

Church of Scientology Gets Nod of Australian Government

An eight-year battle between the Church of Scientology and the Australian Government has ended in victory for the Scientologists in the recent recognition of Scientology's religious status by the Australian Federal Attorney General.

Ministers of the Church of Scientology in Australia are now authorized to perform marriages under the Matrimonial Causes Act. Prior Attorney Generals had refused to give this authorization to the Church of Scientology.

Lionel Murphy, new Federal Attorney General of the Australian Labor Party, however, using the discretionary powers of his office, upheld Scientology's

rights as a religion.

Murphy opposed the unfair treatment of Scientology, stating that: "If certain citizens choose to found their own church then, provided they observe the law, they are entitled to equal treatment with other churches—whether their beliefs are generally approved or not, be they big or small, old or new, orthodox or unorthodox."

The far-reaching implications of this recognition, stated Rev. Steven R. Heard, Minister of Public Affairs for the Church of Scientology of Washington State, are just being felt. "No other church in Australia has ever been formally recognized as a religion by the Federal

Government.

This not only validates fully the Church's true status as a religion, but also effectively serves to negate any legislation regulating or banning the practices of Scientology in Australia."

In 1965 the tiny Australian State of Victoria passed a Psychological Practices Act under which the practice of Scientology was to be regulated. During 1968, both South and Western Australia passed banning acts against Scientology.

Unpopular and virtually unenforceable, the legislation has had little effect on the Church, which operates freely in each of the three states and which is registered in all

Australian States but Queensland.

The only attempt to enforce the bans occurred in Western Australia in 1969 when fines were levied upon several Church members.

This decision, however, was reversed shortly thereafter by the Australian Supreme Court, an action which effectually ruled the ban invalid.

"We've had great support from members of the Australian Labor Party who fought the South and Western Australian bans in 1968 and who, since they've come to power, have introduced legislation in the two Parliaments to officially repeal the bans. We expect the

measures to pass in the next session," said Rev. Heard.

In Victoria, Scientology has filed suits against Kevin Anderson, Q.C., the one-man Board on the Scientology Inquiry held from 1963-1965.

The Victoria Investigations, as in the case of the other two, have had little effect on the Church and the act was roundly criticized by Sir John Foster, M.P., Q.C., in his report on the Inquiry into Scientology in the United Kingdom, published December, 1971.

Sir John, who recommended the ban on foreign students of Scientology entering Great Britain be lifted, condemned the Australian bans, writing:

"Such legislation appears to me to be discriminatory and contrary to the best tradition of Anglo-Saxon legal system."

"This is a tremendous victory for us," commented Rev. Heard. "Even more importantly, it is a further step toward freedom of religious beliefs and practice for men of all creeds and beliefs."

The Church of Scientology was founded in Washington, D.C. in 1955. Scientology's subsidiary, Dianetics, offering a form of pastoral counseling aimed at alleviating spiritually induced effects of the mind upon the body, first became known in 1950 when L. Ron Hubbard wrote "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health". Scientology is an applied religious philosophy which, through spiritual counseling given by the Church's ministers, seeks to bring man to greater ability and awareness of himself, others, the physical universe, and the Supreme Being.

There are currently approximately 50 churches and 150 missions across the world, with a membership in the millions.

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Consumer Protection Recovers \$9,000

The consumer protection division of the Department of Law recovered nearly \$9,000 in February on behalf of 35 people who came to it with complaints, Attorney General John F. Havelock said.

This makes February the largest month for consumer protection recoveries since operations began in July of 1972, Havelock said.

"Since then the Department has recovered a total of \$24,395.52 for 124 consumers," he said, "and the trend indicates still more consumer protection activity in the future."

During February 296 contacts were made in consumer protection offices in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau, including 111 consumer complaints. Some 69 complaints were closed that month.

Havelock said that since consumer protection services started, 502 complaints have been received and 268 of them disposed of.

"These complaints have involved activities in land sales, credit, advertising, construction standards and other areas where the satisfaction of an individual's complaint also results in a benefit to a larger segment of the public," the Attorney General said.

Havelock said that because of limited resources the consumer protection program must "concentrate on cases that yield the largest public benefit."

In addition, he said, "whenever it is appropriate, complaints are referred to other agencies or to private attorneys for action."

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