

# Religion news

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## Ex-Scientologist calls church a moneymaker, not a religion

By CHESTER SHEARD  
Sentinel staff writer

Claims that the Church of Scientology is a religion are false, a former member charged.

The church is an intelligence and information agency that uses mind manipulation, hypnotism and other methods to gradually turn members into agents to financially enhance the organization, said Larry Wollersheim, a former salesman and touring spokesman for the Church of Scientology.

After spending 11 years as an active member in the church, Wollersheim, 40, a native of Milwaukee, sued the organization in 1980 for intentional and negligent infliction of emotional distress.

A Los Angeles Superior Court jury awarded Wollersheim \$30 million in damages in 1986 for the mental anguish he suffered during the years he was a member of the church.

After an appeal by the church, the State of California Circuit Court of Appeals reduced the award to \$2.5 million July 19. Wollersheim said he planned to appeal the ruling.

In 1987, Wollersheim was offered \$4 million to settle the case out of court. He turned it down.

Although he has been "running" scared for 10 years, Wollersheim said he feels it is now his obligation to expose Scientology for what it is.

"I want to encourage people to use the law to fight this type of thing," he said in a rare interview since the decision. He was in Milwaukee recently visiting family.

"I could easily have taken the money they offered me, but I feel it is my obligation to help educate people about how to deal with cultist groups that brainwash their children."

But he cautions parents against kidnaping a child from a cult, saying "that can bring on a lot of problems most people are not equipped to handle."

People concerned about family members and friends who are caught up in a cultist situation should not attempt to confront the organization. Instead, he said, they should contact groups that have expertise in dealing with cults.

Wollersheim recommended:

"They claim to be a religion and use the right of belief as constitutional protection, but their use of religious beliefs to break the law violates that protection."

— LARRY WOLLERSHEIM,  
former member,  
Church of Scientology



American Family Foundation, P.O. Box 338, Weston, Mass. 02183; and Spiritual Counterfeits, P.O. Box 4306, Berkeley, Calif. 94704.

Scientology teaches that its members are the elite of society and are here to right the world's wrongs, the former member said.

Wollersheim said more than 90% of the people who apply to become members of the church are turned down because they doubt or question the principles of the church.

The other 10% are accepted and immediately made to feel that they are members of an elitist group who are actually reawakened beings destined to take over the earth, he said.

Wollersheim was 18 when he first encountered Scientology. He was in San Francisco on a break from the University of Wisconsin — Madison when he met a woman who complimented him on his appearance and told him he showed signs of great intelligence.

The woman coaxed him into a building where he was confronted by a man who said he wanted give him some tests to prove his intelligence.

"It was the '60s, and people were very free," Wollersheim said. "I thought it was a come-on by the woman so I went along with the testing."

"I was 18, from an upper middle-class community with no street smarts, and a person who was prone to be, what is meant in hypnosis

terms, highly suggestible. I was very suitable for their aims."

The method used by the church hierarchy to transform new members with promises into the type of human machine needed to advance Scientology causes is called "auditing," Wollersheim said.

"Auditing" is a form of intense counseling that induces one to go to such extremes as to discontinue contact with family members if they are outside of the church, he said.

Wollersheim said he returned to the building the next day for a "communication course" where he had to sit for hours staring at another person without blinking.

"This caused me to go into a type of trance, and I began to feel that I was out of my body, that I was on a mind-transforming drug," he said. "They speak of the feeling as a 'big win,' a sign that you are an immortal being and that you have a source of power within you that needs to be released and that only they (Scientists) could show me how to release that power."

"The feeling was so overpowering that I believed they had a phenomenal power and I had to stay with them."

Wollersheim said they promised him he would acquire a higher IQ, success in business, freedom from illnesses and pain, occult powers, to love his body, a quick mind and ability to influence people.

"But at the base of it all is fear that if you don't stay with and learn their teachings, you will have a failure in life," said Wollersheim.

His star rose quickly in the church, he said. During the 11 years he was active, he lectured to incoming members and delved into their financial assets. He estimated that he contributed several million dollars for the church, contributing about \$100,000 of his own money.

However, in 1979, he began to feel the strain. A girlfriend told him he looked as though he was dying, urging him to leave the church.

"My hair was coming out. My eyes were drawn. I wasn't eating. I was spending all of my time, at 18 hours a day, working for the church," Wollersheim said. "I was caught up... that I didn't know I was. I was becoming psychotic, a human guinea pig."

Knowing what happened to defected members, Wollersheim said he was afraid to leave.

However, word spread that he was thinking about leaving, and Wollersheim said church leaders began a retribution program against him. Intensive was the program that Wollersheim eventually sought psychiatric help.

Wollersheim told church officials he had to get away for a while and needed a rest.

He said one of the top intelligence officers told him, "Don't ever do a thing that has ever happened to in Scientology."