

YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER
Clearwater Sun

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Courageous attorneys

THE SPIRIT of non-involvement got a mighty boost Tuesday when a cross-section of Clearwater lawyers vigorously back-pedaled away from a resolution that would have asked them to (horrors!) take a stand against (we tremble to mention the name) Scientology.

By a 61-39 vote, members of the Clearwater Bar Association attending a monthly luncheon meeting rejected a resolution condemning the Scientologists.

The resolution had been passed by the CBA's board of directors. But the rank and file wasn't having any of it.

In fact, so reluctant were the lawyers to do battle with the cult that they didn't even debate the resolution.

We haven't heard of a display of courage like that since the 1960s, when apartment-dwellers at Kew Gardens in Brooklyn looked on passively while a young woman was stabbed to death beneath their windows. Nobody even offered to help her.

MILT WOLFE, local flack for the cult, said of the Clearwater lawyers who voted against the resolution: "I think they upheld the integrity of their profession."

If that's what was going on when the vote was taken, the legal profession in Clearwater has all the integrity of a rusty colander.

One attorney at the luncheon said a vote on the resolution would be ethically inappropriate. She said lawyers should not comment on matters that are in litigation or likely to reach that stage.

That takes in a lot of territory, so much so that if adhered to that restriction would keep the bar association perpetually mute. Ap-

parently the CBA's board of directors hadn't heard about that ethical point, or they thought it didn't apply.

We can understand the reluctance of sitting judges to comment on Scientology.

In the same way, we would be in sympathy with the silence of any attorney who is party to an existing suit or case having to do with the Scientologists.

But the resolution before the CBA on Tuesday required, at the least, a show of hands for or against. At the most, it would have allowed attorneys to speak out on a topic that is already a matter of intense public debate in the community where the lawyers earn their living. It tortures legal ethics to command silence in such a circumstance.

Are there any attorneys in Clearwater with the guts to at least talk out loud in public about Scientology?

We know of a few. But if they are allowed to remain a lonely minority by their colleagues, the Scientologists will surely take solid comfort and full advantage of the "hands off, let's stay out of it" outlook of the majority of local attorneys.

TUESDAY'S VOTE was taken in the presence of the state's top lawyer, attorney general Jim Smith.

Smith said, "It is rare to find in a community with strong tolerance for religious freedom such opposition to a church." He was wrong. Scientology is not a church.

Also, he could have exempted his own brethren in Clearwater—the attorneys—as a source of opposition to Scientology. They had a chance to declare themselves such on Tuesday.

Not only did they cave in, they did it without a peep.