

Sect ruling 'beginning of the end'

By *Scient.* **GEORGE-WAYNE SHELOR** JUN 23 1984
Sun staff writer

Lawyers who for years have engaged the Church of Scientology in legal battles said Friday that a Los Angeles County Superior Court decision handed down this week heralds "the beginning of the end of Scientology."

"The walls are collapsing and the truth is finally coming out," Boston attorney Michael Flynn said of

□ Law doesn't protect priest/parishioner privilege, 2A

the "landmark ruling" of Judge Paul G. Breckenridge.

The California judge late Thursday exonerated a former sect member charged with stealing thousands of Scientology documents.

But a sect attorney labeled Breckenridge's actions "lunacy," and said the judge "has condoned theft, invasion of privacy and breach of fiduciary duty."

"No person is safe if this type of defense is allowed to excuse violations of the law," said John Peterson, according to an unsigned sect press release.

Breckenridge ruled that Gerald Armstrong, the former Scientology archivist accused of stealing 10,000 sect documents, took the materials to "minimize potential risks he faced ... including physical harm," when he fled the Clearwater-based sect.

Armstrong, who was authorized personally by Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard to collect material for the creation of a Hubbard biography, took the documents when he discovered they contra-

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dicted highly laudatory published accounts of Hubbard's life history.

The sect and Hubbard's wife, Mary Sue, sought in a civil trial to recover the contested documents and asked for unspecified damages for the "mental rape" of Mrs. Hubbard. Breckenridge ruled that Armstrong did invade Hubbard's privacy by taking the documents, but said the invasion was slight.

No damages will be awarded the sect, which indicated it will demand a new trial.

Breckenridge characterized as a "pathetic individual" Mrs. Hubbard, who was released from federal prison shortly before the trial began. She had been convicted of conspiracy to obstruct justice and fined \$10,000 for her part in a Scientology operation which infiltrated and stole documents from government agencies.

"She was forced from her post as Controller (of the sect), convicted and imprisoned as a felon and deserted by her husband," Breckenridge stated. "Her credibility leaves much to be desired. She struck the familiar pose of not seeing, hearing or knowing any evil—yet she was the head of the (sect's Guardian's Office) for years.

Breckenridge noted that Mrs. Hubbard authored "the infamous order GO-121669" which directed that member's confidential files should be examined for embarrassing confessions to be used against those who challenged the sect.

"It is, of course, rather ironic, that the person who authored GO-121669 should complain about an invasion of privacy," the judge said.

And Armstrong's discovery bled with irony—for he testified that his sole purpose in collecting the materials which documented Hubbard's life was to prove that the reclusive 73-year-old science fiction writer was everything he claimed.

Documents and testimony offered during the trial last month apparently proved to the court Hubbard

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—Attorney Michael Flynn

was a man obsessed with power who exaggerated and invented his past and stopped at nothing to get what he wanted.

In his intended ruling following the bitterly contested nine-week trial, Breckenridge found that Scientology "clearly is schizophrenic and paranoid, and this bizarre combination seems to be a reflection of its founder LRH (Hubbard). The evidence portrays (Hubbard as) a man who was virtually a pathological liar when it comes to his history, background and achievements."

Breckenridge further stated that "in addition to violating and abusing his own member's civil rights," Hubbard and Scientology harassed outsiders who dared question the practices of the sect.

"(Breckenridge's ruling) proves what we've been saying for the last four or five years," said Flynn, who represents a number of former Scientologists in lawsuits against the sect.

"This is probably the single most significant opinion to come down in any court anywhere regarding Hubbard and his organization. And the stunning thing is it (the finding) is based on Hubbard's own writings!"

Flynn said the most damning of Breckenridge's

findings was his qualification of Hubbard as the "alter ego" of Scientology, which means Hubbard, who has not been seen publicly since 1979, is responsible for everything the sect does.

"In criminal cases and investigations worldwide, that ruling has huge ramifications," Flynn said. "Hubbard has been legally adjudicated to be a pathological liar, and I think this is the beginning of the end."

Armstrong's co-counsel, Julia Dragojevic of the Los Angeles law firm Contos & Bunch, called Breckenridge's ruling "amazing."

"This was more than we had dared hope for. For two years we've been trying to tell judges what the case was about but we were never able to fully explain what this man (Armstrong) has been through.

"But this judge came to the ultimate recognition, and no one can deny it," she said Friday after reviewing the 12-page judgment and its appendix. "Scientology is an organization, I believe, out to destroy truth and justice. And this court indicated in its decision that Gerry did what he did because of his dedication to the truth."

Armstrong, who before his defection was one of Hubbard's intimates, was unavailable for comment Friday. He left late Thursday for England, where he is to testify in another lawsuit involving the controversial sect.

Scientology spokespersons in Clearwater and Los Angeles—including international president Heber Jentzsch—refused to entertain questions about the case Friday. Instead, they referred a reporter to a typed, unsigned press release with a sect letter-head.

"Under this decision society can be made a ready victim of the thieves of the world to take what they want when they want it," the release states. "There is no basis for legal precedent in law or fact for this outrageous decision."