

= Church of the SubGenius =

The Church of the SubGenius is a parody religion that satirizes better known belief systems . It teaches a complex philosophy that focuses on J. R. " Bob " Dobbs , purportedly a salesman from the 1950s , who is revered as a prophet by the Church . SubGenius leaders have developed detailed narratives about Dobbs and his relationship to various gods and conspiracies . Their central deity , Jehovah 1 , is accompanied by other gods drawn from ancient mythology and popular fiction . SubGenius literature describes a grand conspiracy that seeks to brainwash the world and oppress Dobbs ' followers . In its narratives , the Church presents a blend of cultural references in an elaborate remix of the sources .

Ivan Stang , who co @-@ founded the Church of the SubGenius in the 1970s , serves as its leader and publicist . He has imitated actions of other religious leaders , using the tactic of culture jamming in an attempt to undermine better @-@ known faiths . Church leaders instruct their followers to avoid mainstream commercialism and the belief in absolute truths . The group holds that the quality of " Slack " is of utmost importance ? it is never clearly defined . The number of followers is unknown , although the Church 's message has been welcomed by college students and artists in the United States . The group is often compared to Discordianism . Journalists often consider the Church to be an elaborate joke , but a few academics have defended it as an honest system of deeply held beliefs .

= = Origins = =

The Church of the SubGenius was founded by Ivan Stang (born Douglas St Clair Smith) and Philo Drummond (born Steve Wilcox) as the SubGenius Foundation . Dr. X (born Monte Dhooge) was also present at the group 's inception . The organization 's first recorded activity was the publication of a photocopied document , known as the Sub Genius Pamphlet # 1 , disseminated in Dallas , Texas in 1979 . The document announced the impending end of the world and the possible deaths of its readers . It criticized Christian conceptions of God and New Age perceptions of spirituality .

Church leaders maintain that a man named J. R. " Bob " Dobbs founded the group in 1953 . SubGenius members constructed an elaborate account of the life of Dobbs , which is described by commentators as fictional . They assert that he telepathically contacted Drummond in 1972 , before meeting him in person the next year , and that Drummond persuaded Ivan Stang to join shortly afterwards . Stang describes himself as the " sacred scribe " of Dobbs and a " professional maven of weirdness " .

= = Beliefs = =

= = = Deities = = =

The Church of the SubGenius ' ostensible beliefs defy categorization or a simple narrative , often striking outside observers as bizarre and convoluted . The group has developed an intricate mythology involving gods , aliens , and mutants , which is usually considered by observers to satirize other religions . Their primary deity , generally known as Jehovah 1 , is cast as an extraterrestrial , who contacted Dobbs in the 1940s . Various accounts state that the encounter occurred while Dobbs was building a television or watching late @-@ night television . Jehovah 1 gave him supernatural knowledge of the past and future , in addition to incredible power . Dobbs then posed deep questions to the alien , receiving mysterious answers . Some of their discussion centered on a powerful conspiracy , to which the Church attributes command of the world .

Jehovah 1 and his spouse Eris , regarded by the Church as " relatively evil " , are classified as " rebel gods " . SubGenius leaders note that Jehovah 1 is wrathful , a quality expressed by his " stark fist of removal " . The Church teaches that they are part of the Elder Gods , who are committed to human pain , but that Jehovah 1 is " relatively good " in comparison . Yog @-@ Sothoth , a

character from H. P. Lovecraft 's Cthulhu Mythos , is the leader of the Elder Gods . In her 2010 study of the Church of the SubGenius , religious scholar Carole Cusack of the University of Sydney states that Lovecraft 's work is a " model for the Church of the SubGenius ' approach to scripture " , in that aspects of his fiction were treated as real by some within paganism , just as the Church appropriates aspects of popular culture in its spirituality .

= = = J. R. " Bob " Dobbs = = =

SubGenius leaders teach that Dobbs ' nature is ineffable and consequently stylize his name with quotation marks . They cast him as a " World Avatar " and hold that he has died and been reborn many times . The Church 's primary symbol is an icon of his face in which he smokes a pipe . Stang states that the image was taken from Yellow Pages clip art , and it has been likened to Ward Cleaver , Mark Trail , or a 1950s @-@ era salesman . The Church 's canon contains references to aspects of the culture of the United States in that decade ; religious scholar Danielle Kirby of RMIT University argues that this type of reference " simultaneously critiques and subverts " the concept of the American dream .

In the Church 's mythology , Jehovah 1 had intended for Dobbs to lead a powerful conspiracy and brainwash individuals to make them work for a living . Dobbs refused to support the group ; instead , he infiltrated it and organized a counter @-@ movement . Church leaders teach that he was a very intelligent child and , as he grew older , studied several religious traditions , including Sufism , Rosicrucianism , and the Fourth Way . Another key event in his life occurred when he traveled to Tibet ; there he learned vital truths about topics including Yetis . The Church teaches that Yetis exist , and that SubGenius members have descended from them . The only relative of Dobbs that the Church identifies is his mother , Jane McBride Dobbs ? Church leaders cite his lack of resemblance to his mother 's husband as the reason for not revealing his father . Dobbs is married to a woman named Connie ; SubGenius leaders identify the couple as archetypes of the genders in a belief that resembles Hindu doctrines about Shiva and Parvati . Church literature has variously described Dobbs ' occupation as " drilling equipment " or fluoride sales , and accounts of his life generally emphasize his good fortune rather than intelligence . SubGenius leaders believe that he is capable of time travel , and that this ability results in occasional changes to doctrine , deemed the " Sacred Doctrine of Erasability " by the Church . Consequently , members attempt to follow Dobbs by eschewing unchangeable plans .

= = = Conspiracy and " Slack " = = =

The Church of the SubGenius ' literature incorporates many aspects of conspiracy theories , teaching that there is a grand conspiracy at the root of all lesser ones . It records that there are many UFOs , most of which are used by the conspiracy leaders to monitor humans , although a few contain extraterrestrials . In the Church 's view , this conspiracy uses a facade of empowering messages but manipulates people so that they become indoctrinated into its service . The Church refers to these individuals as " pinks " and states that they are blissfully unaware of the organization 's power and control . SubGenius leaders teach that most cultural and religious mores are the conspiracy 's propaganda . They maintain that their followers , but not the pinks , are capable of developing an imagination ; the Church teaches that Dobbs has empowered its members to see through these illusions . Owing to their descent from Yetis , the Church 's followers have a capacity for deep understanding that the pinks lack . Cultural studies scholar Solomon Davidoff states that the Church develops a " satiric commentary " on religion , morality , and conspiracies .

SubGenius members believe that those in the service of the conspiracy seek to bar them from " Slack " , a quality promoted by the Church . Its teachings center on " Slack " (always capitalized) , which is never concisely defined , except in the claim that Dobbs embodies the quality . Church members seek to acquire " Slack " and believe that it will allow them the free , comfortable life (without hard work or responsibility) which they claim as an entitlement . Sex and the avoidance of work are taught as two key ways to gain " Slack " . Davidoff believes that " Slack " is " the ability to

effortlessly achieve your goals " . Cusack states that the Church 's description of " Slack " as ineffable recalls the way that Tao is described , and Kirby casts " Slack " as a " unique magical system " . The Slackware Linux distribution is so named after the tenet of Slack .

= = Members = =

The Church of the SubGenius ' founders were based in Dallas when they distributed their first document . The SubGenius Foundation moved to Cleveland , Ohio , in 1999 . In 2009 , Stang claimed that the Church had 40 @,@ 000 members , but the actual number may have been much lower . As of 2012 , becoming a minister in the Church consists of paying a \$ 35 fee ; Stang has estimated that there are 10 @,@ 000 ministers and that the Church 's annual income has reached \$ 100 @,@ 000 .

Most SubGenius members are male , and , according to Stang , many of them are social outcasts . He maintains that those who do not fit into society will ultimately triumph over those who do . The Church has experienced success " converting " college students , particularly at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology . It has also gained popularity in several American cities , including San Francisco , Little Rock , and Cleveland . A few Church members have voiced concerns and / or amusement about new members who took the Church too seriously , fearing that they acted like serious cult @-@ followers , the very concept that the SubGenius parodies . Stang has expressed concern that the Church 's doctrines could exacerbate pre @-@ existing psychoses of mentally ill devotees , although he believes that the Church genuinely helps many adherents .

Notable associates of the Church include Mark Mothersbaugh , Mojo Nixon , Paul Mavrides , Paul Reubens , members of Negativland , David Byrne , and R. Crumb . Crumb , a cartoonist , provided early publicity for the church by reprinting Sub Genius Pamphlet # 1 in his comics anthology Weirdo . References to the Church are present in several works of art , including the Internet @-@ based collaborative fiction Ong 's Hat , the comic book The Middleman , the band Sublime 's album 40oz. to Freedom , and the television program Pee @-@ wee 's Playhouse .

= = = Instructions = = =

Church leaders have issued specific instructions to their followers ; Robert Latham of the University of California , Riverside , casts their ideology as " anarcholibertarian " . Five specific commands particularly embody the group 's values .

The first command is to shun regular employment and stop working . This encapsulates the Church 's view that to repent is to " SLACK OFF " (sic) , in opposition to the idea of working for a living . SubGenius leaders state that it is permissible for members to collect public assistance in lieu of maintaining employment .

The second command is to purchase products that are sold by the Church , which its leaders teach was founded by Dobbs to gain wealth . Unlike most religious groups , the Church proudly admits it is for @-@ profit (presumably mocking some religious groups that seem to have ulterior financial motives) . Cusack sees the instruction to buy as an ironic parody of the " greed is good " mentality of the 1980s , and Kirby notes that although the group emphasizes " the consumption of popular cultural artefacts " , this consumption is " simultaneously de @-@ emphasized by the processes of remix " .

The third command is to rebel against " law and order " : specifically , the Church condemns security cameras and encourages computer hacking . Cusack notes that this instruction recalls Robert Anton Wilson 's critique of law and order .

The fourth command is to rid the world of everyone who did not descend from Yetis . SubGenius leaders teach that Dobbs hopes to rid the Earth of 90 percent of humanity , making the Earth " clear " . The group praises drug abuse and abortion as effective methods of culling unneeded individuals .

The fifth command is to exploit fear , specifically that of individuals who are part of the conspiracy . Church leaders teach that members of the conspiracy fear SubGenius devotees .

= = Events = =

= = = Devivals = = =

Local groups of members of the Church of the SubGenius are known as " clenches " . They host periodic events known as " devivals " , which include sermons , music , and other art forms . Their leaders take comical names and give angry rants , and many devivals occur in bars or similar venues . Cusack compares the style of the services to Pentecostal revivalism ; David Giffels of the Akron Beacon Journal casts them as " campy preaching sessions " . Cusack posits that these events are examples of Peter Lamborn Wilson 's concept of Temporary Autonomous Zones , spaces in which the ordinary constraints of social control are suspended . On one occasion , the presence of the wife of a Church leader at a SubGenius meeting that included public nudity and a goat costume contributed to her losing custody of her children in a court case . However , the publicity surrounding the event was ultimately a boon to the Church 's recruitment efforts .

The Church also celebrates several holidays in honor of characters drawn from fiction and popular culture , such as Monty Python , Dracula , and Klaatu . The Association for Consciousness Exploration and pagan groups have occasionally assisted the Church in its events . Some SubGenius members put little emphasis on meetings , citing the Church 's focus on individualism , although the Book of the SubGenius discusses community .

The Church of the Subgenius has held Devivals in multiple states within the continental United States , as well as different countries , including China , the Netherlands , and Germany . The Church has also held Devivals at non @-@ SubGenius events , such as Burning Man and the Starwood Festival .

The Church of the SubGenius has a relationship with the Association for Consciousness Exploration , which hosts the Starwood Festival in Pomeroy , Ohio . Subgenius members have access to discounted tickets for the ACE ? s annual festival .

= = = X @-@ Day = = =

In early SubGenius literature , July 5 , 1998 , was introduced as a significant date , later becoming known as " X @-@ Day " . The Church held that Dobbs identified the date 's significance in the 1950s , claiming that the world was to experience a massive change on that date when Xists , beings from Planet X , would arrive on Earth . SubGenius leaders declared that their paying members were to be transported onto spaceships for union with goddesses as the world was destroyed , although a few posited that they would be sent to a joyful hell . In anticipation of the event , X @-@ Day " drills " were held in 1996 and 1997 .

In July 1998 , the Church held a large devival at a " clothing @-@ optional " campground in Sherman , New York , attended by about 400 members . The event was ostensibly intended to celebrate the coming of aliens . When their appearance was not detected using the technology available at that time , Stang speculated that they might arrive in 8661 , an inversion of 1998 ; this has been interpreted as a satire of the way that religious groups have revised prophecies after their failures . Some critics have dismissed the event as a prank or form of " performance art " . Steve Bevilacqua , the Church 's business manager , admitted that his group made strange predictions about aliens , but contended that their statements were as believable as the account of Jesus ' walk on water . Another theory is that The Conspiracy has lied about what year the present year actually is (just as they have lied about everything else) , so that the liberation date would seem to pass without fulfillment and cause followers to lose faith . As a precaution , SubGenius members continue to gather for X @-@ Day every July 5 after 1998 . At these events , the non @-@ appearance of the aliens is celebrated . Cusack casts the productions as carnivalesque or an echo of ancient Greek satyr plays .

= = Publishing = =

= = = Online = = =

The Church of the SubGenius established a website in May 1993 , and its members were very active on Usenet in the 1990s .

= = = Print = = =

Although it has gained a significant online presence , it was successful before the advent of Internet communities . The Church was a pioneer in the religious use of zines ; Cusack notes that its use of the medium can be seen as a rejection of the alienation of labor practices .

The SubGenius Foundation has published several official teachings , as well as non @-@ doctrinal works by Stang . The Book of the SubGenius , which discusses " Slack " at length , was published by Simon & Schuster and sold 30 @,@ 000 copies in its first five years in print . Kirby casts the book as a " call to arms for the forces of absurdity " . The juxtaposition , visual style , and content of the book mirror the group as a whole . It draws themes from fiction , as well as established and new religions , parodying a number of topics , including the Church of the SubGenius itself .

A number of SubGenius writers have authored stories to build their mythology , which have been compiled and published . Their core texts are disordered , presented in the style of a collage . Kirby notes that the group 's texts are a bricolage of cultural artifacts , which is then remixed into a new creation . In this process , Kirby argues , they interweave and juxtapose a variety of concepts , which she describes as a " web of references " .

= = = Video = = =

The group has also been promoted by a video Stang produced in 1992 .

= = = Radio = = =

The Church of the SubGenius hosts several radio shows throughout the world , including broadcasters in Atlanta , Ohio , Maryland , and California . The Hour of Slack , the Church ? s most popular audio production , is broadcast by several radio stations in the United States and two in Canada .

= = Analysis and commentary = =

= = = Comparative religion = = =

The Church 's teachings are often perceived as satirizing Christianity and Scientology , earning them a reputation as a parody religion . Church leaders have stated that Dobbs met L. Ron Hubbard , and SubGenius narratives echo extraterrestrial themes found in Scientology . Cusack notes that descriptions of Jehovah 1 bear noticeable similarities to Xenu , a powerful alien found in some Scientologist writings . The Church 's rhetoric has also been seen as a satirical imitation of the televangelism of the 1980s . Cusack sees the Church 's faux commercialism as culture jamming targeting prosperity theology ; she describes this as " a strikingly original innovation in contemporary religion " . Religious scholar Thomas Alberts of the University of London views the Church as attempting to " subvert the idea of authenticity in religion " by mirroring other religions to create both a sense of similarity and alterity .

Cusack compares the Church of the SubGenius to the Ranters , a radical 17th @-@ century pantheist movement in England . She notes that they made statements that shocked many hearers ,

attacking traditional notions of religious orthodoxy and political authority . In her view , this demonstrates that the Church of the SubGenius has " legitimate pedigree in the history of Western religion " . The American journalist Michael Muhammad Knight likens the Church to the Moorish Orthodox Church of America , a 20th @-@ century American syncretic religious movement , citing their shared emphasis on freedom .

There are a number of similarities between the Church of the SubGenius and Discordianism . Eris , the goddess of chaos who is worshiped by adherents of the latter , is believed by members of the Church of the SubGenius to be the wife of Jehovah 1 and an ally to humans . Like Discordianism , the Church of the SubGenius rejects absolute truth and embraces contradictions and paradoxes . Religious scholar David Chidester of the University of Cape Town views the Church as a " Discordian offshoot " , and Kirby sees them as " a child of the Discordians " . Both groups were heavily influenced by the writings of Robert Anton Wilson , who is referred to by SubGenius members as " Pope Bob " . Kirby states that the two groups have elements of bricolage and absurdity in common , but the Church of the SubGenius more explicitly remixes pop culture .

= = = Categorization = = =

Scholars often have difficulty defining the Church . Most commentators have placed the Church in the category of " joke religions " , which is usually seen as a pejorative description . Kirby sees this categorization as partially accurate because irony is an essential aspect of their faith . Other terms used to describe the Church include " faux cult " , " [post @-@ modern] cult " , " satirical pseudoreligion " , " sophisticated joke religion " , " anti @-@ religion religion " , and " high parody of cultdom " . Members of the Church , however , have consistently maintained that they practice a religion . Stang has described the group as both " satire and a real stupid religion " , and he contends that it is more honest about its nature than are other religions .

Cusack states that the Church " must be accorded the status of a functional equivalent of religion , at the very least , if not ' authentic ' religion " . She sees it as " arguably a legitimate path to liberation " , citing its culture jamming and activism against commercialism . Kirby posits that the Church is a religion masquerading as a joke , rather than the reverse : in her view , it is a spiritual manifestation of a cultural shift toward irony . Alberts believes that there is broad agreement that the Church is fundamentally a different type of group than religions that date to antiquity ; he prefers to use the term " fake religion " to describe the group . He sees it , along with Discordianism , as part of a group of " popular movements that look and feel like religion , but whose apparent excess , irreverence and arbitrariness seem to mock religion " . Knight characterizes the Church as " at once a postmodern spoof of religion and a viable system in its own right " .

= = = Appraisal = = =

Kirby argues that the Church forms a counterpart to Jean Baudrillard 's concept of hyperreality , arguing " they create , rather than consume , popular culture in the practice of their spirituality " . She describes their remixing of popular culture sources as an " explicitly creative process " , maintaining that it prompts the reader to adopt some of the group 's views by forcing " the individual to reconsider normative methods of approaching the content " . She states that the group attempts to " strip references of their original meaning without necessarily losing their status as icons " .

In addition , Kirby sees the Church 's goal as deconstructing " normative modes of thought and behavior " in American culture ; she believes that it attempts to fight culturally ingrained thought patterns by shocking people . She argues that traditional approaches to religion cast seriousness as a measure of devotion , an approach which she believes has failed in contemporary society . She feels that irony is a common value that has been ignored by most religions . By embracing the quality , she maintains , the Church of the SubGenius offers a more accessible worldview than many groups .

Literature scholar Paul Mann of Pomona College is critical of the Church of the SubGenius . He notes that the Church purports to present the truth through absurdity and faults it for insufficiently

examining the concept of truth itself . In addition , he believes that the group undermines its attempts to take a radical perspective by their " hysterical , literal , fantastic embrace " of criticism .

Anarchist writer Bob Black , a former member , has criticized the Church , alleging that the group has come to be characterized by conformism and submission to authority . He believes that although it initially served to satirize cults , it later took on some of their aspects . In 1992 , allegations of cult @-@ like behavior also appeared in the newspaper Bedfordshire on Sunday after a spate of SubGenius @-@ themed vandalism struck the English town of Bedford .

= = Publications = =

Books

SubGenius Foundation (1987) . Book of the SubGenius . Simon and Schuster . ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 671 @-@ 63810 @-@ 8 .

Ivan Stang (1988) . High Weirdness by Mail . Simon & Schuster . ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 671 @-@ 64260 @-@ 0 .

Ivan Stang (1990) . Three @-@ fisted tales of " Bob " : Short Stories in the SubGenius Mythos . Simon & Schuster . ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 671 @-@ 67190 @-@ 7 .

Ivan Stang ; SubGenius Foundation (1994) . Revelation X : the " Bob " Apocryphon : Appointed to be Read in Churches . Simon & Schuster . ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 671 @-@ 77006 @-@ 8 .

Ivan Stang (2006) . The SubGenius Psychlopaedia of Slack : The Bobliographon . Running Press . ISBN 978 @-@ 1 @-@ 56025 @-@ 939 @-@ 8 .

Videos

Stang , Ivan ; Holland , Cordt ; Robins , Hal (2006) [1991] . Arise ! : the SubGenius Video (DVD @-@ R) . SubGenius Moving Pictures . OCLC 388112825 .