

ATTY. GEN. RYAN FILES SUIT AGAINST WORLD CHURCH - ACTION SEEKS ACCOUNTING OF `CHARITY'S' FUNDS

Chicago Tribune - July 14, 1999

Author: David Mendell and Kirsten Scharnberg, Tribune Staff Writers.

Saying he finds aspects of the World Church of the Creator "personally repugnant," Illinois Atty. Gen. Jim Ryan on Wednesday filed suit against the East Peoria-based white supremacist group and its controversial leader, Matthew Hale .

The civil lawsuit asks the Cook County Circuit Court to declare the organization a charity, which would require it to register with Ryan's office and provide a "full accounting" of its finances.

"We want to shine a light on the financial dealings of this organization," Ryan said at a Chicago news conference.

Hale and his group were thrust into the public spotlight last week after police blamed white power activist Benjamin Smith, who had been a World Church member, for a two-state shooting spree that killed two and wounded nine. The spree, over the Independence Day weekend, targeted racial and religious minorities and ended when Smith committed suicide as he struggled with police officers.

The U.S. Department of Justice is considering opening an investigation into the group, which espouses anti-Semitic and anti-minority views, to explore its links with Smith and whether Hale or the church provoked Smith's violence. Hale and Smith had spoken extensively by telephone in the weeks leading up to the shooting, according to law enforcement sources, and Smith met with Hale five days before to pick up church hate literature for dissemination.

Ryan said his staff believes the group operates as a charity because it collects dues from members and solicits money for merchandise and books, including the "White Man's Bible" and "Nature's Eternal Religion," through its Web site. Illinois law requires charities to register annually with his office.

Hale on Wednesday called the lawsuit "ludicrous."

The Illinois Department of Revenue has said it denied the group tax-exempt status in 1995, rejecting the notion that the group is religious.

Caption: PHOTO

PHOTO (color): Illinois Atty. Gen. Jim Ryan, sitting in his Chicago office on Wednesday, announces the court action he has taken against the white supremacist World Church of the Creator. Tribune photo by Charles Osgood.

Edition: EVENING UPDATE

Section: NEWS

Page: 1

Index Terms: LAWSUIT; ILLINOIS; CHARITY; RELIGION; RIGHTS; BLACK; ETHNIC; SHOOTING MURDER; MULTIPLE; POLICE; FEDERAL; PROBE; SUICIDE; INDIANA; OFFICIAL

Record Number: CTR9907150084

Copyright 1999, Chicago Tribune