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Section B

## Witnesses Are Critical Of Church

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CLEARWATER — The Church of Scientology deceives, brainwashes and takes money from its followers, and its founder is a man who beat his wife and is preoccupied with sex, two witnesses told the City Commission Wednesday.

The hearings are being held by the city to investigate church practices.

One of those witnesses was the 47-year-old son of church founder L. Ron Hubbard.

Another witness was Ed Walters, a former high-ranking church official, who said followers are encouraged to donate all their money to the church and in return the church will cure all their illnesses. However, Walters said, church rules prevent people from going to the authorities if they are not cured.

"When that lady loses \$80,000, and she still has arthritis, she can't come to you because it is a high crime (to testify against the church)," Walters said.

Walters, 44, and Ronald DeWolf, Hubbard's son, testified before the commission as part of the public hearing.

However, while the two told the commission about church practices generally, neither gave examples of any violations taking place in Clearwater.

The church contends it is doing nothing wrong.

And late Wednesday, Tampa attorney Paul Johnson, who represents the church, said he was incensed by the way the hearings were being conducted.

Johnson became involved in a verbal confrontation with Mayor Charles LeCher when LeCher and the commission denied the attorney's request to speak to the commission.

"I am completely frustrated," Johnson said. "They will not allow people with other views to speak."

"This is a character assassination of the church and its members.... Now, the damage is done."

The hearings have been an emotional issue with the church, which has labeled the investigation a "witch hunt." Last week, the church lost a bid in U.S. District Court to prevent the in-

vestigation.

The City Commission scheduled the 10 days of hearings for the investigation. Witnesses are questioned by Mayor LeCher, the City Commission and city officials. All witnesses are under oath and face perjury charges if they lie, officials said.

DeWolf, a wiry, fair-skinned man, sipped on orange juice from a Styrofoam cup and testified late in the afternoon under television camera lights.

A former director for the religion, DeWolf said he helped his father organize the church in the early '50s but left the organization in 1959.

He characterized his father as a "bigamist" with an "incredible temper," who also was very interested in sex. L. Ron Hubbard also kept large amounts of money in shoe boxes at his home.

He said his father wrote a book focusing on sex and the abuse of pregnant women by husbands.

When he was six or seven years old, he said he saw his father attempt an abortion on his mother.

"My father knew how to do one thing — destroy people," DeWolf said. "Anybody who criticized him, he would flat go after their throat."

DeWolf refused to talk to The Tribune after the hearing.

Walters, a slim, dark-haired man, testified haltingly before the commission for more than five hours and said he moved rapidly up the church ladder of power after joining the organization in 1970.

He told the commission he helped burglarize buildings in Las Vegas and he also charged that the church frequently planted illegal drugs on its en-

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emies and then, turned them in to police.

Walters also said he helped gain personal information about church members that the church used to ensure members never left the church.

"I'm embarrassed to say at the time that I believed it was all some-

thing I had to do to destroy the vicious enemies of the church. I believed what they told me," he said.

Walters said disenchanted members were often forced to return to the church after they left and that they frequently were made to pay large debts if they did succeed in leaving.

The church wooed "hot prospects"

who had a lot of money, Walters said.

During the late 1970s, he said he was told the church was going to launch an all-out campaign against nonbelievers.

"I was hearing that they were going to attack and destroy the federal government, Interpol, the FBI and the IRS," he said.

Walters also compared a guardian arm of the church to the Gestapo.

"I found no goodness, compassion, caring. I saw the actual teaching and hysterics of Hubbard," he said.

Walters later left the church, went to a different denomination, and quit that. He is working now for a Las Vegas casino, he said.

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