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## Behind an Internet Message Service's Close

### Pressure From Church of Scientology Is Blamed for the Shutdown

By PETER H. LEWIS

Pressure from the Church of Scientology International was at least partly responsible for the recent shutdown of a well-known Internet messaging service based in Helsinki, according to the Finnish operator of the service.

The service, known by its Internet address, anon.penet.fi, was used by hundreds of thousands of people worldwide to send and receive electronic messages without divulging their true identities. It was the best known of a small, global network of special computers known as remailers, whose legitimate users include political dissidents, people with medical or drug ailments and others who want to communicate anonymously.

Although previous news accounts had reported that the service was shut down because of accusations that it was a primary conduit for child pornography transmitted on the Internet, police investigators in Helsinki dismissed those accusations as groundless.

The real reason for terminating the service, according to its founder and operator, Johan Helsingius, was a recent Helsinki court ruling that ordered him to reveal the true name of one of his system's users to the Church of Scientology. The judge held that under Finland's current telecommunications laws, Internet electronic mail does not carry the same privacy protections enjoyed by postal mail or telephone calls.

The church, which in recent years has been trying to protect its copyrighted scriptures by trying to block their dissemination over computer networks, said an unknown person or persons had used the anon.penet.fi computer to illegally publish copyrighted church documents on Usenet, the global electronic bulletin board.

Mr. Helsingius, a 35-year-old computer networking expert, has not yet revealed the name sought by the Scientologists, and said he planned to appeal the court ruling. But he said the court ruling opened the door for future subpoenas seeking the real

names of anon.penet.fi users, and that he would rather close the system than spend all his time in court.

Mr. Helsingius has operated anon.penet.fi for more than 3 years, handling over 7,000 messages a day.

"In a sense I've done my pioneer work and it is now up to others to carry on," Mr. Helsingius said.

Helena Kobrin, a Church of Scientology official, said the complaint against anon.penet.fi was just one of several actions the church had taken against the operators of remailer computers in Europe and the United States. She said the church has five lawsuits pending in the United States against remailer operators and us-

### A Finnish judge says different rules apply to E-mail.

ers of remailers.

"We have actively been in communication with various remailers about postings that have gone through their systems," said Ms. Kobrin, general counsel for the Religious Technology Center in Los Angeles, which is responsible for protecting the copyrights and trade secrets of unpublished Scientology scriptures.

Earlier this year, another remailer, known as hacktic.nl, in the Netherlands, was shut down under pressure from the Scientologists.

Unlike many other churches, the Church of Scientology, founded nearly 40 years ago by the science fiction author L. Ron Hubbard, regards its gospel as copyrighted material and a trade secret. Several courts have upheld the validity of the copyrights.

Foes and critics of the church have used the Internet to publish the church documents, as well as other documents the church contends were stolen from its computers.

The Religious Technology Center has also tried unsuccessfully to shut down a Usenet forum,

alt.religion.scientology, where many of the copyrighted documents are published.

A series of recent news articles in The London Observer newspaper among others had linked the anon.penet.fi computer to accusations it was a conduit for child pornography.

Mr. Helsingius, who has denied that his system is a conduit for child pornography, declined to speculate on the motives of the accusers. The accusations of child pornography first appeared several days after Mr. Helsingius declined to turn over to the court the name sought by the Scientologists.

The London Observer quoted Toby Tyler, identified as an adviser to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, as saying anon.penet.fi was the source for up to 90 percent of the child pornography on the Internet.

But Richard P. (Toby) Tyler, a sergeant in the San Bernardino, Calif., County Sheriff's Department who said his involvement with the F.B.I. was minimal, said he was misquoted by the newspaper. Mr. Tyler, who has investigated pornography trafficking in cyberspace, said that most child pornography on the Internet did not pass through remailers. He did say, however, that of the small portion that does, 70 percent to 90 percent passes through anon.penet.fi.

"I think that's a shame," Sergeant Tyler said upon learning that anon.penet.fi was closed. "I personally view its closing as a loss of freedom. I did not like the abuse of the remailer for child pornography, but I felt it served a necessary political purpose in this world."

Ms. Kobrin of the Religious Technology Center said that despite its legal actions, the Church of Scientology does not oppose the operation of remailers, which are also known as anonymous servers.

"We were not opposing the existence of his server," Ms. Kobrin said. "We have no opposition to there being anonymity for private, consensual communications. What we oppose is using anonymous servers for the purpose of permitting criminal or other unlawful acts. There has to be responsibility and accountability."