

CLEARWATER SUN

THURSDAY

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## Scientologists sue Clearwater newspaper

By JEANNE PUGH  
St. Petersburg Times Staff Writer

**CLEARWATER** — The Church of Scientology filed a \$250,000 damage suit in Tampa Wednesday against Tom Coat, assistant city editor of the Clearwater Sun, and Clearwater Newspapers Inc., publishers of the newspaper, charging that Coat violated the "privacy and confidentiality" of the church by "joining" it under false pretences and then taking part in its "advanced training."

Announcement of the suit, filed in Hillsborough Circuit Court, was made at a news conference in the former Fort Harrison hotel, now owned and occupied by the Scientologists. Explaining the suit was Rev. Bruce Harrell, who was identified as director of the Tampa mission of the Church of Scientology of Fort Lauderdale.

**THE SUIT** charges that Coat enrolled for a Scientology seminar in

Tampa on or about Feb. 25; applied for church membership March 3, listing his employment as a free lance photographer; and attended seminar sessions "on various dates" between March 3 and March 18.

Clearwater Sun executive vice president Al Hutchison, asked to comment about the suit, said "We do not feel it would be appropriate to comment at this time since the matter is in the hands of the courts." He said the Sun would comment "at a more suitable time."

Harrell said Coat was recognized by church officials "within two days" after he joined the class "but he was given the benefit of the doubt" that his intentions as a student were sincere.

**HE SAID** Coat was not confronted with the fact that his true identity was known until March 18, after another Clearwater Sun reporter "let the cat out of the bag when he inadvertently told Rev. Fred Ulan (head of Scientolo-

gy operations in Clearwater) that a series of articles on Scientology was in preparation and would be launched that next Sunday."

Harrell said that revelation exposed "the bare intentions" of the newspaper "to proceed covertly, behind the scene, hidden, secret, to manufacture a series of stories."

In a press release, the church labeled the series, now appearing in the newspaper, as "muckraking yellow journalistic articles, visiciously (sic) attacking the Church of Scientology and its tenets." The series has not included anything about Coat's class.

**THE SUIT** charges that the presence of Coat in the Tampa seminar constituted an "unwarranted and surreptitious intrusion and invasion of plaintiff's private areas."

It says that other new members of the church "divulged highly personal confidences and communications to defendant Coat and in his presence."

Thursday, March 25, 1976

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**B**

# Scientists Name Sun, Employee In Suit

By STEPHEN ADVOKAT  
and MARK SABLEMAN  
Sun Staff Writers

Charging a reporter's enrollment in one of its courses caused members "extreme mental anguish, suffering and humiliation," the Tampa mission of the Church of Scientology sued the Clearwater Sun and a Sun employe Wednesday for \$250,000.

Bruce Harrell, director of the mission, charged that Sun Assistant City Editor Tom Coat enrolled in the Tampa mission for the purpose of writing articles about the controversial group that has purchased the former Fort Harrison hotel.

"Coat's unwarranted and surreptitious intrusion and invasion of our private training areas was in direct contravention of our rights guaranteed by the constitution of the United States of America and the State of Florida and we have acted accordingly," Harrell said in a prepared statement he read at a press conference at the Fort Harrison.

According to the suit, filed in Hillsborough County Circuit Court, the Church of Scientology has maintained a policy "of excluding anyone from participation in the seminars who would attend for any ulterior motive or purpose other than solely for their own religious and spiritual betterment."

Coat paid membership dues and joined the organization on March 2. After Scientology officials discovered and announced he was a newspaper employe, his money was returned and he was expelled from the mission.

Harrell charged the Sun with acting "covertly behind the scene, hidden, secret, to manufacture a series of stories, 12 of them on the Church of Scientology."

However, Coat did not contribute to the information-gathering or writing of this week's special report, which looks at Scientology through the organization's own documents and actions and views of former Scientologists.

The suit against the Sun and Coat did not specify laws or constitutional provisions that were allegedly violated.

Instead, the suit broached the general question of violation of freedom of religion and the right to privacy.

The Scientologists charged that Coat's attendance and subsequent expulsion from the Tampa Scientology See SUIT, Next Page



FRED ULAN  
...declines comment

## Suit

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courses had harmed the mission's "reputation for confidentiality in its seminars, thereby adversely affecting the recruiting of members, students and solicitation of donations."

In a second count, the suit also contends Coat is guilty of trespassing on Scientology property by attending the classes.

Scientology spokesmen Fred Ulan and Frederick

Rock each declined to comment about the suit following the brief press conference.

The Sun management also declined to discuss the suit, Managing Editor Ron Stuart said the Sun would "have its say at the proper time" and pointed out that "not one word about Coat's experiences has been published. It could be the report will be highly favorable to the Scientologists."

In criticizing the Sun for

allegedly slanted reporting, Ulan and Rock seemed to confirm some of the information in the recent Sun special reports.

While denying the Fort Harrison, a 50-year-old city landmark, had become the world headquarters for Scientology, Rock acknowledged that some Scientology literature describes Flag—now based at the Fort Harrison—as the international headquarters.

And Ulan reluctantly acknowledged that the Fort Harrison was one of three Scientology facilities in the world where a permanent residence is maintained for Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard.

Expanding on the use of the Fort Harrison, Rock announced that the building was also being used for low-level Scientology training, claiming that did not conflict

with earlier explanations that the facility would be used only for advanced courses.

According to Rock, even the rudimentary Scientology communications program is considered "advanced" training. The closest center to Clearwater for the introductory course is the Tampa mission, but courses immediately above that level are available in the Clearwater Scientology facility, he said.

In response to another question during the short question-and-answer period after the press conference, Rock said he personally would like to see a Scientist on the city commission.

Rock said the Church of Scientology was apolitical, and noted he would not actively solicit the candidacy of a Scientist. But he added he would encourage anyone with aspirations to run.