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**Analysis:**

# **Cut From the Same Cloth: Scientology and EnlightenNext**

**Discussion of the recent *New Yorker* article on Scientology**

by William Jenner

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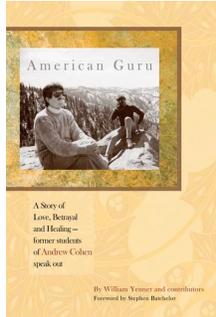
February 22, 2011

In his recent *New Yorker* [profile](#) of the Church of Scientology (February 7, 2011), Lawrence Wright highlights a type of social pathology that, far from being confined to Scientologists, is a ubiquitous feature of many contemporary so-called "religious" or "spiritual" organizations. Yet in public discourse about the relative merits of any particular such group, there seems to be a characteristic obliviousness to the presence of this pathology, and it seems to be difficult for people to perceive and accept how pervasive and formulaic this [type of pathology](#) actually is. Whether in the interest of general "fairness," or of protecting an emotional investment in a chosen spiritual ideology, people seem to be inclined to extend some measure of legitimacy to an established organization no matter how perverse its internal dynamics are known or rumored to be--in spite of the fact that these dynamics often do represent a *total* perversion of the overt ideology of the organization in question.

As a result, the phenomenon of cultic abuse and manipulation continues to be examined on a case-by-case basis, while the isolation and insularity of such groups serves to protect them against a recognition of their underlying commonalities. Such a recognition does not constitute undue generalization or indiscriminate persecution, nor does it undermine the foundational principle of religious freedom that such organizations often hide behind. Used judiciously as a tool for investigation, evaluation and discernment, a clearer understanding of this form of social pathology would enable cult members and the general public to recognize organizations that receive undeserved preferential treatment based on the false assumption that they exist to do good, and tax-exempt status while they beat and rob people--protesting all the while that they are being persecuted by "unenlightened" critics, "disgruntled" former members and "witch-hunting" government agencies. Without such information, we will continue to be surprised each time another series of ugly incidents is exposed and denied. Though this is a phenomenon endemic to groups that use mystical traditions and founding myths to justify their authority over individual members, each time they produce results consistent with their authoritarian blueprints there is public outrage--AFTER a lot of people have gotten hurt and their bizarre ordeals have become the object of gawking and controversy.

[American Guru](#), my book about the organization EnlightenNext and its founder Andrew Cohen, tracks the history and development of this phenomenon in yet another such "idealistic" group. To demonstrate how much EnlightenNext has in common with the Church of Scientology, I've listed below several striking parallels between Scientology as documented by Wright and EnlightenNext as documented in *American Guru*. Other than the fact that Scientology has a higher profile and more substantial assets and membership, close comparison reveals little substantial difference between them in terms of the effects of the authoritarian dynamic described above.

[Read more](#)



[American Guru](#) is a multifaceted account of life in the contemporary spiritual community known as EnlightenNext, and the controversial "teaching methods" of its New York-born founder, self-proclaimed "guru" Andrew Cohen. With wit and insight, William Yenner and his colleagues have produced a riveting cautionary tale on the dangers of authoritarian spirituality, and an insider's case study on the promises and pitfalls of postmodern discipleship.

Available at [Amazon](#), and coming soon on Kindle.

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