

# The El Paso Times

Serving the Fabulous Southwest for 95 Years

EL PASO, TEXAS, SATURDAY, JULY 24, 1976

## Papers On Religion Uncovered By Group

By WILLIAM RINGLE  
Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON — After doggedly filing more than 150 Freedom of Information Act requests for documents, members of the Church of Scientology have obtained thousands of government papers that had been hidden in files of offices ranging from the Central Intelligence Agency to the Labor Department.

"We were appalled at some of the things on file about us," said Kathy Flanagan, an ordained minister of the 22-year-old church, who has been working on the FOI project.

"Outright lies. Gross distortions. Stuff right off the wall. I wouldn't want my family or anyone I knew to read some of it."

The effort by the church is one of the heaviest assaults on government files through the Freedom of Information Act — the law designed to make more government papers public.

In one paper, a 1967 Labor Department report by an investigator named Foley — which was subsequently secretly circulated among a number of government agencies and became the unchecked backbone for "intelligence" reports in several offices — said that the church's founder had abandoned his wife and children, that LSD was "widely used" by the members in assembly, that electric shock was administered to new members and that members of families had been shot when they objected to their children joining the church.

The church has obtained similar records from the FBI, the CIA, the Air Force, the Army, the Internal Revenue Service, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Selective Service, the State Department and even the Coast Guard Auxiliary, to mention a few.

The information in the federal documents, much of it false and slanderous, according to the church, and a lot of it transparently unchecked, was circulated among federal gunshoes and they charge it was used to deny the church tax exemption, to deny its members promotion in the military or advancement in government service, to refuse entry visas or working permits to members from overseas and even to forbid membership in the Coast Guard Auxiliary, to which amateur yachtsmen like to belong.

To rebut the more vicious accusations, the church obtained affidavits from rabbis, a medical doctor and a psychiatrist, a police sergeant, a former Marine Corps colonel, an Anglican bishop, the founder's ex-wife, newspaper editors, church members and others.

Once the church finds what adverse information is lodged in government files, it can act to defang it.

For example, one FOI request brought to light a 1969 query from the U.S. consul in Casablanca to Ambassador Walter Annenberg in London seeking information on the church and its founder, L. Ron Hubbard.

In reply, Annenberg said: "We believe the enclosed clipping from The Sunday Times of October 5, 1968 . . . should give the consul general enough flavor and background on the affairs of Mr. Hubbard to guide its contacts with him."

Once the church found that such a document was imbedded in government files, it was able to produce an affidavit, dated Jan. 14, 1970, in which Harold Evans, editor of The Sunday Times, and Alexander Mitchell, author of the article, promised they never again would publish in the newspaper allegations such as those in the article Annenberg relied on and was passing around.

Another concrete result of the church's FOI effort was a letter last Nov. 28 from the Labor Department bearing the tidings that the "'Foley memorandum' will be retired to the Archives where it will be destroyed in due course."

The department told government agencies that "the information contained in the 'Foley memorandum' was irrelevant unverified and based on hearsay and . . . should be destroyed.

" . . . A review of the relevant data has led us to conclude that the Church of Scientology had established itself as a bona fide religious organization and should, therefore, be recognized as such for the purposes of Schedule A," Craig A. Berrington, the department's associate solicitor for manpower wrote to the church. "Schedule A" sets forth the Labor Department's standards for certifying that legally admitted aliens, who work at certain occupations, such as church work, will not be interfering with the U.S. job market.

In some cases it has had to go beyond the FOI procedures. In U.S. District Court the church has separate actions going against the FBI, the CIA, Interpol (the international organization by which police swap information), the Defense Communications Agency and the Customs to force the government to produce papers.

In federal court in California it has sued the Drug Enforcement Administration (the church was unsatisfied with that decision and has appealed), the State Department and the Post Office. In all there are 16 federal court actions. Parallel attempts to obtain state or municipal documents are being pursued by state and local Scientology churches around the nation.

Leaders of the church, whose membership is estimated at a half million in the United States, dispute the notion that theirs is a fringe cult. They point out that "Dialectics, the Modern Science of Mental Health," the book containing many of the precepts of Scientology, was once on The New York Times best seller list.

Many of the government papers repeated claims, several of them picked up uncritically from popular magazines or newspapers, that one of the church's practices, called "auditing," was actually a kind of psychoanalysis that could be harmful. There were other allegations that the church indulged in medical treatment.

In rebuttal, the church obtained an affidavit from a Yale-Stanford psychiatrist, an M.D., who outlined the differences between the two and said: "The techniques used in psychiatric, psychotherapeutic or psychological therapies in no way resemble Scientology pastoral counseling."

Another affidavit from London, by a Harley Street psychiatrist, said he had "never seen any harm come" from the use of Scientology methods.

Some of the government papers obtained by the church, together with rebuttals of the information in them, have been organized by a 10-member "Task Force on Religious Defense" into a two-inch thick volume.

In launching a campaign to organize religious groups in Austin to fight false government files on religions, the Council of Scientology Ministers has begun distributing a book entitled "How To Use the Freedom of Information Act" to religious groups.

The booklet is a guide to obtaining files kept by government agencies. Information may be obtained from the local Scientology office, 1912 E. Yandell.