

Titchbourne lawyer calls Scientology terrorist group in guise of church

By FRED LEESON
of The Oregonian staff

The Church of Scientology was decried Monday as a terrorist organization run by a "brilliant sociopath" under the guise of religion as lawyers began closing arguments in a civil fraud trial against the church in Portland.

"This is a bogus scheme of mental health to which religiosity is callously tacked on," declared Garry P. McMurry, an attorney seeking up to \$42 million in punitive damages against the church and its founder, L. Ron Hubbard.

In a daylong argument before a Multnomah County Circuit Court jury, McMurry attacked Scientology as "nothing more than a terrorist organization masquerading as a religion." He urged jurors to impose a large damage award to punish Scientology for its conduct regarding Julie Christofferson Titchbourne, to deter future anti-social behavior and to warn other thought-reform groups about the consequences of wanton disregard of the truth.

"If any case ever cried out for punishment, it is this case against L. Ron Hubbard," McMurry said after citing a list of what he said were misrepresentations about Hubbard's personal background and alleged benefits from Scientology.

McMurry also attacked a series of policies written or authorized by Hubbard in which opponents of Scientology were declared to be "fair game" and could be cheated, sued, lied to, tricked or "destroyed" by other Scientologists without special sanction from the church.

The defense is scheduled to spend a day arguing against Titchbourne's claims Tuesday as the trial draws near an end in its 10th week. Circuit Judge Donald H. Londer said he expected the jury would begin deliberations Wednesday.

McMurry recounted Titchbourne's involvement in Scientology in Portland in 1975 and 1976 after she had graduated from high school in Libby, Mont.

He said she had been interested in Scientology because she had read and been told that it was an exact science, that it could improve her weak eyesight, improve her intelligence and give her more knowledge of the mind than any psychologist or psychiatrist.

McMurry described as "pure bunk" the claims for Scientology and representations that Hubbard graduated from George Washington University, was a nuclear physicist and civil engineer and that he had cured himself of crippling and blinding World War II injuries by using Scientology techniques.

McMurry said medical records showed Hubbard was neither crippled nor blinded during the war and that the ailments he suffered — arthritis, bursitis and an eye infection known as

conjunctivitis — never were cured. He said Hubbard still received \$106 in a Navy disability pension "to this day."

He also described Hubbard as a "brilliant sociopath" who had retained control over the church and made millions of dollars from it, despite Hubbard's claims that he retired from church management in 1966 and that he made no more than a Scientology staff worker.

McMurry said Titchbourne suffered from a blunted, narrowed mind after her involvement with Scientology. He said that "it took her years to recover." Titchbourne, now 27, later graduated with honors in engineering from Washington State University.

"She's well now, but not because of any spiritual enlightenment at the hands of Scientology," McMurry said.

McMurry also stressed the failure of any high-ranking church officials to appear to testify as defense witnesses about Hubbard's personal control or about church policies of attacking those who attacked them. The plaintiff's case included testimony from several former Scientologists, including some who had worked personally with Hubbard.

"You have a right to wonder where are their witnesses?" McMurry said. "Do they expect us to be so stupid we won't ask?"

He added, "The massive fraud, the massive amounts of money, the cynical, sick terror, that's all uncontested."

As a result of Titchbourne's request for a refund in 1976, McMurry said she was declared to be fair game, was sued unsuccessfully twice by the church and had her supposedly confidential church files culled and examined by the intelligence arm of the church.

He said the intelligence branch also launched an investigation seeking criminal activity on the part of Titchbourne, her mother, friends and her Lutheran minister in Montana.

Londer ruled earlier that the church was liable for damages only as a result of secular statements, not religious beliefs. "Every statement we have sued them for is everyday, garden-variety common fact," McMurry argued.

He said Hubbard started a forerunner of Scientology in the 1950s as a mental-health scheme and tried to add religious elements only after the curative powers were challenged by the government.

"You can't hide behind a religious mask like you hide behind a Halloween mask whenever it suits your purposes," McMurry said.

Titchbourne won a \$2 million judgment in a 1979 trial against the church but the Oregon Court of Appeals reversed it in 1982 and ordered a new trial.