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"Disconnection" Religious Good Intention to Controlled Thought

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Jay Huguley and Dennis Bonette in the world premiere of DISCONNECTION by Allen Barton at Beverly Hills Playhouse, 254 S. Robertson Blvd. in Beverly Hills
A Skylight Theatre Company production

Photo by Ed Krieger

Images from Previews of the play "Disconnection" at the Beverly Hills Playhouse
Beverly Hills Playhouse

"Policy of Mass Alienation" and "Dogma" are words used to describe the Church in the play "Disconnection" from the [Skylight Theatre Company](#) currently at the Beverly Hills Playhouse. The play written by Allen Barton explores the concepts of invasion of private thoughts and actions by an overzealous church and the dangers of blind extremism. It demonstrates how a religion can go from being one with intent to help others, to one that closes the minds of its followers and blinds them to their own corruption. This premiering play is groundbreaking in exposing the destructive nature of **"excessive devotion."**

According to the [Pew Research](#) center **"Religious Intolerance is on the rise."** Three quarters of the seven billion people on this planet live in countries with strict religious laws that create **"social hostilities."** Both the US and the [UK](#) registered on the rise for "social hostility" though moderate when

it comes to government restrictions. This play is one indication of how there are groups in this country that are feeding that "social hostility." It is not just a question of a government imposing restraint on free thought, but institutions.

"Disconnection" is about one particular institution that has often made the headlines for acts of violence and corruption and has been referred to as a **dangerous cult**. As actor Robert L. Hughes who plays the religious creator Oldman points out in the second act, his organization is more dangerous than most because they are not traditional cult that has closed themselves off from the rest of society, but their doors are open for anyone to enter. Allen Barton wrote this play about his own experience with the Church of Scientology. Talking to him post show, he stated that he had the personal knowledge and experience to write this. As stated in the press release "Scientology is just one of many controlled-thought systems that have taken hold throughout history, but the play is designed to be a metaphor for all those systems." According to Director Joel Polis post show, "This (play) is greater than Scientology."

Even without the above statistics, anyone reading the news knows that on a regular basis this country and others have experienced violence in the name of some belief structure. Several of the actors in the play, Jay Huguley (Landon), Carter Scott (Tess), and Everett Wallin (Chairman) expressed the importance of this production and its message.

This play is also about a family ripped apart by a policy of the church to cut people off from anyone the church deems in violation of their policies, hence the title. Landon is a piano student lawyer who through a tragic accident is divided from his daughter Tess. Landon turns to a piano teacher with the church Michel played by Dennis Nollette for solace. While Tess is divided by an overbearing Chairman and the love she has for her husband Nick played by Luke Cook and ultimately a love she has for herself and a need for freedom. (Please note Landon is also played by Bo Foxworth with alternate performances.)

This is a play worth seeing because it is a play to open the mind to how religious extremism can blind even those with the greatest intent. It also may help people understand that the members of a religious group are not all the same. Some are guilty of acts of corruption and violence, while others are truly victims of their own blind faith. The character Oldman states that he believes people are inherently good, yet he recognizes that his organization has gone in a direction completely out of his control. Being part of an extreme religion is not an indication that one is corrupt. As seen by the performance of Everett Wallin as the Chairman, acts speak to the level of the disease. And as both Hughes character Oldman and Scott's character Tess point out often the real root of the evil is a very secular goal.

Headlines about **Muslim Profiling**, **Baha'i discrimination**, **Jewish anti-Semitism**, **Jewish Bigotry**, **Buddhist acts of violence**, **criticism of the Dalai Lama**, **Christian extremism (Westboro Baptist Church)**, **Islamic Terrorism (ISIS)**, **rejection of Buddhism as protected speech**, and the **incarceration**

of Atheists, all stem from the same concept of extremism demonstrated in this play.

See this [interview](#) with Allen Barton for more of his perspective on his play.

"Disconnection" runs through Sunday March 1st with shows on the weekend starting on Friday at 8:30 pm, Saturday at 8 pm, and Sundays at 7 pm at the Beverly Hills Playhouse 254 South Robertson Blvd, Beverly Hills. Tickets run \$30-34 and reservations can be made by calling 213-761-7061 or online at [Skylight Theater](#) .

Please note the Author of this article would like to stress she is experienced in Religious Freedom and qualified to write about the subject to an extent. She has her own experience with Scientology and with Christian religious extremism. She left her parents church at age 18 and has only been to church with her family as a polite act on the rare family reunion. She was baptized Baptist, raised Methodist. Half her extended family is Protestant and half Catholic. She has considered Judaism and practiced Passover at American University. She studied the Culture of Islam from a Baha'i Julie Badie at McDaniel College. Spent years as a devoted agnostic. Converted to Catholicism by a nun at Catholic University where she sits the [Basilica](#) in Washington, DC. She walked into the Church of Scientology in 2003, only to walk out in 2004 after seeing a document that says L. Ron Hubbard was happy someone had died against his religion. She has been invited to First Circle Church in Venice only to find an actor is a teacher there who knows she was assaulted by someone they both knew and then attacked on line after refusing to go. People in that community have implied she has to give up acting for some other art form. She has repeatedly asked this actor to please tell the people in his life she is here to find her own path and strive to be an actor. She is now on a path toward Buddhism, in particular Zen (Japanese Soto)/ Chinese Shaolin meditation practices and has a great deal of respect for Thai and the other forms of Buddhist thought. She also was an intern in Law School for the Clinton's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad for Professor Robert Destro. Her Contract Professor was Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright's son in law. See this [transcript of a speech](#) given by Albright in 1997. In 1998 the Government formed "[The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom](#)" under the State Department. That Commission grew from the Committee as the meetings attended by this author were held at the State Department. She even had the opportunity to have lunch with the Committee including one Dr. Laila Al-Marayati of the Muslim Women's League who has been a gynecologist here in Los Angeles and Rev. Samuel Billy Kyles who was on the Balcony with Martin Luther King Jr. when he was shot, and met the representative from the Baha'i Continental Board of Counselors, for Dr. Wilma M. Ellis. Scientology was not represented on the Committee.

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Laura Tull

LA Performing Arts Examiner

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