

Church 'altered minds' trial told

By Paul Moloney
TORONTO STAR

Church of Scientology intelligence officers in the 1970s were "complete zealots" prepared to use illegal means to attack critics, a former official has testified.

"Within Scientology, we were completely indoctrinated and did believe that everything we did was 100 per cent right. Our minds were completely altered," Bryan Levman told an Ontario Court, general division, jury.

Testifying in return for immunity from prosecution, Levman said he thought at the time it was justified in having "plants" infiltrate Metro police and other agencies seen as enemies.

"We thought it was good to do the things that led us here today," he said yesterday, referring to breach of trust charges against five members and the church itself in connection with the intelligence-gathering operation.

Levman, who started out as a church spokesperson, admitted to lying in the past "to protect Scientology. You twist the answer around to make it look good for the church. We were drilled for hours on how to do it."

But Levman agreed with Clayton Ruby, defence counsel for the church, that founder L. Ron Hubbard never issued a written directive to commit crimes to gather intelligence.

Levman, who admitted he authorized break-ins and plants, said a Hubbard document on the subject doesn't state illegal acts but "doesn't say you can't do anything illegal."

Hubbard "set up the policies by which we did it," he said on his fourth day on the witness stand.

Levman denied Ruby's suggestion that he was trying to blame the church, and said he felt officials had attempted to put the blame on him.

"I can't shift the blame to the church. It already belongs there," he said, adding the leadership "can never own up to the fact that they ever do anything wrong."

In the mid-1960s Hubbard, who died in 1986, said "enemies of Scientology are fair game and we can do anything we want to them," said Levman, who joined in 1968.

"We felt safeguarding Scientology by any means was our mandate. We didn't trouble ourselves over whether it was legal or illegal, which is of course why we're here today."

Levman, 44, said ordinary members of the Church of Scientology of Toronto didn't know what was going on within his office of deputy guardian for Canada, which he held from 1973 to 1978.

The office reported to the guardian's office worldwide in England. It operated separately from day-to-day operations and its job was to battle those seen as enemies of Scientology, he said.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Scientology saw itself as being "persecuted" by police, government agencies and mental health groups, he said.

It was being portrayed "as a cult ensnaring young, impressionable minds and all their money," he said.

Levman said that, when he testified, he was young, idealistic, misguided and immature and he now has "no belief in Scientology."

The trial continues.