

POSTCARD FROM CYBERSPACE/DANIEL AKST

Religious Fracas Debunks Myth of Anarchy on Net

■ **Cutting Edge:** Electronic war of words between Scientologists and critics shows Internet governance in action.

Much of cyberspace is fractious, but it's hard to imagine anyplace more polarized than **alt.religion.scientology**, an Internet newsgroup divided into a pair of flame-throwing camps dedicated to demolishing one another's arguments about the Los Angeles-based Church of Scientology. Now, though, the battle has gone far beyond flaming. Someone—it's not clear who—has forged messages that have the effect of canceling some postings critical of the church, in effect censoring an Internet forum, or electronic discussion group.

On the Internet, this is serious stuff indeed, but it gets even more dramatic. A Church of Scientology lawyer actually tried to nuke **alt.religion.scientology** altogether, sending out what is known to the cognoscenti as a "rmgroup message" that would have eradicated the newsgroup from the great river called Usenet that flows at

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POSTCARD: Battle Debunks Anarchy Myth

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all times across the Internet.

The fracas now even includes an Internet petition drive urging the Church of Scientology to stop trying to censor its critics. The church, meanwhile, has denied any wrongdoing and calls itself the victim of a smear campaign and copyright violations.

Controversy is nothing new for Scientology, and free-speech disputes are nothing new in cyberspace. But what's most interesting about the attack on **alt.religion.scientology** is the insight it offers into how the Internet is (you should pardon the expression) governed. For the Net is not the anarchy it seems.

Nobody runs it, of course, but system administrators all over the place function as its stewards, and their perspective is a product both of the networking culture (a weird blend of individualism and communality) and the America in which most of them grew up.

It's really a very American institution, the Internet—democratic but not without property rights. Most of the rules are based on the idea that people should be left to do what they want as long as they don't abuse the commons. Thus, it appears that hardly any sites have stopped carrying **alt.religion.scientology**. (In general, rmgroup messages require human approval to take effect, or at the very least must announce their arrival to system administrators, who can then undo them.) Besides, if **alt.religion.scientology** had been destroyed, Netsters would have posted the same stuff elsewhere in cyberspace, just as they circumvented a Canadian ban on reports of a celebrated murder trial by posting details all over the place, until the Mounties—that's right, picture them there at the border, on horseback—finally gave up.

Church of Scientology lawyer Helena Kobrin has proved tenacious. In addition to trying to cancel the newsgroup, she tried to stop the **alt.religion.scientology** postings of Dennis Erlich, a former church member-turned-dissident, by demanding that the Los Angeles Valley College bulletin board system cancel his account.

Tom Klemesrud, who operates the North Hollywood BBS independently of the college, refused without proof of Kobrin's claim that the account was being used to post copyrighted church materials. Erlich denies doing anything illegal.

Klemesrud is no stranger to Scientology: He has long been involved with dissidents from the group and admits to having passed information about the church to the FBI and IRS at times.

Kobrin asserts that **alt.religion.scientology** "has been used by a few unprincipled lawbreakers" to post "re-created versions of sacred religious scriptures which are protected by both copyright and trade secret law." She said the church will continue to defend its rights vigorously.

To fully understand why the Scientology fracas has created an uproar on the Internet, consider the way newsgroups are born. Establishing groups in such mainstream categories as "soc." and "sci." requires a process that includes a vote, but even responsible progenitors of "alt." groups, which are relatively easy to create, will gauge Net feeling before going ahead. If they didn't, system operators might not carry the group.

The point is, you can't just decide to kill a widely accepted newsgroup simply because you don't like what people say there. Well-meaning Net vigilantes have in the past taken it upon themselves to cancel Usenet "Spam," commercial messages posted to a large number of inappropriate newsgroups.

Such cancelings added to the furor surrounding the widely publicized Canter & Siegel episode, in which a pair of Phoenix lawyers flooded the Internet with messages promoting their services. Some Internet users, incensed at this misappropriation of the commons, took the liberty of canceling Canter & Siegel postings, which requires a certain amount of skill, since normally a user can only cancel his own postings.

Rmgroup messages, which can result in rmgroup wars—one side removing a group, the other re-creating it just as fast—also require some skill. But to many on the Internet, Kobrin's rmgroup message was too much, and Internet activist Jon Noring was moved to action. Noring, who had previously organized e-mail petitions to get Intel to replace its flawed Pentium chips, this time posted a petition to **alt.religion.scientology** urging the church to stop censoring its critics. The nonprofit Electronic Frontier Foundation has also entered the fray, posting a statement Monday urging the church "not to take actions designed to cut off the free flow of information through the Net."

An irony here is that, according to Klemesrud, his system is used by many active Scientologists as well as Scientology opponents, though he acknowledges that he is probably no favorite of the church. And yes, he remains adamant about not canceling dissident Erlich's account.

Daniel Akst, a Los Angeles writer, is a former assistant business editor for technology at The Times. He welcomes messages at akstd@news.latimes.com but regrets that he cannot reply to each and every one.

Tampa Bay & State

SECTION
B

ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 1995

Police looking for church's private eye

■ Officers suspect an investigator for the Church of Scientology of impersonating a Hillsborough detective to get information.

By THOMAS C. TOBIN
Times Staff Writer

A private investigator who does work on behalf of the Church of Scientology is being sought by Tampa police in a case that features a bizarre claim about the Pasco County sheriff.

The investigator, a former Los Angeles police officer named Eugene Martin Ingram, is accused of impersonating a Hillsborough County sheriff's detective. Tampa police say Ingram was quizzing a woman about an alleged prostitution ring that he said involved Pasco County Sheriff Lee Cannon.

Police also have investigated Matt Bratschi, a reporter for the church publication *Freedom* magazine. Bratschi, who has not been charged, is believed by police to have accompanied Ingram on the interview.

The woman, who lives in Pasco County, contacted authorities and told them she does not know Cannon and knows nothing about a prostitution ring.

"I was a little amazed," Cannon said Friday of the church's inquiry. "The whole thing is a mystery to me."

He said he has never had any contact with the Church of Scientology, does not know the woman and is not connected to any prostitution ring. Nor is his department involved in any large-scale prostitution investigation, he said.

The woman, whose name is withheld by the *Times* to protect her privacy, declined to comment Friday.

Former members and critics of the church say Ingram has been seen around the country in recent years, harassing them in connection with their anti-Scientology activities, questioning their neighbors and using other intimidation tactics.

Ingram did not return messages to his Los Angeles business office Friday. Bratschi could not be reached for comment.

Ingram's Los Angeles lawyer, Elliot Abelson, said Friday that he had no information on the charge but added that it "sounds ridiculous." He said Ingram works for several law firms, some of which represent the Church of Scientology.

Ingram "is one of the finest investigators I've ever seen," said Abelson, who also has represented Scientology and has known Ingram for 20 years. "He's just ordinary folk as far as I'm concerned. I don't think he has intimidated anyone who doesn't want to be intimidated."

Kurt Weiland, a top Scientology official in Los Angeles, said Ingram and Bratschi were working on two investigations for *Freedom* magazine last year.

One was based on a tip about sexual activities involving Pasco County officials, he said. The other, he said, was an investigation of the *St. Petersburg Times*. For years, the Church of Scientology has been critical of the coverage it has received from the *Times*.

The church's spiritual headquarters are in Clearwater.

At some point, Weiland said,

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ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 1995

He said he has never had any

Police from 1B

Bratschi and Ingram "had indications of a crossover" between the two investigations. He would not elaborate.

"We haven't published everything there is to publish," Weiland said.

According to police reports, two men showed up last June at the Tampa headquarters of Salomon Brothers, a brokerage firm. They allegedly said they were police officers and asked the security guard to summon the woman, a Salomon Brothers employee.

The woman told police they presented badges with gold stars and green-and-beige identification cards and said they were Hillsborough County sheriff's detectives. She said they asked her about a prostitution ring in Pasco involving Cannon and asked whether she had dated Cannon.

The woman called the Pasco Sheriff's Office, who reviewed the sign-in log at Salomon Brothers. The log contained the names "G. Ingram" and "Matt Bratschi."

Pasco investigators recognized the names. On the same day the woman was questioned by the two men, Bratschi and Ingram had submitted a lengthy public records request at the Pasco County Sheriff's Office.

The request asked for 14 items, including appointment books, personnel files, telephone records and internal affairs records about a "sex scandal" within the office's communications division.

The Sheriff's Office provided the two with some of the information requested. A handful of items was denied either because they weren't

public records or because they weren't on file with the sheriff, said Mike Randall, the sheriff's legal counsel.

Later, Tampa police detectives acquired pictures of Bratschi and Ingram from their California driver's licenses. The woman from Salomon Brothers identified Ingram as one of the two men who interviewed her, but couldn't identify Bratschi.

There is a warrant in Tampa for Ingram's arrest. His bail is set at \$1,000. The maximum penalty for impersonating a police officer, a felony, is five years in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

Asked about the charge, Weiland said: "I've heard stuff like that before and it's usually done when an investigator gets close to something. They're trying to back him off."

Abelson, the lawyer for Ingram, said Ingram left his business card with the woman. He disputed the charge and suggested police were "trying to persecute the guy in the newspapers. Obviously, you guys are going along with it."

Scientology has a long history of conducting aggressive investigations. The most notorious example came in the 1970s when Scientologists infiltrated government offices in Washington D.C. and stole documents relating to government actions against the church.

A total of 11 high-ranking Scientologists, including the wife of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard, were convicted.

Church officials recently have said those people are no longer with the church and that their days of hardball intimidation tactics are behind them.

But several former members say Ingram has harassed them.

Ingram appeared in Seattle recently, ac-

cording to Stacy Young, a former church official and the wife of Robert Vaughn Young, formerly a top Scientology spokesman. The couple left the church in 1989 and now speak out against it.

Ingram has been spreading false information about the Youngs to their neighbors and friends, Stacy Young said. She said a neighbor was taking out his trash three weeks ago when Ingram appeared and began questioning him in the street. When Robert Young confronted him, Ingram ran, she said.

Priscilla Coates, chair of the Los Angeles Cult Awareness Network chapter, said Ingram once showed up unexpectedly at her husband's office. Ingram told her husband, who is a physician, "that I was getting kickbacks from deprogrammers and that I would get commissions of like, \$10,000," Coates said. She denied it.

Ingram used to work for the Los Angeles Police Department, where he was a desk sergeant. He was fired in 1981 on charges that he ran a house of prostitution and tipped off a drug dealer about a raid. In a jury trial, he was later acquitted.

In 1985, after Ingram began working as a private investigator, a letter surfaced indicating that an LAPD officer had given Ingram permission to eavesdrop on a former Scientologist.

This was strictly against department policy. Then-LAPD Chief Daryl Gates sharply criticized the episode.

Ingram shrugs off criticism. He told the *Los Angeles Times* for a story published in 1990: "People who claim that I have conducted an improper investigation probably have so much to hide."

Germany, Church of Scientology Feuding in Print and Political Arena

By Rick Atkinson
Washington Post Foreign Service

BERLIN—As the Church of Scientology sees it, Germany today is a repressive and intolerant place, not much different from the Third Reich of more than half a century ago in its hostility toward racial and religious minorities.

As the German government sees it, the Church of Scientology is not a church at all, but rather a dangerous cult that uses religion to cloak its money-making schemes while exploiting gullible members and threatening local communities.

Of such contradictory viewpoints are titanic feuds made, and the bitter quarrel between Scientology and German officials is now approaching Hatfield-McCoy intensity.

Scientology, which celebrated the 40th anniversary of its founding last month, is headquartered in Los Angeles and is based on the precepts of American science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, who died in 1986. Particularly influential is Hubbard's "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health," which Scientology officials say has sold more than 15 million copies. Through counseling and courses, Scientology professes to help adherents find inner harmony and awareness of the self "as a spiritual being."

More than two decades after Scientology brought its unorthodox brand of spiritual development to Germany, the uneasy relationship between church and state has degenerated into mutual name-calling and legal counterpunching.

Germany's 16 state premiers last month demanded concerted federal and state scrutiny of Scientology activities, as well as a European conference on the subject. Germany's main political organizations have banned Scientologists from membership, either nationally or in individual states. And state interior ministers last summer warned that Scientology—which claims 30,000 members in Germany—combines "economic activities with elements of economic criminality under the cover of a religious community."

Labor Minister Norbert Blum has described Scientology as "a machine for manipulating human beings." Renate Rennebach, a Social Democrat member of Parliament, declared in an interview that Scientologists are "seeking political influence to dominate the world according to their view of things. . . . They're a danger to democracy."

Franz Riedl, a spokesman for Scientology in Germany, dismisses such claims as unfounded. "We are not political at all, despite all allegations to the contrary," Riedl said in a telephone interview from Hamburg.

Scientologists have fought back since September with a series of full-page advertisements in The Washington Post and the New York Times, which have cost "close to \$1 million," according to Sylvia Stanard, a spokeswoman for the Church of Scientology's Washington office.

The ad campaign, which Stanard said was undertaken in the United States after German newspapers refused to print similar messages, asserts that Scientologists and other groups have been harassed relentlessly in Germany with government complicity. A recent ad contends that Scientologists have been discriminated against by German banks, schools and business firms.

An ad appearing in The Washington Post on Jan. 5 declared, "In Sept. 1938, Adolf Hitler enacted the infamous Nuremberg laws which gave

formal assent to anti-Semitism. . . . A half century later, a similar scenario is being repeated in modern Germany."

Such allegations provoke outraged denials from German officials. Norbert Reinke, director of the sects department in Bonn's Ministry for Families, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, said in an interview: "It's an unpleasant hate campaign, which has stepped way over the line."

Jewish groups also have denounced the campaign as exploiting the Holocaust. In an unpublished letter to The Washington Post, Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, described one advertisement as "manipulation and hypocrisy of the first order."

Stanard defended the ads. "I think some people are missing the point," she said. "It's not similar to what happened to the Jews in the '40s when they were going to concentration camps. That's not happening in Germany. But it's similar to what happened to the Jews in the early '30s. . . . We're not on the trains yet, but a similar environment is starting against minority religions in Germany."

Estimates of Scientology's worldwide membership range from 50,000 to 8 million. Some former Scientologists have charged the organization with brainwashing and blackmailing its members, and with harassing defectors and critics. In the United States, the Internal Revenue Service, after a decades-long battle, awarded tax-exempt status in 1993 to Scientology's 150 American churches.

German officials suggest the ad campaign reflects Scientology's resentment of its inability to reap the tax benefits accruing to recognized churches here. Instead, the federal government classifies Scientology as a "youth cult." Germany's constitutional court has yet to rule on whether Scientology should be considered a church.

A document from the German Embassy in Washington states that the Bonn government "finds credible expert testimony that the organization's pseudo-scientific courses can seriously jeopardize individuals' mental and physical health. . . . The government concludes there are ample grounds to believe reports that membership can lead to psychological and physical dependence, and financial ruin."

Riedl, the Scientology spokesman in Hamburg, said members at the nine churches and 20 missions in Germany pay a 30 mark (\$20) annual fee; to achieve Hubbard's enlightened state of "clear," which Riedl estimated would require three years of intensive "pastoral counseling," costs another 30,000 marks (\$20,000).

Among the most relentless opponents of Scientology in Germany has been a task force created in 1992 by the Hamburg state government to examine the organization's operations. Hamburg real estate agents have alleged that Scientologists are buying residential properties, converting them to cooperatives and then coercing renters to buy their apartments or face eviction.

Ursula Caberta y Diaz, head of the Hamburg task force, said, "Scientology is not a religion; it's not about a world view. It's a political movement and a psychological dictatorship. In Germany, unfortunately we know what it means to live with this kind of system."

Riedl counters that the Church of Scientology owns only one property in all of Germany, a building in Mu-

nich. Even the church's five-story Hamburg headquarters is leased, he said, adding, "We are a nonprofit organization with idealistic purposes." But critics contend that ownership is masked through a complex web of firms and individuals.

Riedl also noted that a three-year criminal investigation of German Scientology by Hamburg prosecutors was dropped last year because of insufficient evidence.

Scientology officials say they have catalogued 400 cases in which German members were discriminated against, including individuals who on the basis of their religious beliefs have lost their jobs, been deemed unfit tenants by landlords or been unable to open bank accounts. Reinke, the federal ministry official, called such assertions "sheer nonsense."

"If you investigate these cases," he added, "you find that there's nothing behind them."

Independently verifying such claims is difficult, partly because Germany has strict privacy laws.

Riedl produced documentation on two cases. One in particular—involving a western German furniture store owner named Paul Arenz—illustrates the acrimony and suspicion provoked by Scientology.

In a telephone interview from his home town of Kommern, in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, Arenz said he has been a member of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Christian Democratic Party for 25 years and a Scientologist since 1990. After buying a property in town and failing to win bank financing for construction of a hotel, Arenz said he contemplated building a drug-treatment center instead.

Arenz said he wrote a letter to the Scientology church in Duesseldorf in

an unsuccessful effort to persuade the church to build and run the treatment center according to the principles of Hubbard. Last September, the letter became public and with it Arenz's intentions to give Scientology a foothold in Kommern. Citing the Christian Democrats' avowed opposition to Scientology, local party leader Dieter Pesch asked for Arenz's resignation from the party. He refused and was expelled in December.

Pesch, the party leader, said in a telephone interview that party membership is "incompatible" with Scientology because "it's known that Scientology is no religious sect but rather—as [Labor Minister] Bluem has expressed it—a criminal economic enterprise which bleeds its members."

Arenz said he is appealing his ouster from the party. "I've been badly damaged personally and in my business through all this," he said. "I'm shocked that something like this can happen in Germany."

Officials in Bonn charge that the Scientologists want to wear down the government until someone in authority agrees to meet with them, thus giving legitimacy to the organization.


But Scientology officials said they have the time and money necessary to keep pressing Bonn through American public opinion.

"We're going to keep running the ads until the German government is willing to realize that there's a problem," Stanard said. "We're trying to say, 'Wake up and smell the coffee. There is a problem.'"

Special correspondent Petra Krischok contributed to this article.

IN TODAY'S GERMANY

TAKING PRIDE IN PERSECUTION



THE MESSAGE WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GRANT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCIENTOLOGISTS

For more information call 1-703-467-5811 or write to: Office of Public Affairs, Church of Scientology, 2155 S. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006

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Church of Scientology ran this full-page ad in The Washington Post.

Los Angeles Times

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1995

D7

Scientology's Internet Battle With Debunkers

The Business section is the last place I would expect to get my morning chuckle, but there it was on Jan 25. In a story about the electronic war of words between Scientologists and critics ("Religious Fracas Debunks Myth of Anarchy on Net"), a spokesperson for the religion blasts the critics for "re-created versions of sacred religious scriptures which are protected by both copyright and trade secret law."

Copyright and trade secret law?
Give me that old time religion.

B.H. MARGUET
Costa Mesa

Los Angeles Times

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1995

Scientologists Seize Disks for Lawsuit

■ **Glendale:** Church representatives with court order remove files allegedly containing copyrighted texts from home of outspoken critic.

By ALAN ABRAHAMSON
and NICHOLAS RICCARDI
TIMES STAFF WRITERS

GLENDAL—Led by a lawyer brandishing a federal court order and backed up by a pair of off-duty police officers, a handful of Church of Scientology representatives searched a Glendale house Monday and seized hundreds of computer disks and files allegedly containing copyrighted religious texts.

In the latest twist to a fractious dispute that began in cyberspace and landed last week at a federal courthouse in San Jose, Scientologists spent six hours Monday searching the house of Dennis Erlich, an outspoken critic of the church, for material they believed he transmitted, or intended to transmit, on the Internet about the Los Angeles-based church.

Erlich said the Scientologists confiscated more than 360 computer disks and 29 books, and served him with court papers disclosing that the church is suing him for copyright infringement. The papers disclosed that the church is also suing a North Hollywood businessman who runs an Internet bulletin board and a San Jose-based firm that provides access to the global computer network.

"They're taking the hard copies, they're taking everything!" Erlich cried over the telephone as his house was searched for material containing church policies and spiritual doctrines released only to initiates.

"What can I do? These guys have guns."

Erlich added later in the day that he believed the search was unlawful because it was not conducted by uniformed police or by federal marshals.

Thomas Small, the lawyer who led the search, confirmed the searchers took material but countered that their actions were lawful. In the complex and arcane field of copyright law, he said, a search and seizure like the one Monday does not need to be performed by police—as is the case, for instance, in

Please see **SEARCH, B7**



Warren McShane of the Religious Technology Center, which holds the "Dianetics" and "Scientology" trademarks, searches through Dennis Erlich's computer disks for copyrighted religious texts.



Photos by CLARENCE WILLIAMS / Los Angeles Times

McShane carries boxes of confiscated materials as a police officer, center, talks with Erlich.

VALLEY NEWS

SEARCH: Hundreds of Disks, Files Confiscated

Continued from B1
a criminal investigation.

Nor, Small said, is such a search uncommon.

"There's a lot of emotion in a case like this," Small said. But "it's not all that different from the kind of anti-counterfeiting going on in the toy field—the [Mighty Morphin] Power Rangers, for instance, where T-shirts and things are being impounded regularly."

Small said the searchers took boxes of material but he was unsure how much until it is catalogued.

The dispute that led to Monday's search has been brewing for months on the Internet—and while Scientologist lawyers contend it revolves around copyright law, Erlich says it's an issue of freedom of religion.

Erlich admits that he has been transmitting, or "posting," church materials on the Internet's "alternative scientology" newsgroup, where they could potentially be copied by millions of users worldwide.

The material got onto the Net via a BBS—or bulletin board system—operated by North Hollywood businessman Tom Klemesrud, 44, and then through computer facilities run by San Jose-based Netcom On-Line Communication Services, Inc.

Erlich, a Scientologist from 1968 to 1982 who was trained as a church minister, said he does not

believe that the material he posted is copyrighted. "... In fact, word for word, it is not," he said.

"If I am wrong about that, and it's possible I am, I was trained as a minister on this material which they are calling sacred Scripture," he said. "I am a minister licensed to practice my ministry and that is material I was given to minister with."

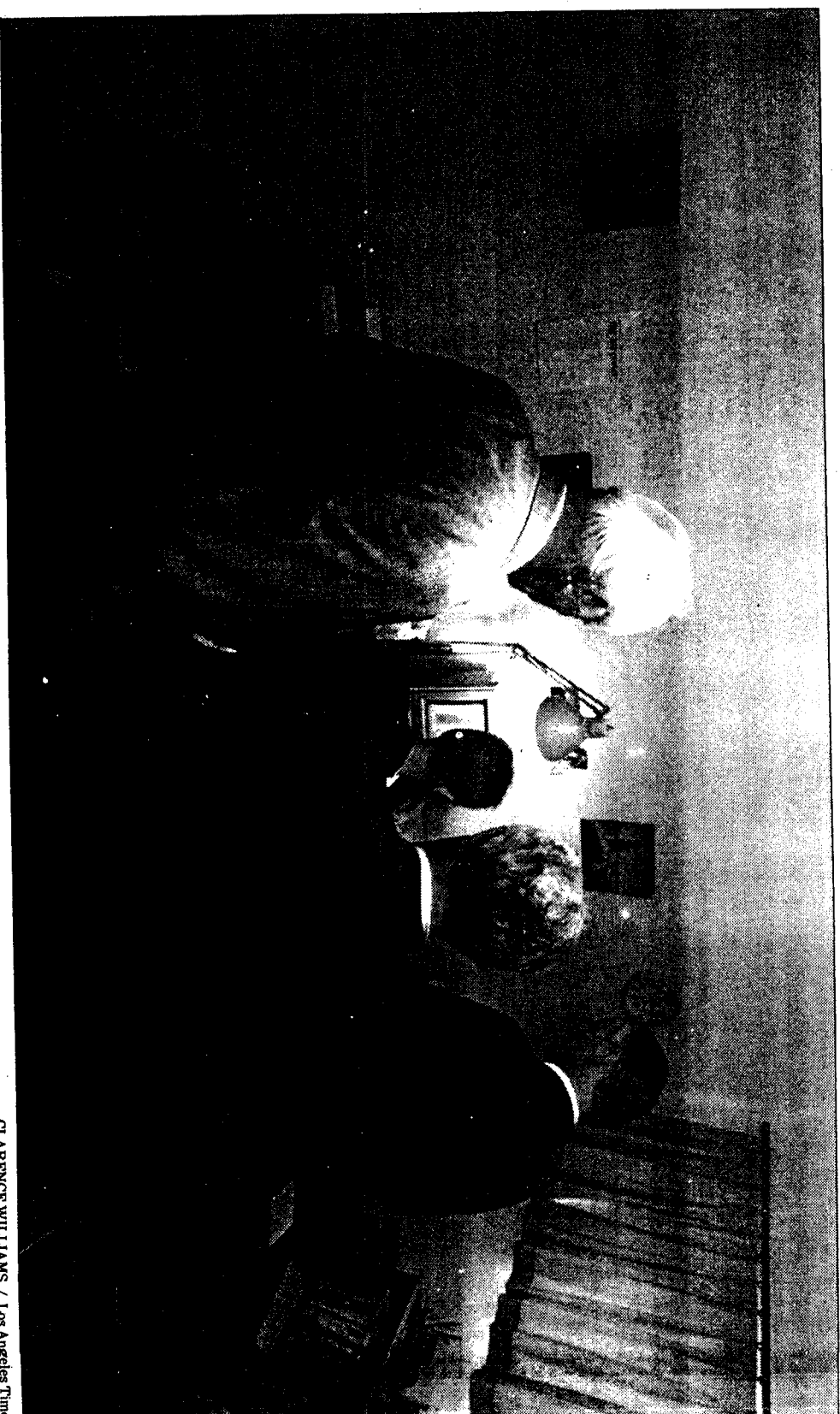
"They excommunicated me and now I'm making use of that same material by preaching or writing or publicizing my religious obligation onto the Internet. That's my pulp."

Claiming instead that the postings were copyright violations, the church's publishing company, Bridge Publications Inc., joined by Religious Technology Center, holder of the "Dianetics" and "Scientology" trademarks, sued last Wednesday in U.S. District Court in San Jose.

Named as defendants were Erlich, Klemesrud and Netcom. The suit seeks a restraining order as well as monetary damages of \$120,000 per infringement.

Last Friday, Judge Ronald M. Whyte issued an order directing the seizure of computer disks and other materials from Erlich's home.

The search began at 7:30 a.m. Monday. A uniformed Glendale Police Department officer was present at the beginning of the search and another was present at the



CLARENCE WILLIAMS / Los Angeles Times

Affiliates and consultants of Religious Technology Center, which has sued Dennis Erlich, look through Erlich's computer files.

end, but not in between, both Small and Erlich said.

"Our presence there was to keep the peace and pursuant to the court order we assisted in the execution of that order," said Police Depart-

ment spokesman Chahe Keuroghian.

Two off-duty police officers and a private investigator, "retained for this purpose," were present at all times, Small said. Erlich said the police identified themselves as off-

duty Inglewood officers.

The search lasted until about 2:30 p.m., Erlich said.

He said he isn't worried that the information he sought to make public will be suppressed. After repeated postings on the Internet,

"the genie's definitely out of the bottle on this," he said.

But he said the search was distressing. "I feel now like I'm a stranger in my own house," he said.