

Church 'plants' stole files trial told

APR 30 1992 STAR

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TORONTO STAR

A man who left a Catholic seminary to eventually head the Church of Scientology in Canada said he knew church members were infiltrating police and government offices, and his wife was one of them.

Emile Gilbert, 44, who now lives with his former wife and her new husband in Fonthill, Ont., testified he studied 5½ years for the priesthood then left to join the Church of Scientology in September, 1968.

There he met his wife, Cathy Wilkins, who was infiltrating the Ontario Provincial Police on behalf of the church, and they were married in 1973, he told assistant crown attorney Renee Pomerance. They separated after nine years and were later divorced.

Gilbert, who was expelled from the church for life along with his former wife in 1983, was testifying at the trial of the Church of Scientology and five Scientologists.

They are charged with five counts of criminal breach of trust

"plants" infiltrating the OPP, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Metro police and the Ontario attorney-general's office between April, 1974, and November, 1976.

He said the plants worked for the church's Guardian's Office, which he had no control over while he headed the church's Canadian branch. Documents and secret information stolen by the plants were kept in a file room called the "garden," he explained to the Ontario Court, general division, jury.

Gilbert said he was recruited by the Guardian's Office in 1974 to infiltrate a family that had defected from the church and was allegedly spreading unfavorable information about it.

He said he posed as a church defector to get the family's confidence, but wasn't sure when he completed the project in 1976 whether it had been successful.

He said while in the "garden" he saw his former wife, John Bradley and Janice Wheeler putting documents — which he believed had been illegally obtained — into the secret files.

Bradley is charged with a breach of trust involving the Metro police, and Wheeler's charge relates to the attorney-general's ministry.

When Gilbert learned the OPP were investigating the activities of the Church of Scientology, he said he feared he and his former wife might get implicated despite their expulsions.

In May, 1984, he spoke with the police and the two were offered immunity from prosecution if they testified under oath.

Gilbert said his main function as head of the church was to counsel members, recruit new members and raise money.

The Guardian's Office was designed to work as a buffer between the church and the public at large. Legal, public relations, intelligence and finance committees worked under its wing to get Scientology accepted, Gilbert said.

He said the aim of the church was "to make the planet a more ethical, saner place to live."

In the early 1980s there was a power struggle going on within the church, the witness said. He said the "finance police were now in power to enforce (founder) L. Ron Hubbard's policies in a ruthless manner."

Gilbert maintained he was removed from office on false allegations of embezzlement and of working for the family he was supposed to be spying on.

The trial is continuing before Mr. Justice James Southey.