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FEDERAL AGENTS RAID SCIENTOLOGY CHURCH

Offices in Two Cities Are Searched for Allegedly Stolen I.R.S. Files

By ANTHONY MARRO

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 8—Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, carrying buzz saws, sledgehammers, crowbars and search warrants, entered offices of the Church of Scientology here and in Los Angeles this morning in an attempt to recover hundreds of documents allegedly stolen by church operatives from Government files.

The raids were undertaken after the bureau had received information alleging a complex and somewhat bizarre scheme by which the church evidently sought to gain an advantage in a succession of legal disputes with the Internal Revenue Service and other Federal agencies.

The scheme, as described by the Government, included infiltration of church operatives into Federal agencies, surreptitious entries into Government buildings and theft of Government documents.

In a statement released this evening, the church officially denounced the Government action as "a Gestapo police state raid." It contended that the raid was in reaction to an allegation in a church report that officials of the Government and of Interpol, the private French-based police association, were involved in an international narcotics operation. The statement also said the Government raid was in retaliation for church "attempts

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Federal Agents Raid Offices of Scientology Church

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at Government reforms," but did not elaborate.

The Church of Scientology was founded in 1950 by L. Ron Hubbard, a writer of science fiction, and now says it has 3.1 million members around the world. It is based on a philosophy that uses various counseling devices to aid its followers in gaining self-knowledge and self-aware-

In recent years, the church has initiated several suits against the Government, which it contends has been improperly keeping the organization and its members under surveillance. It has also waged an extensive and seemingly well-funded campaign to force the Government to cut its ties to Interpol.

According to a 33-page affidavit filed in Federal District Court here in support of the request for the search warrants, persons working on behalf of the church also allegedly forged Internal Revenue Service credentials and bugged a conference room in which I.R.S. officials were to the Federal Courthouse here. scheduled to discuss the tax-exempt status of the church.

Fewer than half, a dozen such operatives were named in the affidavit, and to date only one of them has been charged with a crime.

A bureau official declined to describe the material taken from the church offices today, except to say that the raids were "extremely productive."

The information in the affidavit was based mostly on extensive interrogation of a former church official, Michael James Meisner, 27 years old. According to the affidavit, he admitted taking part in many of the acts.

A church official, the Rev. Hugh Wilhere, said today that Mr. Meisner had been connected with the church, but that this should not be taken to mean that anything he did was done on behalf of the church.

The raids, which were coordinated to begin at 9 A.M. here and at 6 A.M. on the West Coast, were directed against offices at 2125 S Street N.W. in Washington and at two locations in Los Angeles.

According to the affidavit by Robert Tittle, a Federal Bureau of Investigation agent, Mr. Meisner reached Justice Department officials in Los Angeles in May and said that he wanted to turn himself in and cooperate in the Government's investigation of the alleged thefts.

The affidavit says that during two weeks of interrogation by bureau agents, Mr. Meisner said that his knowledge of the alleged plan dated to 1974, when church officials called for an all-out attack on the Internal Revenue Service. The I.R.S. from time to time had withheld tax-exempt status from certain church subsidiaries on the ground that it was not satisfied that they met the criteria for exemption.

According to the version set forth in

the affidavit, a man named Gerald Ben- agents who had been alerted by a suspinett Wolfe was recruited by church mem- clous guard. The agents copied down the bers and told to apply for a job at the I.R.S. By November 1974, he had obtained a job as a clerk-typist there.

Beginning in the summer of 1975, Mr. Wolfe allegedly was directed by Mr. Meisner to monitor the files of the I.R.S. sections dealing with exempt organizations, and Mr. Wolfe purportedly obtained and copied many of the documents he found there.

Mr. Wolfe was said to be living with his parents in the Middle West, and could not be reached for comment tonight.

In 1976, the focus shifted to the Department of Justice and to the staff attorney who was handling the church's freedom of information suit against Interpol. According to Mr. Meisner's account, a church member succeeded in obtaining a job as a secretary in the Justice Department, and eventually learned the whereabouts of the files.

In the months that followed, the affidavit says, Mr. Meisner and Mr. Wolfe managed to break into a room at the Internal Revenue Service and make false I.R.S. identification cards for themselves, and then used these cards to gain entrance

At least three times in May and June 1976, they gained entrance to the courthouse office of an Assistant United States Attorney, removed stacks of documents from his files, made copies of them in a neighboring office and then returned

the files, according to the affidavit. On the last of these entries, the affidavit said, they were stopped by F.B.I.

names on the credentials and then let the two men go.

Mr. Wolfe, who had used his legitimate I.R.S. identification instead of the false one, later was arrested by the F.B.I. He pleaded guilty to a charge of making false use of a Government seal, a felony offense, and was sentenced to two years on probation and two years of community service for the city of Milwaukee.

He apparently did not corroborate Mr. Meisner's version of events; instead, according to the affidavit, he testified in a grand jury to a version that did not implicate the church in the thefts.

Mr. Meisner, who says he was placed under "house arrest" by church members for a time after the arrest of Mr. Wolfe, also told Federal agents that church members had concocted a false story for Mr. Wolfe to tell the grand jury in hopes of diverting blame from the church.

At a news conference in Los Angeles this afternoon, Vaughn Young, a church official, denied that Mr. Meisner had ever been held against his will. He also said that, to his knowledge, there were no documents in the church files that had been obtained illegally.

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