

A history

This church has long tradition of drawing attention of public

Scientology has been in the limelight over the years:

□ In 1979, nine church members — including founder L. Ron Hubbard's wife, Mary Sue — were convicted of bugging, burglarizing and infiltrating government agencies, including the Internal Revenue Service. In addition, church and FBI files show its members have executed, with mixed success, elaborate plots to entrap and discredit reporters and public officials.

□ Several documents came to light in the 1970s that revealed a church policy of attacking its "enemies." In one of those policy letters, Hubbard said, "Attack early and hard ... originate a black PR campaign to destroy the person's repute ... If possible, of course, ruin him utterly." Hubbard's policy went on say it was OK to bribe, rob and blackmail.

□ Court documents and materials seized during a 1977 FBI raid show church members plotted covert operations against officials and journalists. The operation included attempts in Florida to entrap a federal judge and another in California to ruin the reputation of a deputy attorney general, though the church dismissed the latter plan as an "unauthorized prank."

□ In 1980, the IRS ruled the Church of Scientology of California to be a religion but maintained it should not be tax-exempt because it channeled money to private parties.

The church appealed the ruling and hearings were concluded last fall. IRS spokesman Rob Giannangeli said the ruling on the appeal could come any day. Some branches of the church have already been given tax-exempt status, said Giannangeli, but there are others whose status is unclear. The ruling might set a "precedent" for the church's other branches to lose tax-exemptions, he said.

"We'll see if that happens," said Scientology spokeswoman Kathy Gorgon. "I don't anticipate losing the tax case. The IRS goes after everybody."

The IRS has placed a "collateral trust deed" on some church property in Los Angeles. If the church loses the appeal and cannot pay its taxes, said Giannangeli, the government can sell the property to collect.