scientologists also teach the story of Xenu, a galactic warlord from 75 million years ago, who buried billions of people from other planets in Earth's volcanoes. The souls of these space creatures constantly interfere with humans, and one of the missions of [Scientology](#) is to help shed these spirits, critics claim."²⁴

Time's investigative report also includes an interesting glimpse into this and [Scientology's](#) approach to ensuring good mental health, without psychiatry or medication:

"[Hubbard](#) wrote one of [Scientology's](#) sacred texts, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, in 1950. In it he introduced a crude psychotherapeutic technique he called "auditing." He also created a simplified lie detector (called an "E-meter") that was designed to measure electrical changes in the skin while subjects discussed intimate details of their past. [Hubbard](#) argued that unhappiness sprang from mental aberrations (or "engrams") caused by early traumas. Counseling sessions with the E-meter, he claimed, could knock out the engrams, cure blindness and even improve a person's intelligence and appearance.

[Hubbard](#) kept adding steps, each more costly, for his followers to climb. In the 1960s the guru decreed that humans are made of clusters of spirits (or "thetans") who were banished to earth some 75 million years ago by a cruel galactic ruler named Xenu. Naturally, those thetans had to be audited.â€²⁵

How long will this auditing process last? Based upon [Scientology's](#) view on reincarnation, it could be many lifetimes. In a rather strange twist, while Akiyama objected to the *Post-Gazette* publishing information about an alien connection to the [Church of Scientology](#), another public affairs office, Sylvia Standard, told a reporter from one of Katie Holmes' (Cruise's fianc ) hometown papers, "We believe that man is an immortal spirit-ual being and that he has lived before and will live again innumerable times â€We do not believe there is a finality to this, which is why Scientologists work so hard on improving the societies, environment, and countries in which we live. After all, we believe we'll be coming back!"²⁶

Schless estimated that, "if he's [Cruise] paid for all his services [to reach the OT VII level], he's easily sunk \$500,000 into the process. What's more, the [Church of Scientology](#) may have amassed voluminous records of everything he's ever done. 'Everything that he has disclosed in his counseling sessions [auditing], every personal detail in his life, every sin he's committed, is all documented in folders.'"²⁷ *The Sunday Paper* adds that, "when Schless became part of the staff [she worked at the [Church of Scientology](#)'s desert compound outside L.A. training others in its doctrines, taking courses, and performing landscaping duties], she was shocked at the lack of confidentiality and the number of people who had access to the information in those files—the financial embarrassment and the potential social embarrassment lurking in the files...made it difficult to get away' (become deterrents to leaving the group).²⁸ Obviously, these make for a strong hold on members and may also inhibit one from questioning the teachings of the group.

Peter Overton of *60 Minutes Australia* reported that before being granted an interview with Cruise he was asked to, take a "four-hour crash course in [Scientology](#)." During the interview, he asked Cruise, "Why, then, was it a condition of me talking to you today that I had to spend quite an intense four-and-a-half hours in the [Church of Scientology](#) here in Los Angeles?"²⁹ After telling him he really didn't have to do it, Cruise responded, "People are interested in [Scientology](#) and I find that people wanted to know. They want to know about it...There's people out there that want help and that need help."³⁰

He is right about this. There are interested people, and there are certainly plenty of people who need help. As they seek this information and this help, it needs to come from a trustworthy source based on accurate information. Mr. Cruise would agree with that. In fact, as he was concluding the Today Show interview, he stated as much, saying, "I don't talk about things that I don't understand. I'll say, you know what? I'm not so sure about that. I'll go find more information about it so I can come to an opinion based on the information that I have."³¹

Unfortunately it appears, at least as regards [Scientology](#), Mr. Cruise may only be considering the research provided by the Church. It would do him well to talk with some of the many former Scientologists, like Karen Schless, who have experienced the group from the non-celebrity side and to look at some of the documentation that is readily available and paints a much different picture of [Scientology](#). All of us should take the time to research the facts before forming an opinion, however, we must also make sure that our research is honestly done.

Steven Spielberg, who directed *War of the Worlds*, did an earlier film about aliens, *ET, the Extra-Terrestrial*—the story of an alien stranded on Earth and befriended by a young boy. It gave us the classic and much quoted line, "ET, phone home," referring to ET's desire to contact those who could truly rescue him. Maybe it is time for someone else to follow ET's example—Tom Cruise, phone home.

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