

English 110

The Church

The road for the Church of Scientology has been hard, but not necessarily long. Founded in 1954, and only recently recognized as a religion in the US as of 1992, this organization and religion has been placed in the spotlight a number of times, in part due to its large celebrity following (Scientology). In general scientology is focused on making the world a better place and followers aim to achieve this by finding “workable answers to problems that people face in their [daily] lives” (Scientology). This is achieved through the science of dianetics, that was created by founder L Ron Hubbard, and is described as “a psychotherapeutic technique for personal development” (Lee). The Church has not only amassed attention through their unusual background, the creation story of the religion involves an alien overlord, but it has also gained attention from negative allegations made by multiple ex-members. One example in particular are the comments Leah Remini has made defaming the Church of scientology by “claim[ing] Scientology officials were controlling and intimidating towards members” (Chiu). In addition to speaking about her exit from the Church in interviews, Leah Remini created a television show titled Leah Remini: Scientology and the Aftermath, which works to investigate other alarming reports from many others like her.

Once Leah Remini came forward to the public about her exit from the Church, a discourse was then created in response to the credibility of the Church of Scientology, which included not only comments from her, but also an official statement from the Church of Scientology. This discourse, upon further investigation, seems to be an example of a rhetorical situation. A well-renowned rhetorician, Lloyd Bitzer, describes a rhetorical situation as, “a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites

utterance” (4). In this example, the context is the uncertain credibility of the Church which then invites the discourse of Leah’s response and the Church’s statement. In addition to fitting those criteria, an exigence must be named in order for this to qualify as a rhetorical situation. Bitzer describes an exigence as an “imperfection marked by urgency; it is a decision, an obstacle” (6). The exigence can easily be determined from the text as the statement is titled, “The Church of Scientology Statement re: Leah Remini” (Scientology Newsroom). Here the reader can see that the text provided by the Church is in direct response to Leah voicing her negative views of the Church. In other words, this evidence’s the exigence because Leah’s decision to shame the Church created a dialogue, or debate, between her and the Church, and it was her allegations that led to the publication of the text. In addition to naming her allegations as the exigence, the statement also provides the Church’s preferred solution for this problem saying that, “she needs to move on with her life instead of pathetically exploiting her former religion” (Scientology Newsroom). This shows that the Church of Scientology has a problem with how Leah Remini is describing their religion, and thinks the answer is to get her to back down or stop broadcasting her negative views.

As all contextual qualifications for a rhetorical situation are met, a problem inciting a response, it is important to take note of the audience in order to further analyze the situation. The audience in a rhetorical situation would be “those who are capable of being persuaded by rhetoric” and those who could potentially be “mediators of change” (Bitzer 7). When looking at this statement from the Church of Scientology, with regard to Remini, one can identify the audience as any person who is looking to become a member of Scientology. New members would be those most persuaded by the Church’s statement because it could affect their attitude towards joining and participating in the specific organization of Scientology. Also, the

statement's audience is new members because the new members have the power to affect the Church's reputation which could hinder or help their response depending on if they support the Church's statement or Leah's statements. The idea of potential new members being a targeted audience is also evidenced by the quote, "Scientology is the only major religion to be founded in the 20th century and emerge as a major religion in the 21st century" (Scientology Newsroom). This quote highlights the achievements of the religion in a potential play to persuade people to join and bring in new followers, showing that the Church is in some way directing their message towards this audience and finds them influential in the discourse as well.

Another aspect of this text that influences the rhetorical situation are the constraints of the statement released by the Church. Constraints in a rhetorical situation consist of contextual elements that obstruct change in the exigence, such as beliefs, attitudes, motives, or facts (Bitzer 8). One constraint within the Church's statement is their motive to discredit Remini and her claims that Scientology is a malicious religion. For example, a sentence from the Church's released statement says, "Ms. Remini is now joined at the hip with this collection of deadbeats, admitted liars, self-admitted perjurers, wife beaters and worse" (Scientology Newsroom). Here one can see an example of textual evidence that shows the Church painting Ms. Remini in a negative light. The Church's biased depiction of Remini acts as a constraint, because it would prohibit the reader from having a clear picture of the situation, thus clouding their opinion and possible reactions to the text. Another constraint of the official statement released by the Church is the lack of factual evidence to disprove Leah Rimini's allegations. For example, Leah Remini has stated that she chose to leave the Church because she started "seeing stories of abuse over and over again" and became suspicious (Discussion). On the other hand, the Church states that "her repeated ethical lapses and callous treatment of others...resulted in her being expelled."

(Scientology Newsroom). In this instance, the Church offers no evidence of her so called callous treatment, while Remini went on to create a full-fledged documentary with witnesses of the abuse she mentions. This hinders the audience from believing the Church's side of the story over Leah's, because the only thing backing up their version of why she left the church is their word, while Leah has collected many voices. In addition, the dramatic language of the text is also a constraint because it takes away from the official nature of the document. The text's use of strong, offensive words like "pathetic" and "callous" in relation to Leah comes off as harsh and could invoke pity in the reader. This emotional response from the audience could in turn lead to support of Remini's allegations, thereby obstructing any change of the exigence (Scientology Newsroom).

Another requirement of rhetorical situation, per Bitzer, is that it "invites a fitting response" in other words, the text "meets the requirements established by the situation" (9-10). In this case, a fitting response would be one where the Church has successfully protected Scientology's reputation and proven that these allegations against them have zero merit. At first glance, it seems that this statement has met the initial requirements, as it is clear that the overall opinion of Leah Remini is that she is not a reputable source, which would serve to protect their reputation. However, considering the aforementioned constraints of zero facts and overly dramatic language, the statement released by the Church is not as effective as it could have been in achieving this goal. Childish hyperboles and name calling within the text such as, "spoiled entitled diva" and "bald-faced liar" that are used when describing Remini are examples of a language that is reminiscent of a child acting out when they don't get their way (Scientology Newsroom). This informal tone works to take away from the credibility of their own statement. To make this a fitting response, things such as shutting down Remini's

accusations in a concise manor, or using more formal word diction, would have had a greater effect in showing that Remini's accusations were illegitimate. This less emotional response from The Church would have conveyed more authority, thus better protecting their reputation as an upstanding organization, and creating the fitting response they were initially attempting.

Overall, when Leah Remini left the Church of Scientology and became an open protestor against their organization an exigence, or problem, was born. As the Church is used to being in the spotlight, it didn't take long for a response to be posted onto their media site which attempted, and failed, to provide a fitting response in this rhetorical situation.

Constraints such as a lack of substantial evidence in the face of harsh allegations and language dramatic to the point of disbelief, resulted in a statement that does not meet the goals of alleviating suspicion of the Church's practices. Since the statement from the Church is inadequate, their reputation is still considered questionable by a wide majority and the discourse surrounding this rhetorical situation continues today and can be watched as Leah Remini's documentary is still in production.

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