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CHILDREN OF GOD

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# Unfinished preachings

## Even prostitution can attract converts to cults

by Kathy Mehler

InterVarsity Press publishes racks-full of seemingly insignificant books on Christianity and what can be termed Christian cults. Despite their size and price, these books make valuable and interesting reading.

John Moriconi's *Children of God, Family of*

Love describes how David Berg twists scripture and Christianity into a cult that uses prostitution as a form of winning converts to the Family.

Berg's group started as *Teens for Christ*, was dubbed *Children of God* in 1969 and later became *Family of Love* in 1978. Berg also changed his name in the process from David to Moses David and again to Father David.

The book tells us that "much of the Family of Love theology centers around the person of David Berg." The Family accepts his writing as the word of God and it is equal to the Bible in importance. But Berg is contradicting the Bible by adding his extra interpretation of God's word. John says in Revelations 22:18 that anyone who adds anything to the words of prophecy in the Bible will be punished by the plagues that are described in it.

Berg also preaches that "we do not have to keep the 10 Commandments." So he concludes that sins, such as adultery, are no longer sins. In fact, Berg says that sex can be an effective way to get new members. "He considers the physical attributes of the women in the Family of Love to be the bait that will lure the fish into the organization," writes Moriconi.

Berg has even written an instruction manual on "Flirty Fishing" (the FF-er's Handbook) that will guide the Family member as she fol-

lows her evangelical calling. "If you don't know how to let these guys know that you need money, you ought to get out of the FF-ing business! It's nice to win souls, but it's got to pay for itself," Berg writes.

Another cult that uses the Bible to some degree for its religious foundation was started by Victor Paul Wierwille in 1953. Now, an estimated 20,000 to 100,000 Way members preach the Gospel according to Wierwille.

But there is one glaring flaw in Wierwille's "Christian" theology—he denies that Jesus Christ is God, the Son, although he acknowledges that Jesus is a son of God. Wierwille even wrote a book entitled *Jesus Christ is No God*. Perhaps he just didn't notice John 10:30: "I (Jesus) and the Father are one."

In his book, Joel MacCollam writes the Way members must pay \$100 to attend a "Power of Abundant Living" program where they listen to 12 three-hour taped sessions given by Wierwille. The highlight is when 'The Doctor' (Wierwille) teaches his students how to speak in tongues as an essential part of the more abundant life he offers.

Both *Children of God, Family of Love* and *The Way of Victor Paul Wierwille* are worth picking up. For 50 cents a copy, they give thorough rundown of what to expect from these two cults.



Children of God, Family of Love  
John Moriconi

The Way of Victor Paul Wierwille  
Joel MacCollam  
InterVarsity Press  
50 cents  
Paperback

The Daily Seline 4/11/80

# 'Help me rescue

SCM Post Hong Kong

## cult children'

By LYNNE WATSON

Hongkong resident Mrs Pat Furniss has been asked to help a grandmother in Britain who is trying to rescue her grandchildren from the Children of God cult.

Mrs Furniss belongs to an organisation of British parents whose children have been recruited by this cult.

The Children of God organisation, also known as the Family of Love, began in California in the late 1960s but now operates mostly outside the United States.

Hongkong is one of the Family's most lucrative bases, and a centre for its publishing empire (See related articles on Page 18)

The sect maintains about 40 members in Hongkong. New ones continually fly in to replace those who may face visa extension problems here.

Two years ago Mrs Furniss freed one of her own daughters from a London home operated by a Family colony.

Last week the British anti-cult organisation phoned her and asked her to help supply information on the sect to Mrs Maureen McArdle of Leeds, Yorkshire.

She agreed to send Mrs McArdle copies of pamphlets — known as MO letters — written by the cult's founder, David ("Father Moses") Berg on the sex lives of children.

She posted a copy of Father David's 1977 pamphlet, *Child Brides*, to Leeds.

Parents raising children within the Family are fleeing Britain rather than having to observe court orders brought by worried relatives, say Mrs McArdle and other British opponents of the sect.

Mrs McArdle told the *SCM Post* in a long-distance phone call that her daughter Claire (24) and son-in-law Jay Riley, of Canada, had left England in defiance of a High Court order.

The order made Claire's two children, a girl (15 months) and a boy (three months) wards of the court, in a case brought by Mrs McArdle.

She intended to seek final custody of the babies for herself and Mr McArdle, a 53-year-old construction site foreman.

Mrs McArdle sought more documentation on Father David's teachings regarding the sexual lives of children raised within the cult.

Father David himself, now a millionaire, frequently changes bases but is believed to be in Switzerland.

Mrs McArdle explained that she and her husband became alarmed about possible abuse of their grandchildren after reading cult literature, meant for members only.

The Leeds grandmother confronted her daughter, who replied that there was nothing wrong in Father David's unusual sexual recommendations, either for children or for adults.

Among his admonitions is that female followers should not use birth control.

"They are our business.

"You wouldn't understand them.

"How we bring up our family is our concern.

"But it will be with love."

However, Mrs McArdle told the *SCM Post*: "Eight children in Britain who were wards of court have been taken out of the country by this cult.

"We are heartsick," she continued, declining to say what steps she and her husband will take in an effort to retrieve their grandchildren from the cult.

In the *Child Brides* pamphlet, Father David as usual meanders on about his own prolific if basically misogynistic sexual history, and adds:

"I've said before that I think the Lord must have been in favour of marriage at about 12 or 13, because you're first able to have children at that age."

Father David, who was an impoverished evangelist most of his life until he devised a new means of ensnaring troubled and gullible youth, said he wished that he had married when he was 15 years old.

Two ex-cultists from the Hongkong branch who helped the *SCM Post* expose Berg's operations here, said that the guru's approach to sex education for children was what finally caused them to flee the sect.

The most controversial practice of this cult is that women and girl members must do "Flirty Fishing" — seeking converts and money by prostitution — a practice well-documented by former members and the cult's own internal literature.

The Family children generally are not educated outside their homes, and are used to help pass out leaflets and seek donations on the streets.

They also are formed into amateur singing groups which are used as fronts to gain access to the media and businesses, and to lucrative sites for begging, such as hotel lobbies and public parks.

Like other relatives worried about children living in Family of Love homes, the McArdles sought court custody of their grandchildren when the parents refused to leave the cult.

"We worry they are in moral danger," she said.

Mrs McArdle said her two grandchildren were made wards of court on November 20, and she had planned to seek custody herself in Leeds on December 16.

However, the cult couple, Claire and Jay flew to Canada on November 27 with the two babies.

The Rileys were interviewed by the tabloid *Daily Star* newspaper, one of several covering the custody battle.

Apparently interviewed by telephone from Jay Riley's home in East Vancouver, the young father told that newspaper: "I don't care what your English courts say.

"I'm not prepared to discuss our beliefs."

# Woman tells of her escape from cult that offered sex for sale

By DORIS SMITH

A woman who escaped from a bizarre, mind-bending cult has revealed the sordid and shocking details of life with a wandering band of followers led by a self-styled "Moses."

Brainwashed, dirty and hungry, Una McManus said the Children of God crossed countries and continents preaching love and practicing evil.

Prostitution, child sex, pornography, white slavery were part of the sick world that Una inhabited for five terrible years.

She lost her husband, her children and her self-respect.

And when she broke free at last and won an unprecedented \$1.5 million lawsuit against the mind-twisting cult that nearly destroyed her life, she vowed to expose the cult for what it is.

The heartbroken woman has told all in a terrifying book, "Not For A Million Dollars," (Impact Books, \$4.95 paperback).

Una, who now lives in Akron, Ohio, with the two children she fought to free from the cult, exposes a seamy world where prostitution and sex are the path to salvation.

It is a world led by a man named David Berg, known to his followers as Moses David, a world she says demands total and absolute obedience — and gets it by fear of punishment and the threat of damnation.

Una was 15 when she joined the cult. The innocent teenager had had a strict religious upbringing in Ireland, attended Catholic schools and wanted to become a nun.

"I thought I had never met such beautiful people," she said

***'They had promised everlasting joy — but all they ever delivered was hate'***

Children of God. "They seemed so happy, so sincere, so utterly without hatred or strife."

She did not suspect that underneath the robot-like incantations of "Praise the Lord!" were minds so brainwashed they could no longer think for themselves.

Una lived and traveled with the cult, selling Moses David literature in the streets. At night she slept on a filthy mattress in dark alleys or abandoned buildings.

Her clothes were rags, her belly ached from hunger, but always she believed it was fair to lie and say the money collected was to finance a Christian youth drug-rehab effort.

And when nagging doubts nagged at her conscience, she reminded herself that what she was doing served a higher purpose — the salvation of lost souls.

When she failed to remind herself strongly enough, others did it for her.

She was banished into the cold to sell pamphlets on her own if her quota fell behind. She was criticized and ostracized, belittled and beleaguered and driven to such low depths that

empty bus seemed a blessing for which she cried in pathetic gratitude.

"They had promised me everlasting joy but all they ever delivered was hate," she said.

While Una and the cult's hundreds — or perhaps thousands — of followers lived in poverty, their leaders lived in luxurious mansions.

Nearly five years passed before Una saw a picture of the revered leader of the cult, Moses David.

"I could not believe my eyes," said the shocked woman. "This was not the dynamic, Christlike figure I had pictured in my mind.

"He was old, wasted and ugly! He sat, Buddha-like, with one hand resting on the leg of his chief wife.

"A bevy of scantily-clad women surrounded him and they were smiling seductively. He was eyeing them lustfully and his mouth was contorted in a sensual leer."

Una stared at the picture in horror. She shivered at the thought of the cult's new rule forcing her to sell her sexual favors to strangers — a rule her brainwashed husband thought was totally fair.

The repulsion she felt was overwhelming, but it triggered her desperate, frantic desire to break free at any cost.

The struggle back was long and extremely painful. Nightmares plagued her for a year, but at last she understood — the Children of God was an international racket.

Una was free at last to rebuild her life with her two young chil-



WEEKLY WORLD NEWS, August 4, 1981

Una McManus was a Child of God for five years before she es-

# Children of God - Update

by Joseph M. Hopkins  
Jan. 25

"Moses" David Berg cites persecution as the reason for strategy and organizational changes in the Children of God. "The system is out to get us, and they are driving us from the streets," complained Berg, 60, the founder-leader of the small, but international group.

In an "MO Letter" dated December 31, 1978, Berg told his disciples, "Beloved, we have had our good years! — our fat years and our famous years! . . . I believe that we're now entering into our worldwide persecution lean years! Jonestown is their excuse to attack all the cults, and the cults are their excuse to attack us! Because there is not one of them that preaches Christ like we do."

Berg, who two years ago renamed the group "Family of Love," has ordered COG members into newly-formed small groups - "for security, smaller families more difficult to find." His new strategy calls for door-to-door witnessing, peddling cult literature, organizing home Bible studies, and pushing the Worldwide Mail Ministry."

He also called for stepping up the "Flirty Fishing" outreach to older men who are lonely and sufficiently affluent. (Under the Flirty Fishing policy, COG members use sex to win a hearing for the gospel. Their sexual contacts are asked for money "gifts," which COG members give to their church.)

In a bitter blast at the news media last May, Berg revealed the firing in 1978 of 300 COG leaders. He said, "You (media) can't hurt us anymore! We've already disbanded . . . Go to Hell where you belong! We're on our way to heaven in spite of you! Thank God."

## Decline In Membership

Hundreds of family members have defected. From January 1978 to May 1979, total membership fell from 8,068 to 4,958; the number of live-in adults dropped from 3,650 to 3,259. (The number of children increased slightly from 1,451 to 1,699.) Despite the exodus, Berg exulted, "Our Worldwide Mail Ministry is absolutely booming at the rate of . . . 300 new members per month." The October Family News reported 6,700 "workers" in 83 countries.

A former COG executive believes those figures are inflated. He estimates that only about 1000 hard-core disciples remain. Literature distribution plummeted from a

high of 8 million pieces per month to 3 million by December 1978 and to 1.5 million by August 1979. Last May Berg chided his followers. "Our world income is off over 25 percent this year."

Casualties of the 1978 purge included Berg's daughter Linda ("Queen Debbie") and her ex-husband ("Jethro"), together with their present spouses Bill ("Isaiah") and Melissa ("Joy"). Deborah (now Linda's legal name) had pioneered a number of schools for COG children, six in Italy alone. Jethro had instituted and administered the group's computerized accounting system. Isaiah and Berg's son Jonathan ("Hosea") had launched the sect's monthly pictorial *New Nations News*. Melissa, daughter of former senior vice-president John Moody of Mobil Oil, gained national attention when in 1971 she married David "Michael" Senek, a Newton Falls, Ohio COG convert. The two couples now are living in the U.S.:

Berg banished them from South America.

Barbara Kaliher Cancaro ("Queen Rachel") was heir apparent to "King" David's throne until her defection several months ago. Mike Sweeny ("Timothy Concerned") assumed Rachel's leadership post, only to be axed a short time later when he refused to sign a "MO Letter" defaming Rachel. He and his wife Debbie ("Cornia") now are involved in social work in Europe.

Recent castoffs are Berg's legal wife Jane ("Mother Eve") and her consort Stephen Ferguson ("Stephen David"). Jane and a team of disciples spent the past few years ministering to Arabs in North Africa, southern France, and the Mediterranean island of Malta, where last spring she was granted an audience with Libyan dictator Muammar EL Qaddafi.

In an open letter last February to Qaddafi, a long-time COG booster, Berg shared his pleasure over the ouster of the Shah of Iran. Berg is rumored to be hiding out in Switzerland, although he wrote Qaddafi that he could be reached in Madrid. COG world publication headquarters has been moved from Rome to Zurich.

## Church Aberrations

Bizarre aberrations continue surfacing in the "MO Letters." The letters are extolled by their author as "God's word for today," and therefore of greater relevance than "God's word for yesterday," the Bible. In Berg's latest revelations:

- The Trinity consists of Father, Mother, and Son. The female member, the Holy Spirit, is described as the "Holy Queen of Love" and is portrayed by an artist as a beautiful, near-naked woman.

- Homosexuality and oral sodomy are acceptable under certain conditions: being "within the limits of the love of God."

- Children conceived through Flirty Fishing are called "Jesus Babies." Childhood sex is encouraged. A recent "MO Letter" contains an explicit photograph of the practice. Berg relates that he was introduced to oral sex at the age of three by a "little Mexican girl" babysitter. (This perhaps is a clue to his early and lifelong obsession with sex.)

In an interview, Berg's daughter Deborah attested to growing up in a wholesome Christian home. However, it is no secret that in recent years Berg became deeply involved with wine, the occult, and women (he has admitted in print that he and his mistress "Maria" have been afflicted with venereal disease). What went wrong? How did this apparently authentic Christian minister get off track?

A former high-ranking leader theorizes that Berg fell victim to delusions of self-importance and power, of divinely conferred authority, and of messianic identity and mission. Like the late Jim Jones, Berg submitted to no higher authority, but forced his authority upon his disciples, while demanding total obedience.

## Potential People's Temple?

A former top COG executive says COG is not a potential People's Temple - mainly because cult members are dispersed throughout the world. But there are many parallels, including: supplanting biblical revelations with cult teaching; sexual and financial exploitation; manipulation of minds, bodies, spirits; stifling of dissent; paranoid hatred, suspicion, and fear of "outsiders"; and preoccupation with death. (In letters to Qaddafi and to his followers Berg has alluded to the approaching end of his earthly ministry and to "sweet release to a new world and a new life!")

Joseph M. Hopkins is a journalist who has reported extensively on the Church of God. This article appeared originally in the January 25, 1980 edition of *Christianity Today*.

# Where have all the Children of God gone?

Despite kidnappings, deprogrammings, investigations and a multimillion-dollar lawsuit, the Children of God are alive and well, raking in the money, brainwashing new "babes" every day and having a hell of a time

By Thomas Moore

Belte, short for Belteshazzar, has got his survival knapsack packed. In it, he's got everything he'll need for the apocalypse: one tube of toothpaste, one toothbrush, one comb, one first-aid kit, one flashlight and extra set of batteries, one jackknife and sharpening stone, one piece of rope, a box of waterproof matches, a set of maps for the northeast United States, a transistor radio and extra set of batteries, a set of eating and cooking utensils, a fold-up fishing rod and reel, a packet of seeds, one bottle of water-purification tablets, two tins of sardines, a pair of pants, a shirt and one set of clean underwear. And for the soul, he's got a small Bible and a plastic case of his favorite Mo letters—the biweekly wisdom of his spiritual leader, one Moses David. It's all packed and ready to go.

Belte is a child of God, as in Children of God. He can hardly wait for The End. If only it would happen tomorrow, then bang, out to the woods, scrounging for berries and roots. Baby-faced with

Tom Moore is an associate editor of NEW TIMES.

blond hair cut in a bowl shape, Belte is either 20 or 22, depending on when you ask him. He grew up in Athol, Mass., where he used to be the top local dealer—grass, uppers, downers, yellows, reds, you name it, he had it. That used to be a big thing where he came from—not as big as what he's into now, but big nevertheless. He used to drive to Worcester every two weeks in a reconditioned '59 Chevy he got for \$100 and pick up a new shipment. Then he'd drive back out to this place he'd set up in the woods—sort of like the refuge he's got in mind for The End—and he had it wired up for sound, stereo, tape decks, the whole bit. At night, his friends would filter out to his place, buy some grass, get stoned and party till dawn.

But, see, that was all meaningless, Belte says. No purpose to it. Sure, he was bucking the system—no job, no college, no Army (his lottery number was 364), no parents to speak of—his father died when he was a kid and his mother and stepfather didn't care much what he did so long as he didn't bother them. He had money from the grass trade, all the beer he cared to drink, friends, status. But what did it all add up to?

So, like a lot of other kids too young for the street-fighting politics of the '60s, Belte started to look around for something he could plug into, something that could make sense out of all the chaos and nonsense going on around him. The Establishment? Forget it—light years behind him. The despairing politicians of the '60s? Everything's just a bummer to them. The drug culture? He'd already done that. Belte wanted something new, something radically different, something to lift him up, make him high on life and not on emptiness. He found it, all right. The ultimate trip, the last trip: the Children of God.

And what irony. The Bible's only been around since the beginning of time.

Just a simple book, passed down from one generation to another. Until it got lost in the shuffle of churches, money, intellectuals, systems, wars, economics, politics and drugs. "Once I was passing out Mo letters in Harvard Square," Belte says, "and, let me tell you, it was rough. 'Get outta here,' they'd say. 'Who needs that? Get lost. Fuck you.' That's what they'd say. I gave a letter to this Harvard student and you know what he told me? He said the Bible is only one book on his shelf."

The oldest book in the world, totally dumped on by everybody, until now it's just one book stacked up on a long shelf along with *I'm OK, You're OK* and *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex*.

Yes, Belte joined the Children of God and, yes, he admits to being brainwashed. Who isn't? He washed all those deceiving ideas, those hundreds of mind trips, phony values and thousands of words right out of his mind. Cleaned house, completely. And started over again, from scratch. One book: the Bible. It's the whole truth and nothing but. And—here's the final irony, the ultimate confirmation—it was so easy. Just ask Jesus into your heart and It Is Done. You don't need money, or qualifications, or contacts, or special skills. Right now, if you want. Just ask.

## Pavlov and the Age of Reason

The Children of God (COG) are the hardliners, the Jesus people the media cast as a bunch of brainwashing, hypnotizing, pied-piper, glassy-eyed zombies who, in the last four years, ran off babbling 'bout "Jesus now" with a lot of nice young kids. While most of the weekend Jesus freaks closed their coffee houses and blended back into schools, jobs, families and churches, the Children of God stayed with it. They are different. Unlike the Guru Maharaj Ji's beatific "premies" or



His survival knapsack ready to go, Belte can hardly wait for The End.

Korean Sun Myung Moon's straight-laced "moonies," the Children of God are into it—till The End. They don't own things, take jobs on the side, go to school, or live with their real families. All that has been forsaken.

Losing their kids to such a fanatical group, even in the name of Jesus Christ, naturally came as a shock to some parents. Others were simply amused when their kids hooked up with COG—after all, it was just another trip, the kids were doing their own thing. But then they realized it was hard to keep in touch. Letters they sent would come back unanswered. And what letters they did receive would sound childlike, silly, not the work of their own sons or daughters: "With love to Mommy on Mother's Day. The river of life and love pour freely through every open heart. So let God's glory be your song of praise. Happy Mother's day, Mommy. Cephas." This from a boy who attended St. George's prep school and went to Stanford.

Several parents filed missing persons reports and, with the help of the FBI and police, tried to track down their children. If they were lucky enough to find them—many COG kids were hidden or moved secretly to another place and some

colonies were guarded by an elaborate network of sentries carrying guns and walkie-talkies—it turned out that "leaders" spoke for them. Their kids seemed to be in a daze, they spoke haltingly and showed no emotion except fear. Some screamed at their parents, calling them "devils." And when a father said he'd had enough and tried to pull his son out to the car, the son recoiled, moaning that he'd go to hell if he left, that he'd bleed to death.

And that was when the talk of brainwashing began, and hypnotism, and drugs—even hints of a dark, communist conspiracy. How else to explain this total transformation of their kids, this trip of trips? Certainly not just an old-fashioned religious conversion. These are the 1970s! Post-Nazi Germany, post-Korean War, post-Chinese torture and brainwashed prisoners of war—in short, post-Pavlov and his yelping, pain-conditioned dogs.

Enter Ted Patrick, kidnapper of kids, deprogrammer of Jesus freaks, Black Lightning as he likes to be called. His technique sounded a little heavy: getting parents to abduct their kid from a colony, locking the kid in a motel room for three days, berating the kid to "think for himself" until—sometimes—"the fever broke."

The kids Patrick worked on often went through "relapses" and escaped back to the Children of God. But, the parents contend, at least he was doing something. At least he realized what was happening, that young kids' minds were being brainwashed, taken over and maybe damaged for the rest of their lives.

From a legal standpoint, the problem for the parents is that our present laws don't really take into account the possibility of brainwashing. Our legal system, inherited from the British and the Age of Reason, is based on the assumption of rationality. Only if someone commits an actual crime or is judged to be mentally incompetent can the law touch them. But, even if we admit that people can be conditioned by psychological methods, who is to judge if someone has been brainwashed, willingly or unwillingly, or is simply choosing a new way of life?

Stuart Beck, a young attorney representing a group of parents who recently filed a multimillion-dollar suit against COG in New York's Southern District Court, admits he has had to dig deep into the law books to build his case. The lawsuit charges, among other things, an incident of rape at a former COG colony in Ellenville, N.Y., the coercive detention of several of the parents' kids and, in general, that COG engages in "a conspiracy to frighten, harass, intimidate and damage children."

"There is no doubt," Beck says, "that our legal system has a built-in distrust of psychiatry. It has a lot of trouble with claims based on psychological as opposed to physical coercion. Nevertheless, enticement, coercion and duress, whether physical or psychological, have been held to be actionable in both civil and criminal contexts repeatedly. In the recent Houston homosexual murders case, the jury had a chance to look at a case where a kid claimed his part in the murders was a result of brainwashing by somebody else. The jury didn't buy it. But there was a case in New York a while back where a circus was held liable for luring away a sixteen-year-old."

Regardless, politically sensitive government agencies have been scared off from investigating COG or moving against them legally, largely because the American Civil Liberties Union has argued effectively on COG's behalf against the extreme measures of people like Ted Patrick (Patrick was recently convicted of kidnapping in Denver). As of this writing, only New York State has conducted any sort of thorough investigation into COG. While the final report will not be released until later this fall, an interim report was issued, finding, among other things: 1)

that the purpose of COG propaganda is to alienate a new disciple from family, school, church and society; 2) that COG condones premarital sex; 3) that new members must sign over all possessions and money to COG; 4) that obedience to Leaders is required, to the point, as some former COG members testified, "that if their Leaders were to command to kill, they would do so unquestioningly"; 5) that they engage in "deceitful public relations"; 6) that ex-COG members testified they were given indoctrination classes that constitute a "very subtle brainwashing"; and 7) they are taught to "spoil Egypt" and "rip off the system."

The understaffed Bureau of Charity Frauds, which carried out the investigation under the New York State Attorney General's Office, has so far refused to release any of the testimony or evidence it has gathered, "for reasons of confidentiality." The parents who cooperated with the investigation are now disgusted with what they consider to be its feeble results and have started to petition Congress for definitive hearings on COG.

All of this legal wrangling must bring a smile to the unphotographed face of Moses David, the elusive founder and prophet of the Children of God who, since the parents organized FREECOG against

him, unincorporated his religious organization and fled to an unnamed mountain-top in Europe. He is unavailable, un-subpoenable and untouchable. But, like some kind of fundamentalist General Giap, he finds it easier and less risky to run his worldwide network of about 300 colonies—they say they have 4,000 to 5,000 members today and are growing fast—by sending out his biweekly Mo (for Moses)

**"If their Leaders were to command to kill," charges one ex-child of God, "they would do so unquestioningly"**

letters from seclusion. Like the Viet Cong, the Children of God struck once and, after a counterattack by enraged parents, retreated to wait for a more opportune moment. Which, they tell me, is now, just before The End. So today they are readying a Tet Offensive of the spirit. The plan is to work from within, picking off society's stragglers one by one, snatching bodies and, just as in the movie, replacing

them with smiley, dedicated soldiers of Jesus. The last harvest is at hand. The big bumper crop of lost souls is ripe for reaping.

#### Litnessing for the Lord

"Thank you, Lord. Good morning," intones an "undershepherd" named Napthali, leading the morning devotions at a colony of the Children of God, a white clapboard house hidden in a wooded area of Staten Island. It used to be a hunting lodge, but now the owner, an Italian real-estate man who believes in Jesus, has turned it over to the Children of God rent free. The "teams" are about to take off to the city to "litness," which means witnessing by handing out Mo's literature.

On the surface, there is nothing particularly heavy about these kids. Contrary to the slightly paranoid warnings of FREECOG parents, there are no drugs in the tea, no frightening "isolation chambers" where kids are reduced to mumbling vegetables, no intimidating attempts to force on-the-spot conversions. And yet, there is still something scary about the group: maybe it's the way the house is cut off from the rest of New York City by an improbable woods; the way they have hundreds of pins porcupined over a global map, representing their worldwide network of colonies; the month's supply of



The Children of God "family" at the Staten Island colony: happy Jesus freaks or brainwashed zombies?

10/4/74



A COG prayer circle: many thanks to Jesus, many pleas for miracles, much squeezing of hands.

dry goods they have stacked up in the basement. But mostly what is scary is the way these seemingly normal American kids shelter powerful fears and suspicions of supposed "enemies and devils," of the Unknown, percolating just beneath their cheery facades.

All 20 members of the commune hold hands in a circle, everybody smiling—you gotta be happy with Jesus.

"You guys all want to get out early today?" Naphthali shouts.

Voices: "Yeah! We need to!"

Naphthali: "There's a lot of hungry people out there!"

Voices: "Yeah! Thank you, Jesus!"

Naphthali: "So Lord, really help us to be bright, alive and peppy this morning. Really help us to fulfill, Lord God. You've given it into our hands to feed your sheep, Lord, and we said if we love you, Lord God, we'll feed your sheep."

Voices: "Thank you, Jesus. Praise God!"

Belte: "Just be with us out there, Father God (Amen!), help us Lord to die today, Father God, to really get out there and to just get us so flipped out on your love and just love the people, Lord God (Hallelujah! Thank you, Lord!). Jee-e-sus, Lord God, just help us to be happy newsboys for thy kingdom, Father God (Amen!), Lord, do miracles, we pray Father God, in Jesus' name (Thank you, Jesus! Hallelujah! Praise God! Tongues)."

At 14th Street and 4th Avenue, Union Square, Manhattan, Naphthali and Freedom, recently married, he from Michigan City, Ind., and she from Watertown, Mass., ask me to hold hands with them around a concrete waste container while they pray to God as to which street corner will be the most fruitful.

In a moment they are on a corner, getting out "the lit" to: young Puerto Rican kids in platforms and spangled T-shirts, retired Jews with time to kill, a

couple of Arabs, old women with shopping bags, hippies in VW vans stopped at a light, a Long Island couple in an air-conditioned car. And surprisingly, the people reach into their pockets or onto their dashboards, and quarters and dimes, sometimes even dollars, start to come forth. Nobody seems to care what the literature is, just give the kids a quarter and get rid of them. God provides. Particularly through the blacks; particularly through the poor or hardworking; particularly through the teenagers. But your average godless late-20s hippy or young professional won't touch the stuff. Just another street hustle—like the Rev. Sun Myung Moon folks down the street with their neat cardboard tables, or the Socialist Workers Party girls with their petitions, or the Seventh-Day Adventists, or the National Labor Caucus crazies.

After a couple of hours on the street, 400 letters out and \$40 in, we take a lunch break at Tad's Steak House. And I listen to the inevitable testimonial—the bleak and empty former life, the drugs and alcohol, the non-caring, status-seeking, money-hungry parents, and then, the

overnight conversion.

"I couldn't understand why there was no love in the world," Freedom tells me. "I had this thing about you would try to love people and it just wouldn't work out. You just got more lost, nobody wants to give anything, everybody's taking."

Yes, and the drugs, and the psychiatrist, and the heavy movie, the handful of pills, the suicidal moment—when, suddenly, comes the voice of God, saying: "Put them away and tomorrow when you wake up everything will be fine, you will find what you're looking for." And then, of course, the next day's encounter with a beautiful, carefree angel from the Children of God: "It was a Sunday morning and she was walking up the street, and she had long hair and it was flowing in the breeze and she really looked free, she really looked happy, her face looked different." And then: "I prayed and asked Jesus into my heart and he just changed my whole life that day."

That's how it happens. Bingo, and you're in. Bingo, and then you're back out on the street, "getting out the lit." Freedom has stopped the archetypal New Yorker, the good-natured guy from Queens, maybe 55 or 60, with a grease spot on his shirt.

Freedom: "If you ask Him into your heart, He can place the Kingdom of God in your heart and teach you how to love."

Guy: "Those are very nice words but . . ."

Freedom: "It's true, though. I tried it and it works. All you gotta do is ask. God will supply all your needs for ya."

Guy: "God wouldn't supply my needs, God doesn't have that much."

Freedom: "He luv's ya!"

Guy: "Aw e'mon. C'mon! Listen, I had a prayer book in my hands for years and it didn't do me any good. The harder I prayed, the worse my luck. You figure it



Apocalyptic skits are feature presentations at the COG discotheques.

out."

Freedom: "He just wants you to receive it. You have to become like a little child to receive God, you gotta be a baby to receive love, you know?"

Guy: "To receive love? After years of praying with all my heart and soul, He didn't want to help me. That proves He doesn't love me. He *hates* me!"

### Of Fornication and False Prophets

Back at the colony a young Jewish kid from Brooklyn named Dana knocks at the locked doors. Only a month has gone by since Dana asked Jesus into his heart and started dropping in with "the family" on weekends to take Bible lessons. He has been on the brink of joining, forsaking everything—his clothes, his stereo, his plan to go to business school this fall, his rabbi, his parents. He has found a certain peace. He has said, "Yes, Jesus, I'm yours," and it has made him happy.

But today, everything is different. Dana is troubled. He sits nervously on the edge of the sofa, looking no one in the eye. Today, Dana has come on a mission: to denounce Moses David as a false prophet. Mo has this thing about sex and it doesn't sit quite right with Dana. He thought he had put all that behind him—dark impulses, masturbation, guilt, feeling his blood pound at the sight of bulging nipples under girls' T-shirts. He thought keeping his mind on Jesus might spare him those bewildering urges. He'd asked Jesus to save him, risked his parents' wrath, his rabbi's scorn. He was trying to cope, on his own. But now, it turns out, this guy Moses David is actually fomenting sex! This guy Mo is saying to women, "C'mon Ma, burn your bra!"

In the last week, Dana has made a new friend, Richard, a leader in a Pentecostal sect. And Richard, who eyes the Children of God like the Jewish Defense League eyes the Soviet Embassy, has suggested to Dana that Mo comes on an awful lot like the devil himself. For the past week Dana hasn't slept. He has been going over passages in the Bible, noting down chapter and verse, stocking up on ammunition for the battle.

"Have you read any of these letters?" Dana asks me after we are introduced. "Like Revolutionary Sex, Mountain Maid. It's dealing really heavy with sex. It seems to me this Moses David has a sex hang-up."

There are only a few colony members on hand and they busy themselves cleaning up the paper plates from a late brunch, looking natural, like nothing's happening, and mostly pretending the heretic sitting on their couch is not there.

Dana continues, loudly, "And the

Bible's definitely against it. The Bible says you shouldn't fornicate. In *Matthew* it says: "But I say unto you that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."

No one responds.

"I ask then," Dana queries the near-empty room, "what does this mean?"

One member exits quickly upstairs to warn Leviticus, the colony shepherd.

"Moses David," Dana goes on, also seems to condone premarital sex and lesbianism—he definitely does not condemn it. I'm saying, as I loved you, I have come to talk to you, one to one, and show you how your teachings are so wrong, how you're devoting your life to Jesus and how Moses David is a *false* prophet and there's no doubt about that."

Dana is accompanied out the door. He had tangled with the devil and while

**"We have a sexy God," says COG prophet Moses David, "and a sexy religion, and a very sexy leader. If you don't like sex, you better get out while you can"**

he didn't come out clearly on top, he didn't come out on the bottom either. But he had touched upon a sticky question for these Children of God on Staten Island. Like Dana, before I went out there for a weekend stay, I had read Mo's "sex letters"—wherein he extolls the female breast as God's most beautiful creation, wherein he says sex is good, just what God had in mind for us, wherein he exhorts his followers to be "hookers for Jesus," wherein he says in so many words that fucking is like receiving Jesus. Naturally, I expected a lot of sexy people—maybe even an orgy. That's how it might be in the upper echelons, with Mo and his immediate court. But on Staten Island I found only a group of sweet, bubbly, unsexy, repressed adolescents who sleep in boys' and girls' dormitory rooms ("I guess I was always a wallflower," one girl told me). Only the married couples, all of them leaders, sleep upstairs in separate rooms and have any opportunity to get it on. But the "babes," the new disciples who form the majority,

lead a puritanical existence, mostly work, and have very little free time for getting to know each other, much less have sex.

"If you think there's something wrong with sex," a colony member, reading from a Mo letter, sermonizes, "that you should be ashamed of your body, then there's something wrong with God. . . . We have a sexy God, and a sexy religion, and a very sexy leader with an extremely sexy young following. So, if you don't like sex, you better get out while you can."

### The Story of Mo

As it turns out, Mo, if not really a sexy leader, has been at least very much into sex. About 55 today, Moses David Berg, the son of two evangelists, started his own "soul winning ministry" back in the 1950s. A slight, dark man with a weak heart and drawling voice, Berg moved from city to city, from Miami to Louisville to Houston, witnessing to whomever he could find to listen. God provided for his prophet David Berg by lending him the good services of people like Mary Glassford. Sometimes these people gave David Berg food and lodging, sometimes it was a trailer for transportation, sometimes it was just money—but in Mary Glassford's case, it was more than money. She lent David Berg her own daughter Sarah. To Mary Glassford, David Berg seemed an upstanding man with a good wife, Jane, and four fine young children—Paul, Jonathan, Linda and Faith. Traveling with the Bergs would be a good missionary upbringing for her daughter.

During the '50s and early '60s, David Berg proved to be very small-time. Certainly no Oral Roberts or Billy Graham. And it troubled him mightily. If God had anointed him as his prophet, why hadn't his harvest of souls been greater? In the mid-'60s, however, he found an angle: youth, the demigods of the decade. Berg set up shop in Huntington Beach, Calif., called his group Teens for Christ and started working the campuses. His kids were enthusiastic, young Christian people. They came on like Pat Boone.

As the mood of the '60s turned sour, more radical, Berg kept in tune. Pat Boone's days were over. Jerry Rubin was in. Berg started to encourage militant acts—like having his son Paul (an unpredictable, somber kid who was killed last year in a mysterious mountain-climbing accident in Switzerland) throw "Warning Tracts" over the floor of Congress. Berg picked up on the political rhetoric of the '60s, giving it a fundamentalist twist, and started to preach strongly against the churches and the buildings and the system and America. He told his small following

# A sampling of Mo's sex letters



A DISSERTATION ON MOUNTAIN PEAKS—A MOUNTAIN CLIMBER'S ODYSSEY

I am for the mini-blouse  
Or the see-through at my blouse:  
She is such a lovely thing!  
To her mounts I love to climb:  
I'm a mountain man, my Honey:  
Give me mountains for my money!  
Though I oft explore her cave  
It is on her mountains that I love:  
Let these mountains be more visible  
And their clothing more divisible!  
Undergarment, jillared, behemoth—  
Now can have your clothing solemn!  
Flying buttress, deep crevasse,  
There is nothing like her ass!

But I'll show you something better  
For a real attention letter:  
Set your mind on things above  
That deep cavern test you love:  
When I show my lovely miss  
I prefer the top to bottom.  
Brother, she has really got 'em!  
The bottomless is not amiss.  
But topless beauties I like to kiss!  
Can't have one without the other,  
Like a babe without its mother.  
Bove the bottomless abyss  
Stand the mountains you can't miss!

It's each peak so fascinating,  
Makes my Love so titillating!  
If you'd prefer static wonder  
Tits like hers can make hearts thunder!  
Top to bottom I'm no stranger  
But I thrill to mountains' danger!  
Top to bottom can be seen  
Undulating curves between—  
Up and down her tiny crater  
Heaves and swells where'er I mate 'er!  
Her volcano oft explodes  
When we love in our abodes!  
It's a holy hole indeed  
And within I leave my seed!

You're such cute little fishy, so pretty! You roll those big eyes at them and you peck them with that pretty little mouth and you flirt all around them!—You wrap your pretty fins around them and you wiggle your little tail between their legs! They like it, and then they chase you, and you lure them right into my net and they don't even see it! They don't know I'm sitting there on the shore and I have hold of your line, and the minute they bite I haul 'em in! So pretty! They can't resist you! Little Sparkle Fish! The sun shining down is like God and His Love. It gives you an extra attraction!—You reflect it and sparkle!



to go where the hippies go, into the streets and parks. They encountered children, some only five years old, and chanted things at them like, "hate the system, hate the church, damn the system, damn the church." Berg's kids encouraged other teenagers to avoid the draft, rip off the system, "spoil Egypt."

Still, it didn't seem to catch on. In 1967 they traveled up to the Expo in Montreal where they were given free tickets to sing songs inside. But, at one point, Berg couldn't abide the indifference any longer and grabbed the microphone. As Mary Glassford tells it, he "started blasting America, blasting Canada, blasting the system, and, of course, the authorities just cut him off and put him out right away."

The Montreal trip was a turning point for Berg. Embittered and frustrated, he added another twist to his teachings—sex. And, according to the transcription of a tape-recorded statement by Mary Glassford's daughter Sarah, whom Berg married off to his son Paul at the age of 15,

Berg practiced what he preached. (Sarah's statement was given to Aaron E. Klein, a New York attorney who in the past represented several FREI:COG parents.)

Sarah: "David, at times, would try to get away with things with his own daughters, and he tried it with me when I was a little girl, but I was too young to really know what was going on. And I guess this always made me afraid to be. I



Libya's Col. Qaddafi, whom Moses David Berg praised as a "revolutionary leader," entertains two of Berg's children, Jonathan and Faith.

was always frightened to be alone with him. . . . At times, David Berg, three or four years before my teens, he tried to have intercourse. Of course, I jumped up and ran, and things like this. . . . He'd never push it very far because I guess he was afraid I'd squeal. But once or twice he did make the attempt."

Q: "How far?"

Sarah: "To the point where he had his pants down."

Q: "Did he expose himself to you?"

Sarah: "Yes, but it was in the dark. And after I had married Paul there were several times when he tried to get me—he'd ask me—to go to bed with him. He said if I'd have his son's children, why couldn't I have his."

Q: "Where did this take place?"

Sarah: "All over the country, anywhere we were after Paul and I were married. Many, many times he told me that nobody would know the difference if it was his or Paul's."

16/7/74



Getting out the lit—and taking in millions of dollars in untaxable spare change

Q: "What was your response?"

Sarah: "One time I slapped his face. The other times I would wiggle away from him and just get out. Just try to stay away from him as much as I could. But there were many times when he said it would be just our little secret."

Q: "You never told this to your husband Paul?"

Sarah: "No, I had enough trouble with him as it was. He wouldn't have believed me anyway. Anything I'd tell him that was on a shaded side of anything that had happened, he would say I was lying and he would beat the living daylights out of me..."

After the Expo, David Berg changed the name of his band to Revolutionaries for Jesus and led them on a three-year traveling crusade around the U.S., ending up in 1970 on a dirt farm in Texas owned by a former associate of his, a minor league California evangelist named Fred Jordan. The two evangelists, according to an associate of theirs, struck a deal: Berg would lend some of his kids, portraying themselves as saved drug freaks, to Jordan's television show in southern California; and Jordan would sponsor Berg's group under his organization, let them stay on his land in Texas and give Berg a certain sum of money.

The agreement proved profitable

for both men. Berg's group, which set up headquarters at Jordan's Texas Soul Clinic on the farm, soon started to open up new colonies in other cities around the country. They attracted headlines wherever they went and the media dubbed them the Children of God. Berg thought the name had a predetermined ring to it, and it stuck. Their peak in popularity came soon after NBC ran a prime-time *First Tuesday* takeout on COG in 1970, praising them for turning kids off drugs and onto Jesus.

Despite the good publicity for COG, Jordan ended up making most of the money. The dramatic television testimonials by Berg's kids brought in sizable contributions to Jordan's program. Berg wanted a larger cut. Having made a futile attempt to set up a world headquarters in Israel—he was thrown out immediately—Berg wrote Jordan, according to their associate, that "he wanted to return and go on nationwide and worldwide television... eliminate Fred Jordan's wife and all others, and split the take down the middle."

Jordan balked at Berg's proposal. Moreover, by this time, 1970-71, the media coverage of COG turned against them. Their agreement was dissolved and Berg hid out in Europe, "retiring from active service" because of heart problems

and promising the second coming of the Children of God. Which, he said just before Kohoutek, is *Right Now*, 1974-1975. And so, the Children of God are on the move again. They've opened up discotheques in Houston, Toronto, London and Paris—just for starters. Their rock group, led by former Fleetwood Mac singer Jeremy Spencer, has cut a record: *Jeremy Spencer and the Children*. Outside the U.S., COG claims to have befriended the likes of the president of Costa Rica and his wife, and Libya's Col. Qaddafi. And they say they are taking Europe by storm, pioneering new colonies every day.

For the moment, however, "getting out the lit" seems to be the Children of God's principal activity and financial mainstay. Litnessing team members have quotas to meet each week—2,000 letters at an average of 10 cents each—and spend at least an hour each night adding up their "stats": how many letters they get out, how much money they take in (every penny must be accounted for down to subway fare), how many new converts and so on. If they reach their quota or do better than the others, they are listed as "shiners" and get their name and stats published in an intercolony gazette. If they fall below the quota, they are to feel ashamed, "convicted by God" for the poor showing.

The money, they are told, is essen-

...ial for the maintenance of their needs and particularly the needs of the colonies abroad. At present, the Children of God print Mo letters in just about every language and distribute them on street corners around the world. Contrary to the common assumption of most FREECOG parents, COG derives most of its money from litnessing and not from kids who forsake their few possessions.

To be sure, there are cases of large individual contributions, such as an Italian count who deeded over his vineyard just outside of Florence, Italy. There are some parents who, either out of genuine charity or a kind of blackmail by their kids, send money to COG. But when you add up the take from litnessing, you realize it's more than enough to support in style the most corrupt of false prophets. On an average, from what I saw, each member gets out his or her quota of 2,000 pieces of literature a week at an average of 10 cents each. That's about \$200 a week—more than a lot of kids their age earn as mechanics or secretaries or even reporters. The Staten Island colony, one of the most profitable for litnessing, gets out up to 40,000 Mo letters a week, taking in about \$4,000. That adds up to \$200,000 a year. To be conservative, about half that goes for printing costs and colony support, such as food and clothing. The other half, or \$100,000, goes abroad, where the leadership decides how to spend it. If all of the 300 colonies around the world did as well as the one on Staten Island, that would mean the total take going abroad into central headquarters would amount to about \$30 million annually. A more realistic appraisal, however, would put the European headquarters' net take at about half that, or \$15 million a year.

That's a lot of untaxable spare change. And only God—and maybe Moses David—knows where it all goes.

After my weekend on Staten Island, Belte and Lena, a young French Canadian girl from a small rural village in Ontario, spend a week at my apartment. They get up at 8:00 each morning to litness and come back around 9:00 in the evening. They have good days and then, like anyone else, they have bad days. They both eat well, drink some wine, play guitars, talk Jesus, add up their stats for the day. When we question them too hard, Lena retreats into her room to read the Bible. One night Lena shows us some pictures of her family, but then the next day she comes back to tell us it was a bad idea to do that. All day she has not been able to stop thinking about her family, and such thoughts are obviously the work of the devil. Nevertheless, it is clear on some

nights, when they return exhausted from their long hours and thousand approaches to indifferent New Yorkers, that what they do is not too much fun. In fact, the more they laugh at "systemites and their nine-to-five jobs," the more their strict nine-to-nine litnessing seems patently absurd.

"God puts us through tests sometimes," Belte explains, evincing a strained cheerfulness. "We'll go through maybe a half hour without getting out one piece of literature. Then I pray to God and ask Him why, if we're doing His work. He won't make people listen. God could just zap everyone if He wanted to, just save everybody all at once. But He wants to test us. So I ask Him to do a miracle. And then, bing, bing, bing, all of a sudden I hit ten people in a row. God always does that."

What happens, I ask Belte, if the world doesn't end tomorrow or next year? "Oh, it's going to happen," he says. "It's gotta happen. There've been too many signs."

And Mo apparently hasn't missed a one. The second nation of Israel, as prophesied, has been created—1948, right? And many world leaders have fallen—de Gaulle, Brandt, Meir, Ho Chi Minh and now, finally, Nixon. Right in the middle of August, just as Mo said, Kohoutek, right? A blazing comet would come to warn us. Earthquakes—there have been more in the

last 20 years than in the rest of time combined. The collapse of the economy, right? The stock market has dropped below 700. Drought. Famine. Revolutions and reactionary coups.

Just around the corner, as Belte tells it—he's not saying tomorrow, although it could be tomorrow—in the next few years, God's final judgment, his wrath, his seven angels with seven plagues, will be visited down upon us. The ball game will be over and Belte's here to tell us there won't be another one:

"Still." I press Belte again, "how long can you go on doing this? What if you become 35 and the world's just going along in its same bumbling way?"

Belte obviously does not like to think about this question. His face, already drawn from a hard day, takes on a tiredness beyond his 20 or 22 years. He looks, for a moment, as if he were already 35. He has committed the little he had in the way of possessions and all he has in the way of energy, which seems boundless. But when a gambler puts his last chips down on odd at the roulette table and ponders the possibility of even, it can be a sobering moment.

"Well," he answers quietly, "then I'd have to say we were wrong."

He smiles quizzically at me. "But it's going to happen all right." ●



Armageddon before the storm: two COG members on their way to work.

10/4/74

# The Deceptions of the Children of God

EDWARD E. ERICSON, JR., and PAUL MacPHERSON

The Children of God continue to attain notoriety for their unconventional practices. Recently the media have carried stories about efforts of opponents of COG to help members leave the group. Opponents see the sect as diabolically evil; COG members see themselves as the only remnant faithful to Jesus Christ in these evil end times, and they have supporters outside the group.

What is the truth about COG? How can observers come to such diametrically opposite views of the subject? The explanation, we believe, lies in the fact that COG leaders speak out of both sides of their mouths; one of their statements will contradict another. This is not because it is impossible to coordinate all statements emanating from a group scattered around the world. Rather, it is because the Children of God deliberately set out to deceive outsiders about their true nature. We ourselves have been recipients of what COG calls the "Selah treatment": sweet-talk given to visitors to COG colonies in an effort to convince them that the organization is harmless.

Recently a number of "Mo Letters"—missives written by COG's unchallenged ruler, David Berg (alias Moses), to members of the group—have come into our possession. A comparison of what Mo tells his followers in these epistles with what he and they say to outsiders makes perfectly clear COG's efforts to deceive. This article is devoted to documenting these deceptions.

Recently COG sent out to its mailing list an intriguing "Open Letter to Our Friends" written by Berg. He admits the pressing need for outside support. He also concedes

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that some statements emanating from COG have discouraged such vital support. However, he excuses himself by attributing the offending statement to his subordinates—the first crack in the solid front presented by COG leadership to the outside world. Declaring that Christians do not have to agree totally on all minor doctrines to work together, he asserts his "personal policy" of "tolerance and broadmindedness" and blames any misunderstanding on remarks by "sincerely zealous, but sometimes sadly unwise, lesser leaders." He then proceeds to deny certain teachings ascribed to him.

Unfortunately, other writings of his contradict his denials. For instance, Berg categorically denies the "flagrantly defiant and erroneous slogan with which I have never had anything to do whatsoever," namely, "My family, my family—right or wrong, my family!" What Berg actually said, in his Mo Letter "There Are No Neutrals" was, "You're either for us or you're against us . . . 'My country, my country, right or wrong, my country.'" Is there a substantive difference between these statements, one of which Berg made and the other of which he denies? Or did Berg just forget what he had said earlier? (If so, he does not read his "Mo Letters" as religiously as do his followers, whom he tells to read the same way they read the Bible.) Or is he consciously trying to deceive? Or is there some other alternative?

Berg also asserts that he is "diametrically opposed to the dangerous, erroneous and false teaching . . . of which I myself have often been very falsely accused" and which he ascribes to "an incorrigible few" of his subordinates "who have disregarded many reproofs," namely, "That it's alright [*sic*] to lie, cheat, steal, and perhaps even commit violence in the name of Jesus as long as it's good for the cause." He declares that he never taught this and that it can be found "in absolutely no Mo letter in existence," and he challenges followers "to prove in writing that I have ever indicated such a thing. . . ." Berg professes shock that some COGs said on a national telecast in Canada "that they were so loyal to Moses and so obedient that even if he told them

kill their parents, they would do so!" He declares, "I've never even suggested such unquestioning, blind and implicit obedience!"

First, it is strange that followers in a rigidly authoritarian sect would so flagrantly misrepresent the man whom they revere as God's anointed prophet for the 30 days and on whose word they have given up everything. Second, numbers of COGs and ex-COGs have reiterated what was said on the Canadian telecast about total obedience to Berg, even to the point of killing on command. One ex-COG testified on NBC's "Chronolog" program in the summer of 1972:

I was taught in the Children of God I would have to commit adultery, theft, and murder during the last seven years of the world because of the fact that we would be under cover, and there would be things like this that would have to be done in order to sustain our group.

Numerous newspapers have reported COG members were asked if they would kill (their parents or national leaders, for example) if their elder ordered them to do so. Invariably the answer was yes. It is clear that an affirmative answer to this presumably hypothetical question was expected if they wanted to retain their good standing.

And while Berg claims that nothing in the "Mo Letters" supports the teaching of such implicit obedience, the hard evidence indicates otherwise. The "Revolutionary Contract," which all new members must sign, declares that "instant obedience is imperative." It elaborates: "You must obey: implicitly, quickly and without question your officers in the Lord, if you wish to remain a member of this Team. . . ." Elsewhere Berg instructs, ". . . obedience is not enough. . . . To 'submit yourself' means put your whole body, soul and spirit into complete subjection to the spirit of God in your leader." The best one might find "the spirit of God in your leader" is an escape clause for Berg, we cite another statement in "Mo Letter":

The Bible talks about obeying your parents in the Lord (which is your leadership, not your ungodly fleshly parents). It says obey them in all things, even if they are wrong! If a leader tells you to do something wrong you are justified before God for obeying leadership. . . .

Now, which is the more valid reading of these statements—the members' declaration that they would obey every order of their superiors in COG, even one to kill, or Berg's argument that he never taught blind, implicit obedience?

In his "Open Letter" Berg also denies that he "ever aimed that the final Kingdom of Christ has already arrived on earth." What he did say was, "We agree with 5% of the radical revolutionaries' goals, but their goal of utopia, they cannot reach, while we have reached it already. . . . We are practicing the only pure form of communism. . . ." ("The Rise of the Reactionary Right").

Nor are Berg's denials in his recent "Open Letter" the only examples of the deception running through COG's

***Berg gives his subordinates detailed instructions on how to handle reports. He tells them not to cooperate with any media that publish hostile stories, but to promise scoops to reporters who treat them kindly.***

operation. Berg has instructed his lieutenants to say that he is no longer actively in control of COG. So on NBC's "Chronolog" program, Berg's son "Hosea" dutifully declared that his father "does not take an active part in our COG activities." As if Berg's recent "Open Letter" were not in itself enough to give the lie to this announcement, several "Mo Letters" verify his active leadership. In "General Letter on Various Business," designed only for overseers to read, Berg gives detailed instructions to leaders in various places; discussions of money predominate. For instance: they are "never to discuss your finances with outsiders, at least not the specifics, such as Ben's inheritance. . . ." Berg sends checks to various leaders, according to this epistle. In it he also instructs his immediate subordinates whom to appoint as overall overseer for the United States. He scolds those in charge of absorbing Linda Meissner's Jesus People's Army of the Pacific Northwest for moving too fast and kicking recalcitrant kids off the property before COG had legal ownership of it, since that move left the COG leaders open to trespassing charges. He adds, "I wonder if you would have been so ready to run them out of the building, if you'd known this?" When Berg wrote an emergency letter to send all COGs home for the holidays in late 1971, he threatened elders who did not comply with removal from office. All the members went home.

A flyer designed for outsiders, entitled "What the Children of God Really Believe," says, "Nothing is kept hidden or secret about their way of life. . . ." Why, then, the "Selah treatment"? Also, why the following in Mo's "Pointers for Leaders": "Don't tell people more than you have to, to accomplish the needed purpose"?

Berg evidences a paranoid desire for secrecy concerning his own whereabouts. His "Pointers for Leaders" warns, "Always protect your leader's security! (For example, don't broadcast their whereabouts on short-wave!) Remember—it's a small world, and they're always out to get the leaders!" Berg coaches his followers on how to answer probing questions about his identity: "Who is Moses?—I can't really tell you! Is he so-and-so?—I really don't know—He's never really told us, and even if he had, he wouldn't want us to tell. . . . Is he really your leader?—Jesus Christ is my leader!" ("Public Relations"). While elders say they do not know their leader's identity, COG has recently published some of the more innocuous "Mo Letters" as a book entitled *Letters*

on a Shepherd, the cover of which lists the author "David Brandt Berg, also known as Moses." The allegory shifts to fit the situation.

In "Public Relations" Berg gives his subordinates detailed instructions on how to handle reporters. He tells them not to cooperate with any media that publish hostile articles, but to promise scoops to reporters who treat them kindly, suggesting that the elders, "could even furnish them with a few harmless ones ["Mo Letters"] like 'Diamonds of Dust,' if they would promise to continue to treat them fairly!" He then provides a list of typical questions and the prescribed answers, along with a demonstration of how to go on the offensive in an interview, speak with conviction, and badger the reporter. After intricate examples of how to deceive reporters, he asserts, "Honesty is usually the best policy in dealing with the Press," then two paragraphs later explicates his ideal honesty: "... you can just stall, evade, or lead them on another track..." He continues: "Give them a good story. Try not to be negative in knocking the system, its churches, etc.—even public education!... It's OK to talk like this to each other, but not to outsiders!" Rather, "Don't use what they call 'bad language' and vulgar letter words within their hearing!"

What goes for managing the news applies also to what variously called "procuring" or "spoiling Egypt." Since COG members do not hold paying jobs, they must go to get free food from local merchants. The colony member assigned to this task is called the procurer. He is given specific instructions on his appearance, dress, and manner: neat haircut, coat and tie, clean, conservative shirt, no jeans or far-out pants and shirts, shoes shined, teeth brushed, mouthwash used. "Don't be afraid to put on a camouflage to put on the system" ("Procuring").

ing"). In many localities procurers represent the group by some name other than "Children of God," lest COG's bad publicity inhibit their efforts. Procurers say that the group are Bible-college students, that the ministry is taking young people off drugs and training them in "a certain trade to teach the young people how to become productive members in society" ("Procuring"). Never mind that one of COG's main teachings is that it is sinful to hold a job in society. Procurers show pictures of their work, but they are selective, as per Berg's advice: for example, "... lay off the dancing, you're a Bible oriented group..." ("Procuring").

The Children of God have had some success in their efforts to recruit from other Jesus-people groups, whom they consider "compromisers." Again, deception is part and parcel of their method of operating. When Linda Meissner joined COG, she brought with her an underground newspaper re-christened "New Improved Truth." It quotes establishment newspaper stories on COG, but wherever the name "Children of God" appeared in the original, it is blocked out and a substitution like "Jesus Revolution" or "Jesus Freaks" appears in its place. Nowhere is the paper declared to belong to COG. The mild "Mo Letters" carried in it are ascribed cryptically to M. L. In "Other Sheep" Berg, reacting to published criticism of COG, scolds his subordinates for their excessive exclusivism, which detracts from the effort to bring other Jesus people into COG. Of course, they learned their exclusivism from Berg himself, and what he calls for is not a change of beliefs but only one of tactics. The idea is to avoid doctrinal arguments and condemnations, telling recruits the "heavy stuff" about COG's view of Bible prophecy only after they are safely within COG's fold. "You could even read them the lighter Mo Letters designed for babes and the general public!" Another thing Berg would not want prospects to know is that "it may be the Lord's Will to take otherwise less desirable mothers or fathers, to get the children!—Kibbutzim, do" ("Pointers for Leaders"). A strange statement coming from a man who prides himself and his group on being outcasts for whom established society has no use, the foolish and weak whom God is using to confound the wise and strong of this world.

The same deception is employed in dealing with parents of new members. COG leaders make a big point of their instructions that members are to write home weekly. However, we know from conversation with ex-members that this is not encouraged until converts are firmly in COG's grasp. Further, "Public Relations" makes it clear that the main purpose of allowing members to write at all is to try to get money out of the parents for COG's use. There is a second reason to minimize bad publicity. In fact, since the holiday season of 1971, COG has taken to sending members home on occasion—again, for the same two reasons—a move Berg describes as "a masterful stroke of genius" ("by the Lord," he adds) ("Public Relations").

Parents who find out where their children are located

## MORNING PRAYERS

*"... and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints... and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints..." (Revelation, 8:3, 4).*

*From this sunrise angle  
the chipped cup rim  
shapes coffee mist to an ellipse  
holding the morning odor  
in brief order to the eye  
before my nostrils inhale  
and make its rising incense  
a part of morning adoration  
to the Holy God who can  
make me a hale fellow.*

EUGENE H. PETERSON

*Berg admits that in extreme cases where parents have threatened or attempted violent action to reclaim their children, COG has sequestered the children.*

and come to talk with them are often prevented from doing so. Although numerous cases can be documented, COG leaders publicly deny this. Yet Berg acknowledges this well-known fact in his "Public Relations" letter. However, the letter announces a shift in tactics because of the bad press that this practice incurred. It is necessary, he now says, to take a chance and let parents speak with their children, in private if they absolutely insist. This means risking "kidnapping" of the children by their parents, and so members receive detailed instructions about how to escape from parents and return to the colony.

Nevertheless, the old practice is still often in effect. An English newspaper, *Sunday People*, set up an experiment to see if COG dealt honestly with parents. A young reporter "joined" COG. The next day an older reporter, posing as his father, came seeking him. The elders denied that his "son" was there and denied even knowing him. While the "father" was being offered coffee, Bible verses, and a demonstration of love, the elders tried to get to the young reporter to let them hide him (*Sunday People*, Sept. 24, 1972, p. 4). When an English woman tried to retrieve her daughter, she was shoved by Berg's wife, known in the group as "Mother Eve." When the woman pressed charges over the incident, a COG elder warned her to drop the case and threatened: "If you don't you will never see your daughter again." Mother Eve subsequently fled the country.

One must understand the COG view of the older generation as a whole in order to understand this behavior. Adults are assumed to belong to the System, which manifests itself in government, jobs, schools, and (most evil of all) churches—all of which make up the Great Whore of Babylon. Duplicity is again the hallmark of COG operations. Berg speaks of the "goodwill visitations to local churches" in which COG engaged in the early days in southern California ("Survival"). Yet, referring to the same visits, he crows, "We thumbed our noses at the churches and the Establishment." Berg's letters regularly catalogue vitriolic diatribes against the church. Sample:

And the Church?—Ha!—The so-called church . . . is just an absolute ridiculous bunch! A little bit of than-theu, do-gooder, social club and status symbol for the self-righteous, sanctimonious, pharisaical, superannuated hypocrites!—a useless, ineffective, weak and ludicrous, dead and dying, paganistic hangover from the superstitious past! ("Survival").

Berg writes to a potential donor about "as much as we love them [church people]," but elsewhere he calls them "these d---, fool, so-called Christians" and their churches "the moldy molds of the coffins of the dead"—hardly a place to which to pay good-will visits.

Parents are tarred with the same vitriolic brush. "The Revolutionary Contract" describes parents as "the rotten, decadent, decrepit, hypocritical, selfrighteous, inflexible [*sic*], affluent, selfsatisfied, proud, stubborn, disobedient, blind, bloodthirsty, Godless, dead, selfish, churchy, unchangeable older generation." The "Mo Letter" "Who Are the Rebels?" blasts "this recent modern plastic, artificial man-made gadget-filled, money crazy, whoremongering sex-mad—religiously hypocritical society of the parents"; and the "God forsaking, Bible-hating, anti-Christ selfish peace-defying, law breaking, man killing parents of today." Berg's condemnation follows. "You, my dear parents, are the greatest rebels against God and His Word and His Ways. . . . To Hell with your devilish system. May God damn your unbelieving hearts. . . . God is going to destroy you and save us. . . ."

Though COG members early learn proof-texts for home-breaking for the sake of Christ, Berg publicly denies it: "To say that we try to separate 'children' from their loved ones is ridiculous! We have actually done more in most cases to bring them back together. . ." ("Survival"). Yet in the same passage Berg admits that in extreme cases, when parents have threatened or attempted violent action to reclaim their children, COG has sequestered the children— at their own request and for their own safety, he explains. Then comes the threat: ". . . we have been compelled in several cases to file criminal action and . . . have [been] . . . forced to prosecute them to protect ourselves and put a stop to their lies. . . . Don't try to stop them [the children] or us!" ("Survival"). No wonder COG leaders value their privacy: "And with such insane parents on the loose, is it any wonder that the poor hounded leaders of some suffering Colonies prefer to be unseen, unknown, or at least out of the reach of such demented fiends. . ." ("Survival"). What is true for his lieutenants is even more applicable to the chief. He has good reason to prefer "to remain anonymous, and in the utmost seclusion for both my health and safety's sake when there are such crazy people like those we've been describing running around with guns in their hands actually threatening to kill me if they can find me" ("Survival").

It is always difficult to judge the mind of another man. But it is difficult to read and compare the various statements of David Berg and not conclude that they demonstrate a conscious pattern of deviousness. How this can be squared with the teachings of the Bible that Berg claims to venerate we do not know. If Berg were to confess that he had been mistaken and unzealous in his past pronouncements and to promise to shift from deceptiveness to high Christian ethics, that would be one thing. Until he does, he stands exposed as practicing a conscious duplicity.

## Where Are All the Children Now?

There aren't many members of the controversial Children of God (COG) sect left in America. Last year the COG's middle-aged leader, David "Moses" Berg, from his secret hideaway in London, predicted—or pronounced—judgment upon the land, and he ordered the Children out. Parents who hadn't heard from their children in months suddenly found themselves showered with lavish attention—and requests for travel money and help in obtaining passports. Almost overnight the Children became a world-wide missionary organization, a great leap forward from 1968, when the Berg family and a handful of converts got it all started (see November 5, 1971, issue, page 38).

On almost any Sunday afternoon they can be found singing ("you gotta be a baby") and dancing in Hyde Park, London, inviting stray youths to dinner in the nearby COG commune. The Children maintain an outpost in Christiana, a former army base in Copenhagen that is now home for 1,000 hippies of various nationalities living in assorted communal arrangements. COG communes are located throughout Western Europe, the Caribbean, and Latin America. A colony in Israel has been stirring up controversy with its aggressive evangelistic tactics.

No one knows how many Children there are except perhaps the leaders. The figure heard most is 3,000, but the real total is probably much smaller. The drop-out rate of long-termers is

thought to be rising, family-conscious European and Latin American young people are not as apt to sever relationships and leave home as their American counterparts of a few years ago, and overseas Jesus people are much warier of the Children than were the Americans. Curiously, last summer the Children were banned from platform participation in a huge Jesus festival by Danish Jesus people, while at the World Council of Churches meeting in Holland they were welcomed with open arms. (The Children are now courting the establishment; formerly they openly scorned it, even demonstrating in church services.)

The Children have suffered some serious blows recently. Last spring, NBC television aired a devastating close-up of the COG in which Moses Berg was depicted as a dirty old man by his estranged daughter-in-law, Sarah. (Indeed, say insiders, Berg claims he received a revelation from God permitting him to have concubines, including a secretary named Maria. Four-letter words appear in the "Mo letters" he sends to COG colonies, and some letters contain ribald references to sex.) Sarah Berg also alleged that the Berg clan at times sat around in the nude and drank wine. (Mo is said to have okayed wine for married children because its use improves sexual relationships.)

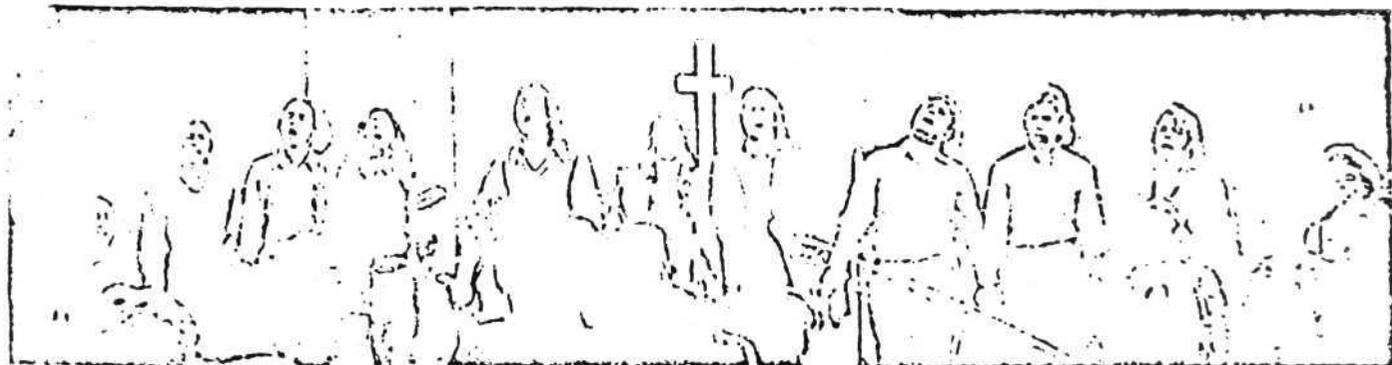
A number of Sarah Berg's allegations were confirmed by David Hoyt, a former Jesus leader in San Francisco and Atlanta who joined the Children at

leadership level. Last year, after Hoyt questioned Berg's theology and policies, Berg said Hoyt was demon possessed, and he instructed other leaders to exorcise the evil spirit. In an ugly scene at COG headquarters in the London suburb of Bromley, Hoyt left COG (he has tried in vain to retrieve his wife and children). He is now linked with millionaire real estate magnate Kenneth Frampton of Bromley in a ministry to ex-Children.

Frampton, a member of the Plymouth Brethren, became one of the Children's main benefactors after two of his sons joined. He too fell out with the Berg family, mainly over theology and Berg's apparent role as dictator of the faith. (In an interview in Paris, COG leaders there acknowledged they read Mo letters nightly to the colony. How often do new letters arrive? "Whenever we need a new revelation from God," replied a COG elder.)

That the unseen Berg is in supreme control cannot be denied. From the moment a "babe" enters COG, his mind is controlled by outside forces. Input is programmed: certain Bible verses, interpretive notes, rationale for new life styles. Output is regulated: he is in utter submission to elders, he is never left alone (not even when he goes to the bathroom), what the group does he does. Further, he is kept at the point of exhaustion. There is simply no time for independent thinking and study. Ironically, many ex-Children, in naming what they missed most in COG,

The Children at the World Council of Churches. Left of cross: Faith Berg



cite personal meditation and Bible study.) Fear is added as a motivating factor: to displease the COG leadership is to displease God. Morality is understood in light of what is good for the COG cause. As for security, the will of the leadership is the will of God.

Many ex-Children say they had trouble framing their thoughts and thinking through decisions in the first days after they left COG. "It was traumatic," recalled one. "I was on my own."

Last December, newspapers across the nation ran stories on San Diego-based "deprogrammers" who were attempting to reclaim COG members by forcibly breaking the mental hold that had been imposed upon them. The deprogrammers were members of FREECOG, a group composed mostly of parents who want their offspring out of COG.

Within the next month or so, at the request of their parents, young people in other groups—from tightly knit charismatic prayer fellowships to secular communes—became targets of deprogramming. Parents literally kidnapped their youngsters and locked them up with deprogramming teams in a room at home or in a nearby motel. This all led to sensational stories in the press in February and March—and to criminal charges against the best-known deprogrammer, Ted Patrick, 43, an African Methodist Episcopal layman in San Diego who once served as a community relations consultant to Governor Ronald Reagan.

Patrick, whose own son was in COG for a short time, was recently arrested in New York City while helping a parent to force his 21-year-old son into a car. The youth, Daniel Voll, belongs to the New Testament Missionary Fellowship, a charismatic community headed by Hannah Lowe. Proceedings in the case were pending this month.

One of the deprogramming leaders, Mrs. Ila Meece of San Diego, a member of a well-known evangelical church, denies that mainstream Jesus people are targets. "In fact, we use Jesus people as deprogrammers," she says. "They're the ones who can get through best to some of these mixed-up kids."

She says that most of the COG members who went through deprogramming left the Children as a result.

In an interview, she explained how deprogramming works. First, the member is isolated from his group for two or three days. Other Christians stay with him the entire time, praying with him and asking him to explain his relationship to Christ, to answer criticism against COG, to determine whom he is really serving—all the time seeking to draw out independent answers and

to convince him that he is loved by family and friends. Scriptural teaching on issues pertinent to COG is also a part, she adds.

In retrospect, what do those who undergo deprogramming think of it?



David Hoyt: minus a wife

Jill Huston, 23, who had been with the Children nearly two years, reflects. "You've been deceived with the Word. The only way to receive the truth is if someone shares and shows it from the Word." (When she was first locked in her room, Miss Huston jumped out a window, but later returned at the counsel of a young man from the church.) As for the methods used, "I'm not sure," she says, "but I guess they have good ends."

So far, fewer than 100 have gone through deprogramming. Important constitutional questions are involved, and courts may soon be called on to answer them. EDWARD E. PLOWMAN

## Children: Soft on Parents

A \$1.1 million libel suit against parents of some members of the controversial Children of God group was dropped in Dallas by the COG with the explanation that it was taking too much time away from evangelism. The suit, filed in January, alleged that during a demonstration outside the Dallas Federal Building in October, 1971, the parents slandered the COG by claiming it is a subversive group, kidnaps young persons, drags and hypnotizes them, and is part of a racket to extort money from converts.

The suit named the parents "individually and in their capacity as members of the Parents Committee to Free Sons and Daughters from the Child-

of God Organization" (FREECOG). COG spokesmen said the parents' efforts to discredit the COG were "futile, evidenced by the fact that the Children of God continue to grow and prosper in their work."

But, says FREECOG spokesman Patrick, COG gave up only a few. FREECOG issued subpoenas requiring both the appearance of COG founder David "Moses" Berg (who has been in hiding overseas for several years) and the handing over of COG records.

JOHN SAILHA

CHRISTIANITY TODAY

AUGUST 31, 1973

CHRISTIANITY TODAY

THE VARIETIES of religious experience are many, and some of them are baneful. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world."

Among the false prophets of this decade are the leaders of an organization called the Children of God, which professes itself "a young disciple army." COG's headquarters lie in Dallas, and "major branches" are listed in some 48 cities all over the world, among them Lima, Auckland, Amsterdam, Nuremberg, Edinburgh, Rome, Tokyo, and Kingston (Jamaica, presumably). There are believed to be about two thousand members of COG, the large majority young Americans; the group seems to have shifted most of its disciples—or captives—to foreign parts, under pressure from outraged parents.

COG falls within the large category of "Jesus Freak" sects, but any resemblance to the more sincere and genuine evangelicals of the Jesus Movement is deceptive. What do COG disciples do? Why, they surrender all their goods and chattels to COG; they live in tumble-down communes; and they testify. Their testimony sometimes is mumbled, and sometimes hysterical; they appear, usually, to be under the influence of either narcotics or hypnotism.

"Love" is much on the lips of COG votaries, but actually their principal teaching is hatred of one's parents, a doctrine perverted from certain passages in the New Testament. They court persecution—always a useful tool for uniting any eccentric sect—and set society at defiance. They closely resemble the vagrant bands of dirty and dangerous religious enthusiasts who appeared near the close of the Middle Ages; indeed they have had their counterparts in every age when the moral and the social order have been disrupted.

COG specializes in luring neurotic or bewildered young people away from parental influence—perhaps forever. COG preaches a Children's Crusade, but with no Saracen adversary. COG's happiest hunting grounds appear to be the campuses of evangelical Christian colleges, and the vicinity of "fundamentalist" churches: Heresy always

feeds upon smug orthodoxy. But COG does not have this field to itself; parents accuse several other "religious" cults, spawned by inner and outer disorder, of parallel tactics with boys and girls—the Alamo Christian Foundation, the Love-In (New York), Love of Seattle, Love Israel of Seattle, Truth and Light (Colorado), Scientology, and the Lord only knows what other varieties of freakery.

What happened to friends of mine, a married couple in California, may illustrate sufficiently what COG and similar groups do to their prey. My friends were almost perfect parents—highly intelligent, humorous, neither too permissive nor too strict with their children, to whom they paid plenty of attention. There was no generation gap—until their eldest son accepted an athletic scholarship and went off to attend a Protestant college in the Middle West.

There he was assigned as roommate a Jesus Freak of the COG variety. The roommate convinced the boy from California that his parents (whom the Freak never had beheld) were hypocrites and scoundrels. After some months, the boy appeared in California, filthy, ragged, and wild with some drug. He cursed his parents, proclaimed his own righteousness, said that they never would see him again, and disappeared. They have searched for him earnestly; no trace. He had been a strong, handsome boy, a high-school athlete, with admirable manners; when he left his parents forever, he did not appear to be long for this world.

The two thousand victims of COG are young people like this boy whom I knew. Generally they seem to be boys and girls with some money in the bank and other goods, chosen because they may be plundered; it is still better if their parents have money. COG solicits "love offerings" from parents, suggesting that if dad and mom cough up, COG may furnish them with the present addresses of their lost children. Those addresses, nevertheless, are difficult to obtain, and COG goes to extraordinary lengths to lure back any members who visit their old homes, or who permit their parents to visit them in their communes.

Bereaved parents have formed their

## COG Widens the Gap

own organization, Parents To Free Our Sons and Daughters from Children of God. In San Diego, they have established a center for "de-programming"—that is, redeeming such young people who have escaped from COG's clutches but who remain all at sea. The de-programming may take months, for COG's "disciples" appear to have been systematically brainwashed. How far hypnotism and narcotics are deliberately employed by groups of COG's stamp is difficult to determine; certainly COG disciples stumble round like zombies.

A MAD world, my masters: But then it often has been mad. In the Children's Crusade of 1212, the hysterical boy Stephen led thousands of French boys and girls down to Marseilles. There they were taken aboard ship by two merchants, called Hugh the Iron and William the Pig. No more was heard of these innocents for eighteen years; then it was discovered that Hugh, the Iron and William the Pig had sold the lot of them into Algerian slavery. Some years later, the Emperor Frederick II caught pious Hugh and William in a Sicilian robbers' roost, and hanged the pair—not least because they had taken money from the Saracens to kidnap *him*.

Some American parents would dearly love to hang the "brothers and sisters" who run COG; I might tug on the rope myself. What are the motives of such "religious" organizers? Why, power over minds and bodies; and the gratification of being a successful fell spirit. More crimes are committed in the name of religion than even in the name of liberty, and these unfortunate young people would have been luckier had they been dominated by some honest atheist. None of Stephen's little children returned home from Africa: few of COG's disciples may come sane out of the communes. □



—New York Times Photo

From counterculture to Bible worship.

## A Day in the Life of The "Children of God"

ELLENVILLE, N. Y.

This sleepy town on the edge of the Catskills has a population of 5,000, a collection of peeling Victorian mansions and—since last June—a colony of more than 100 transients who call themselves the "Children of God."

They are part of a sect within the "Jesus movement" which claims anywhere from 2,000 to 3,000 members in small colonies in the U. S., and some in Europe.

The "Children" live by sharing, adopt Biblical names and follow a strict schedule daily of study, work, prayer and singing in their cluster of houses.

Most of the "Children" in the Ellenville colony are in their early 20s but there have been some as old as 55.

"We shall try." Nominally in charge is David Cook—known in the colony as "Jared"—who is a licensed minister. He says:

"In the book of Acts, it is written that the early Christians sold what they had and shared with each other. That is what we try to do."

Apparently this arrangement works. A recent convert says:

"Lots of kids come here with quite a bit of money. Some still get money from home. We don't have money problems. We don't need much money."

Most "Children" admit to having had bad experiences with drugs, sex or family. Now they have abandoned worldly goods and have turned to what one calls "the ultimate trip"—namely, Jesus.

Robert Miller, who calls himself "Barnabas" and is an assistant to Mr. Cook, explained his own experience:

"Life had lost its meaning. I was

involved in psychedelic drugs.

"At Woodstock, I tried to kill myself, built a fire and stood in it. This guy pulled me out and beat out the flames. Then I heard the Children of God singing on a hillside. It was beautiful. I was drawn to it and accepted Jesus Christ. It was heavy, man. I haven't used drugs since. Now I just want to help other people."

Such people stir mixed feelings, here and elsewhere in the nation.

Many parents of the Children are up in arms about the colonists' life style, and have formed a national organization in opposition—"Parents' Committee to Free Our Children From the Children of God," or FREECOG.

These parents say their children in the colonies have been mesmerized, brainwashed or forcibly detained by their leaders. Lawsuits are threatened in some places to force youngsters to return home.

Here in Ellenville, there are complaints about "goings on" at the settlement about rock music the "Children" play, and "the money up there."

Yet most in Ellenville accept the sincerity of the "Children." Chief of Police William Trapnell said:

"We have very good relations with the group. There has never been any trouble. I have made several visits up there and the atmosphere is good. It's always 'God bless you, brother.' It beats being called 'pig.'"

A Roman Catholic priest, the Rev. John Budwick, also is persuaded of the group's sincerity. "They may be in a transitional phase," he said, "but what they are doing is not so different from what I am doing."

"Called me brother." A filling-station attendant talked about the colony's nightly "Jesus-jamming" at which the "Children" sing original hymns pegged to the Scriptures and set to music played by musicians with electric guitars and banjos.

"I'm not much on religion, but I went up there one night," he said. "I was accepted. Everybody called me 'brother.' This rock stuff was never my bag but when they started singing their own hymns, man, I got goose bumps."

Organizationally, each unit within the colony is described as self-governing, and self-sufficient.

All members are called disciples. The

new member, called a "habe," must give his full name, his drug history, his chosen Biblical name, and allow his mail to be censored.

After intensive Bible instruction which is vigorous enough to make men leave after a few days, the persevering become "younger brothers." With full acceptance comes the title of "elder brother."

At this stage, the disciple must learn a trade. The popular ones are photography, auto mechanics, printing, leather and art crafts.

**Plan of the day.** The daily schedule is spartan. It begins at 7 a. m. with clean up. Then come tribe meetings, morning prayers and classes on eternal salvation. Breakfast, one of the day's two meals, at 11 a. m., accompanied by songs, Scripture reading and recitation.

Afternoons are devoted to work, music classes and leadership training. Dinner is at 6. Most of the "Children" watch evening news on television. Evenings are devoted to celebrating Christ with rock bands, the reading of letters from other colonies and quiet conversation. All lights go out at midnight.

There are separate quarters for men and women, except for a few married couples. Once in the colony, a man or woman may not marry for six months.

All possessions are shared. The "Children" often give away clothing to the poor in the town. In return, Ellenville merchants give their visitors supplies of day-old bread, dented cans of food and sometimes bulk supplies of rice or flour.

**Godly revolution.** These are not hippies. Only a few have long hair. But application form for membership says good revolutionary is "rebellious against society because society is anti God." It adds that the "Children" rebel against "self-destructing capitalism with its imperial wars and feudal weapons."

The "Children" see their colony as springboard for foreign evangelism. Already the "Children" have colonies, established centers of Europe's hippie culture—in Amsterdam, London, Bonn, Essen, Stockholm and Brussels.

Meantime, evangelism consists of boarding one of the colony's ancient buses and heading into New York City Greenwich Village on week-ends to recruit colonists.

The bus has a built-in stove, food blankets and medical supplies. The "Children" talk to Village hippies about God and the peaceful life in the Catskills.

There is no coercion. But each unit produces a few more converts for a sect that is stirring controversy and wonderment in so much of the nation today.

## Whose Children?

Jesus did not always speak of love. In his harsher moments, he reminded his disciples that he had come to bring not peace but a sword. He predicted that he would set son against father, daughter against mother. Christianity has often explained those "dark sayings" as angry hyperbole or simple pessimism about the acceptance of his revolutionary teachings, but from time to time a hard core of believers has chosen to take the Nazarene at his grimest word. The latest group to do so is a controversial sect of young Christians who call themselves, with grand self-righteousness, the Children of God.

The name is meant to describe their single-minded determination to "forsake all" for God—family, friends and personal belongings. The Children of God are the storm troopers of the Jesus Revolution (*TIME* cover, June 21), its most forceful and most criticized zealots. Though the membership numbers only about 2,000 worldwide, it is vigorous and far-flung: about 60 colonies are scattered from Seattle to Essen, Germany, from Jerusalem to Viet Nam. A London colony founded a few months ago has already sent missionaries to Stockholm, Oslo, Glasgow, Belfast, Dublin, Amsterdam and Brussels. Liberia is the next target.

**Woe! Woe!** The Children attack all worldly society with the fierce zeal of the Weatherman, using the cherished King James Bible as their proof text. They demand a strictly communal life as practiced by the early Christians according to the *Book of Acts* ("they held everything in common"). They avoid work except as it relates to their own communes, lest their members be forced to choose between God and mammon. Yet they badger businessmen to support them with handouts of money and supplies, while raging against a sinful America and proclaiming its—and the world's—imminent doom. In their most apocalyptic moments, they dress in red sackcloth (a sign of warning), daub themselves with ashes, put yokes around their necks. With the prophet's traditional staff, they stand silent vigils in public places, breaking their silence only to utter an occasional "Woe! Woe!"

Such theatrics might seem merely eccentric to Americans if they came from, say, an exotic sect such as Hare Krishna. When they are presented in the name of Christianity, however, people who consider themselves good churchgoing Christians resent the purer-than-thou attitude—and the appeal it seems to hold for their children. Nonetheless, the group in some cases has had more success than parents in winning young people from drugs, casual sex and drifting. They also have

potent precedents in St. Francis of Assisi and St. Thomas Aquinas, both of whom had to break with their families over their vocations.

Some of the most vehement parental critics in California banded together in an organization called the Parents' Committee to Free Our Children from the Children of God—a movement that has since spread to other parts of the country. The parents' group charges, among other things, that the Children stoop to kidnapping, hypnotizing and even drugging to keep youngsters in the sect. The outcry has driven many of the Children from California; Ted Patrick, a San

Diego aide to Governor Ronald Reagan, has accused them of trying to "destroy the United States."

None except the "elders"—experienced Children who apparently "grow" into authority—goes anywhere alone. Married couples share rooms within the commune, but single members are rigidly separated in male and female dormitories. Letters to and from home are censored by the elders. Many of the Children insist that the rigorous life is necessary to prepare themselves for the Communist takeover that

CHILDREN OF GOD PREACHING DOOM IN MANHATTAN'S CENTRAL PARK



Diego aide to Governor Ronald Reagan, has accused them of trying to "destroy the United States."

Not exactly turning the other cheek, the Children have slapped four leaders of the parents' group with a \$1,100,000 suit for libel and slander, and have brought a \$300,000 suit against Texas officials and a mother for allegedly railroading one 18-year-old member into a mental institution.

While there seems to be no hard evidence of kidnapping, drugging or genuine hypnotism so far, a broader charge of "brainwashing" may be closer to the truth, at least in the sense of relentless exposure to the sect's propaganda. At special com-

WORSHIPING AT COLORADO MEETING



they expect to come before doomsday.

The beginnings of the Children are already obscured by legend. The core of initial apostles seems to have gathered around a fundamentalist preacher named David Berg, now in his fifties, his four children and their mates in 1967-68. As Teens for Christ, they built up a small group of followers in California, where one of their early—and since abandoned—tactics was to disrupt services at local churches. In 1969, after Berg had a vision of imminent earthquake, about 50 of the band embarked on a period of wandering, during which, legend has it, they had to eat grass to survive.

Berg, who had once worked for TV Evangelist J. Fred Jordan, soon secured the use of Jordan's Texas and California properties for the Children of God, as they had come to call themselves. In return, Jordan displayed the youngsters, most of them in their late teens and 20s, in his televised fund-raising pitches. The arrangement lasted about a year and a half. An argument over the properties precipitated a clash, and Jordan ordered the Children off his land last September.

The Children have won over two important figures in the broader Jesus movement: David Hoyt, of Atlanta's street ministries, and Linda Meissner, of Seattle's Jesus People Army. Both apparently decided that their own methods were not producing enough fasting converts; Hoyt pointedly blamed his "watered-down Gospel." When he entered the Children of God, he took many of the Atlanta Jesus People with him. Linda Meissner, however, took far fewer of her Jesus People Army along—and indeed the feud between the mainstream Army (including Linda's husband John Salvesen) and her splinter group has scandalized Seattle's Jesus People.

Without Games. Founder Berg, under his sect name of Moses, regularly produces a patriarchal stream of crotchety, sometimes profane "Mo-letters" advising his far-flung Children on everything from visa restrictions to buying a boat. A growing consciousness of publicity may modify the Children's behavior in the future—as it has apparently begun to do. To offset attacks by parents, the colonies sent members home for the holidays; while quite a few stayed home, many returned more zealous than before. Berg has also discouraged clashes with other Jesus People.

Not all families for that matter, are disappointed with the results the Children of God produce. Ed Rees, vice president for public relations of the Flying Tiger Line in Los Angeles, watched his son drift from medical studies into drugs, and finally into the Children sect. Rees still finds "a depressing sameness" in the members, "either sucking up this excessive religion or spitting it out," but he also al-

lows that "they are totally without guile, without games. They really believe. They are prepared to die." So far, however, the question is whether they are prepared to live more fully in the world if doomsday does not come as expected.

PART OF FIRST AND LAST PAGE OF COMIC BOOK



SO WATCH OUT, BELOVED, FOR THAT "GREEN DOOR"! IT MAY LEAD TO A REALM WHERE YOU DON'T REALLY BELONG, AND CERTAINLY WOULD NEVER WANT TO BE! SO BE SURE YOU DON'T REGISTER THERE! HAVE YOUR NAME PUT IN GOD'S BOOK OF LIFE IN HEAVEN SO YOU'LL BE SURE YOU'VE GOT YOUR RESERVATION CONFIRMED FOR ONE OF THOSE MANSIONS IN GOD'S GOLDEN SPACE CITY INSTEAD! THAT'S THE PLACE

YOU'LL BE HAPPY FOREVER WITH JESUS! IF YOU LOVE AND RECEIVE AND LIVE FOR HIM NOW, YOU CAN ENJOY HIM AND HEAVEN FOREVER! THEN YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AFRAID WHEN IT COMES TIME TO ENTER THAT "GREEN DOOR"—YOU'LL KNOW WHICH DIRECTION YOU'RE GOING! NOT DOWN TO A POLISHED HELL, BUT UP TO A HAPPY HEAVEN! GOD BLESS YOU! WE LOVE YOU! — IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE, SEND FOR "SPACE CITY," A HEAVENLY TRIP! WRITE ADDRESS BELOW WITH GIFT.



THE CHILDREN OF GOD

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JAN. 1978

ITALY (published)

**RELIGION**

"The Gospels, of course, have many such stern admonitions which, if followed literally by Christians, would tear conventional society apart. But for the 3,000 members of the Children of God, a highly disciplined, apocalyptic sect within the youthful "Jesus Movement," Christ's command to forsake the family demands strict interpretation. Once youngsters join, the Children's chanting, praying communes of Christian fundamentalists, they are forbidden to go home again. Indeed, as part of their enforced isolation from "materialistic" society, converts must even allow elders of the sect to censor their mail and monitor phone calls from their parents.

**The Pits:** Not surprisingly, many parents who initially welcomed their children's "conversion" to Jesus now fear that they have lost their youngsters for good. One night last September, Ismael Barron, a Seattle barber, was startled to learn that his son, Domingo, had suddenly been converted at a COG-run coffee house and was giving up college and "the world" to join the sect. Two weeks later, Ismael was permitted to see his 18-year-old boy at a COG work camp near Burlington, Wash., but only while a group of COG guards stood by the car to prevent the father from making off with his son. Not that Domingo wanted to leave, however. "My son preached the Bible to me every minute," Ismael recalls. "He told me we were no good, that the whole system was rotten and that he didn't want to come back into 'the pits'—that's what they call the world."

Last month, Barron visited his son again and managed to spirit him away, but he is one of the few parents of COG converts to crack the Children's security system. In Chula Vista, Calif., William M. Rambur became so distraught over the conversion of his daughter, Kay, that he formed the "Parents' Committee to Free Our Sons and Daughters from the Children of God," one of a half-dozen such groups organized recently. After Kay Rambur, a 22-year-old nursing student, suddenly joined the sect in July, her father, a retired Navy officer, drove all the way to the COG camp in Mingus, Texas, to see her. "We tried to get her to come home with us," he says, "but she told us, 'The Devil's in that car with you. I'm not getting into a car with the Devil.'"

**Control:** Rambur claims that his parents' committee has no objection to the Children's literalistic beliefs, only the authoritarian control exercised by the COG's ruling elders. "These people," says Rambur, "are anti-government, anti-religion and anti-schools." And on this basis, he has asked President Nixon, the governors of California and Texas and Billy Graham to join in exposing the Children.

Religiously, the Children preach the same brand of Biblical literalism as Graham himself. They believe that God and the Devil are wrestling for the world, which will soon end with the Second Coming of Jesus. Unlike Graham, however, they try to provide communities where these beliefs can be practiced

precisely as preached. All converts must turn over their worldly possessions to the sect's elders and bishops. They learn to deliver their own babies, grow their own food, repair automobiles and even fly airplanes. At all hours of the day—and throughout much of the night—they must study, memorize and recite the Bible in an almost hypnotic ritual of group therapy.

**Sackcloth:** To win bread and influence people, the Children operate a network of coffee houses and other "outposts" in a dozen different cities, mostly on the West Coast. From these centers, they fan out in "prophet buses"—old vans rigged out in sackcloth and pictures of ecstatic Jesus people—to preach the Lord and collect converts. "We've had great success with radicals, hippies and dropouts," boasts



Children of God: A new nation?

one of the elders, Arnold Dietrich, 32, a New Yorker who now calls himself Bishop Joshua Levi.

The Children of God are not without support from some satisfied parents. Three years ago, one son of Houston industrialist M.J. DuPuy dropped out of school and resisted all psychiatric efforts to get him off hard drugs. Then he disappeared with the Children of God and was cured. Months later, another of DuPuy's sons joined the sect, and after visiting the boys at a COG camp in Texas, DuPuy has been won over. "They had gotten turned onto Christ and saved," DuPuy says of his sons. "I realized then that the Children of God were doing something for these kids that money just couldn't buy."

Secure in the righteousness of their ways, and with help from wealthy parents, the Children are now suing Rambur's group and others of their opponents for \$1.1 million, on the ground that their sect has been slandered. "We believe we're a whole new nation," says Bishop Levi, "a whole new society built on the Book of Acts. Praise the Lord!"

N.Y. STATE DID IN-DEPTH STUDY ON "CHILDREN OF GOD."

FINAL REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF

THE CHILDREN OF GOD

TO

HON. LOUIS J. LEFKOWITZ  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE  
STATE OF NEW YORK

Report Submitted by:

CHARITY FRAUDS BUREAU

HERBERT J. WALLENSTEIN

Assistant Attorney General

In Charge

Dated: September 30, 1974

## Rebekah rebuilds her life after leaving the cult

*These stories are based on interviews with a former member of the Children of God and a study of literature produced by the organization. Rebekah Sunshine's real name is withheld to protect her identity.*

By LUCY MORGAN  
Pasco Times Staff Writer

**NEW PORT RICHEY** — Rebekah Sunshine was her name.

Today the soft spoken blonde Rebekah Sunshine is 30 years old. She has discarded the name and the Children of God who gave it to her while she rebuilds a life that was swallowed up into one of the strangest religious cults in existence.

Today Rebekah Sunshine lives with her parents, Pasco County retirees who have spent more than \$9,000 in their harrowing effort to wrest their daughter away from the cult that enticed her into membership a few years ago.

Her adventure into the mind-controlling, sex-oriented cult began outside a supermarket in Killeen, Texas. At the time, she was involved in a divorce, living alone and working as a civil service employee at nearby Fort Hood.

**TWO MEMBERS OF** the Children of God were outside a supermarket "littering the streets," — distributing literature and collecting money — an activity that would later become more than familiar to Rebekah.

"I remember thinking, 'What do these freaks want?'" she recalls. "But in an hour and a half I had given them the keys to my apartment and told them everything. I invited them to stay there if their plans didn't work out."

Less than a month elapsed before cult members were living in her apartment. Then she gave them all of her possessions — a car, her furniture, all she owned — and moved into

**ALWAYS CLOSE TO** her, Rebekah's parents and an older sister began to notice that something was wrong. They sent her sister out to size up the situation and began hunting down experts on cults.

After a series of long distance telephone conversations with Rabbi Maurice Davis, an anti-cult expert who lives in New York, her parents launched a campaign to attract her home with promises designed to capture the interest of the cult.

When stories about her father's illness failed to attract her home, they wrote a letter telling her that they had paid cash for their retiree home, but were going to have to move back up north because of his illness. They promised Rebekah the house if she would be interested in moving.

Maintaining a steady flow of communication, Rebekah's parents then wrote to ask what she wanted them to do with the \$37,000 that was left in her bank account. Actually she had \$37.

**THE BAIT WAS** taken. Rebekah Sunshine was coming home. Actually she was coming home to collect whatever she could for the Children of God and recruit her young niece into the cult.

Upon arrival in Pasco County she was greeted by family members who kidnapped her and placed her in the hands of Ted Patrick, the nationally known deprogramming expert who has tangled with cults for years.

Three weeks later Rebekah Sunshine was on her way out of the mind-strangling hold that the Children of God had gained in her life.

**"YOU'RE TOLD** that if you leave, you'll lose salvation and God's judgment will be taken out against you, your family or friends," says Rebekah. "In my case I'd been out a month and a half when my father was in a traffic accident and in the hospital."

It took hours of counseling from the family and a deprogrammer before "I realized it wasn't because I left, but because some fool ran a red light."

Rebekah has joined Patrick and other former cult members in deprogramming work and spends much of her free time working with cult members and their families in an effort to save other families from the grief she found in the Children of God.

She also works with Save Our Children, a Tampa group that is helping families deal with cults.

Looking back at life in the Children of God, Rebekah can see how things like Jonestown and the Peoples Temple occur.

**SHE SAYS LEADERS** repeatedly told them that everything outside of the Children of God was subject to Satanic possession, particularly their parents.

"Someday Satan will come to the colony," she recalls being told. "In the name of God you can do anything — lie, steal, kill."

Using her mother as an example, Rebekah says she was told that if her mother came to get her, that it would not really be her mother, but "Satan using your mother's body."

See SUNSHINE, Page 3

## Sunshine

They lived a communal lifestyle in a group that included eight adults, six children and constant visitors. The physical attraction between male and female is used to get and keep converts, she says.

"It was a spiritual type thing — seeing that brothers' and sisters' needs are met," Rebekah recalls.

**LEADERS JUSTIFIED** sexual exploits with a Bible verse and women were urged to "flirty fish," using their sexual attractions to gain converts and raise money for the Children of God. Female members are also urged to send nude photos of themselves to Berg.

Much of their days were spent singing, praying, reading the Bible and reading *Mo Letters*, a compilation of letters from David Berg who is known as Father Moses David, the leader of the international cult.

The *Mo Letters* offer members everything from explicit sexual advice to political commentary.

Rebekah looks at the *Mo Letters* in amazement today, wondering that she ever held them in sacred esteem.

Her escape from the Children of God came only after her parents spent many hours and thousands of dollars carefully planning the day they would free her.

"I would have been able to take a knife and slit my mother open," she says with horror. "They got me out just in time."

Her kidnapping occurred shortly before she was to join a pioneering group that was to establish a colony in Mexico. She had already been given her "flirty fishing" assignment — a Mexico City official who lived at the Presidential palace.

**ALTHOUGH** Rebekah Sunshine is free today she will never be free from the memories of time spent inside the Children of God.

Today she is anxious to help others stay out of cults that practice mind control. She believes that no one is immune.

Rebekah believes parents should talk very frankly about cults and their practices with their children and make themselves familiar with the literature and practices of the various cults.

**MINISTERS WHO** have worked with cult members say many young people who get involved in them are captured at a moment when they are alone, uncertain, depressed or simply out on their own for the first time in their lives. Most of the cults practice a form of "love bombing," an ego building approach to a potential convert that is particularly effective when used on someone who is in need of love and attention.

Many of the cults offer a sort of moral justification for behavior that is deemed immoral by mainline religions.

Slowly but surely Rebekah Sunshine's life is "falling in place." She has taken a part-time job so she will still have time to help others who are involved in cults.

Coming out of the sex oriented lifestyle of the cult has left relationships with men difficult.

"I felt real dirty," says Rebekah. "I felt I had been used."

She is still a little leery about going to an organized church, but says she feels closer to God.

"I realized I couldn't trust David Berg or the Children of God, but I really didn't trust my family either," she says of her first days out of the cult. "But I relied on God

## DID CULT ABDUCT TWO CHILDREN? 'DEFECTOR' BLAMES SPOUSE, 10 OTHERS

Honolulu Advertiser, 9/10/80, by Barbara Vobejda--Candy Pickus's story begins 10 years ago in Texas when she joined the "Children of God", a religious cult with a fervor for Jesus and the Bible.

For the next seven years she was caught up in that group, married a member of the group and had four children. They moved from the United States and traveled through three European countries distributing literature and collecting money for the group.

But the fervor evolved into a bizarre experience. Candy Pickus said the cult began soliciting donations and members through prostitution--"Happy Hookers for Jesus.", as they are known. Moreover, children were often included in the group's sexual activities, she said. "I never could really force myself to believe that (prostitution) was necessary," Pickus said. Because she protested, she was sent away from her two older children, who stayed in Spain with her estranged husband, Brian Pickus. She took with her the youngest child and she was pregnant with a fourth child.

For the past three years, her story has been one of frustration--fighting to find her two children. Finally, she convinced her husband to come to visit Oahu, where she now lives. She borrowed the money to send them one-way plane tickets. In late August they arrived. She took the children home with her. Divorce papers were served on her husband at the airport....

On Sept. 1, Brian Pickus visited the children at Candy's house. After dinner, he visited his car briefly, returned, grabbed the oldest son and tried to leave. She pulled her son back in and yelled for her boyfriend...

Four more men appeared at the door and in the struggle that followed her boyfriend was choked and suffered a concussion. He tried to follow but his car was blocked. He thought there were 10 men in 3 carloads...

It is believed the other men were cult members as her husband had no connections or friends except for this group...

Family Court Judge Michael Town ordered a bench warrant for the arrest of Brian Pickus and also ordered that the children be turned over to Mrs. Pickus. Police Det. William Johnson said police have been unable to find Pickus...

The court order states that Brian Pickus took the children "with the assistance of at least 10 other men in willful violation" of an earlier court order...

The boys--Shaqed, 8, & Christopher, 6, --are both Caucasian, have brown hair and brown eyes. They speak English with a slight accent and usually converse with each other in Spanish.

**A REWARD OF \$6,600 IS OFFERED TO ANYONE WHO locates the kidnapped children. The reward money has been provided by the family and a radio station in Hawaii. Call CFF-IS for details.**

K. M. Hansen  
P.O. Box 8622  
Minneapolis, MN 55408

EX-COG

December, 1981 #9

As the holiday season is upon us, we all have many more demands on our time, energy and finances. It's a time when we enjoy the company of friends and family and renew acquaintances and think about the past year and the year to come. It's also a time when we miss most, those who are far from us in body or spirit. I'd like to remind us all of what the "typical/average" cult member is going through.

Statistics of the general population show that November-December is the worst time for suicides, violence and abuse and attribute it to loneliness (insecurity, lack of self esteem or close personal relationships) which is extremely augmented by the joviality and warmth of the holidays.

Holidays are twice as hectic for cult members. The leaders realize members are more susceptible to doubts about the doctrines, as they become lonesome for family contact, etc. Therefore they usually introduce major changes in November-December (as well as May-June - another family get-together time: graduations, weddings, etc.). For example, even while I was in the COG I began to notice a pattern. I entered COG December, 1971. In November, 1971, Berg wrote the Homegoing letter, "commanding" everyone to go home for the holidays, hoping to purge the ranks of doubters, and reinforce the fervor of those more sufficiently under mind control, as well as dispel some of the unfavorable publicity which stated members were not free to leave.

Over a period of 6 1/2 years that I was a member, most of these momentous "revelations" were centered around further commands to leave the U.S. (Babylon, doomed) and/or become more involved wholeheartedly in the doctrine that was hard to swallow (flirty-fishing). Consider the following turning points, that I can remember, and see how easy it is to spot the pattern - in fact, I remember leadership even relying on these "crises" to keep morale high.

- November, 1971 - Homegoing Letter
- Spring, 1972 - Escape letter: International office and leadership moved to Europe  
All disciples urged to leave America.
- November, 1972 - "802 South" - directed disciples South; also many spiritually oriented letters: The Kingdom, Temple Time, Spirit Tree, Prophecy Against Enemies
- Spring, 1973 - Witnessing Revolution (witnessing with literature, learning to ask for money, rather than just witnessing.)
- November, 1973 - Kohoutek (threat of Comet destroying America; leave U.S.)
- Spring, 1974 - Flirty Little Fishy
- November, 1974
- Spring, 1975 - Shake-up (Puerto Rico; leadership revolution)
- November, 1975 - Complete leadership revolution. By now KQC's (King's-Queen's leadership assistants appointed - about 6 throughout the world, by region)
- Spring, 1976 - Flirty fishing letters, enmasse, Arthur letters.
- November, 1976 - FFing
- Spring, 1977 - More leadership changes
- November, 1977 - Green Shirt (always be completely honest, but mainly when it applied to talking about people and what they had done right or wrong), FF quotas established, Visiting Servants in effect and no other big leaders except Berg and his letters.
- Spring, 1978 - 3 Day Fast and prayer for Berg who was supposedly dying.
- November, 1979 - Second Homegoing to detract from suspicions as a result of JONESTOWN!!

Since I left in June, 1978, I'm not sure of what measures Berg has used since. As you can see, he doesn't have to be very original to keep members in captivity. As you know from the past newsletters, however, Berg's latest morale booster was the announcement of the 8-10 musicians who returned to the group as prodigal sons last May.

By the time you receive this newsletter, COG members are probably already implementing the newest "innovation". What better way to continue to shove aside feelings of attachment to their real families?

What happens in the COG when these pronouncements are made? First of all the pressure starts building in all areas about a month before so that MO's newest issue is seen as a revelatory solution. People in the cult are consciously aware of the pressure building and even speculate on what or when new revelations will arrive in their mail box in the form of new MO letters. They interpret the pressure as a spiritual battle MO is going through in order to fight the devil and get God's latest revelations.

So as we go about our busy holiday schedules and activities, let's keep in mind what pressures cult members are under now and keep them in our thoughts and prayers. Even though I am out of COG 3 1/2 years and, in many respects, distant from that experience, I'll never forget their suffering and tension and the haunting loneliness, thinly disguised as "happiness". Rather than relax our efforts of educating the public now, this season is crucial as many vulnerable and idealistic new recruits are "pied pipered" into the group.

Suggestions ←

1. Write that overdue letter to a congressman.
2. Write that overdue testimony of your experiences in the cult and why you left and what you learned from it.
3. Write down any helpful hints you've discovered in your re-entry process that may help another ex-cult member just exiting a cult.
4. Write down your reflections on your personal spiritual search/growth since being FREE of the cult.
5. Write Elizabeth Dole (wife of Sen. Dole-Kansas who organized the Dole cult hearings February, 1979) about your experiences in the cult, and coming out. Her address: Elizabeth Dole, Assistant to the President for Public Liaison, White House, Washington D.C. 20500.

We need to continue sharing these alternatives we have struggled to achieve whether they are small or big breakthroughs for us personally. It could be just the insight that helps another though a tough spot.

Enclosed with this newsletter is a copy of Gary Scharff's taped presentation given in Tampa, in October, 1981, entitled CONVERSION VS. COERCION. I'm recommending this presentation as a very valuable tool to help our spiritual representatives (priests, rabbis, ministers, etc.) and families/friends to understand the process we went through, so they will not mistake it for a real conversion. If you are reading this newsletter reprinted in another CFF-IS newsletter, and did not get a copy of Gary's paper, just send a stamped self-addressed business envelope, and I will send you a copy.

Thanks for the several offers to transcribe other tapes from the Tampa presentations. Hopefully, transcripts will be coming with future newsletters.

Thanks also for your many heartwarming and encouraging letters of support, information and inspiration. Stored within us all are the pieces to a big puzzle, and when we share those insights and information, it gives us all a clearer perspective of the whole picture. An example is a letter sent to me this week concerning COG activities in the very city (foreign) where another family is planning to visit their children in COG. This timely information may make a real difference in someone's eventual freedom from the cult.

It has only been a year since this newsletter began with a mailing list of approximately 30 people. Through word of mouth, and the help of other CFF-IS newsletters re-printing it, I now send it to over 120, and it still gets re-printed in other newsletters, boosting its circulation to many hundreds more. Besides increasing circulation, it has been a useful tool in making many international contacts (private, governmental, public, etc.) who are also concerned about the effects of cults.

So it has been a busy but productive year and much was accomplished, most probably immeasurable at present. Perhaps it seems only a drop in the bucket compared to the immensity of the cult problem, but nevertheless, a drop that wasn't there last year!!

*Season's greetings!  
Gary Hansen*

# Audrey's Experience With Children Of God

By DEBBIE WEBER  
Tribune Staff Writer

**BROOKSVILLE** — Mrs. William Winter picked up the ringing telephone in her Brooksville residence to hear her 22-year-old daughter say, "I'm gone."

And for three months the young woman was gone. To her family. To previous responsibilities. To herself.

Audrey, who said she knows what it is to be a mindless robot, has now returned from the Children of God (COG) sect she left to join. The methods of mind control she feels the cult utilized on her have been reversed by painstaking reasoning.

**THE STORY** she tells is astounding, yet not so extraordinary at a time when an estimated three million persons are members of such cults.

Tall, attractive Audrey was a dance major at the University of South Florida last fall when she received a call from Bernie Stankiewicz, a friend from her high school years in Miami.

Stankiewicz, 20, told her he had recently returned from four years in a Switzerland Children of God cult. Audrey said she found out too late that he was working as a paid recruiter for the organization.

He asked simply to visit her Grand Prix Way apartment to renew their acquaintance. Two hours after he arrived at her apartment that Friday night, she decided to forsake her family, her responsibilities, her material possessions and follow him.

Right into the hands of the Children of God.

"I JUST REMEMBER looking into his eyes. I couldn't take my eyes off of them. When I tried, he would slip a comment into the conversation about how difficult it is for some people to look into another's eyes." Already the mind control was being used, she said.

The conversation was filled with negative comments about society. But the young man assured Audrey that in "the family" things were different. There was hope in the Children of God, he said.

Audrey, then in the process of a traumatic divorce, feels that at another time in her life she might not have been so vulnerable, so receptive.

But then, she has seen firsthand people from all walks of life, from all states of emotion who have been "sucked in" to COG.

**BEFORE THE TWO** headed to the Miami colony, one of two COG locations in Florida, they filled Audrey's small foreign car with her new stereo, a sewing machine, an extensive album collection, various small kitchen appliances, a set of crystal glasses and clothes.

Upon her entry into the cult she signed the possessions over to COG. The items were assessed and besides the few clothes she was allowed to keep, she never saw them again.

In her sudden departure, Audrey left behind an apartment with 11 months remaining on a one-year lease, a partnership with her mother as an instructor of dance at a Brooksville studio and her student status at USF.

It was of little concern to her, since she had been assured by her friend those things were of the world and COG members did not

concern themselves with such trivialities. "It will all be taken care of," he told her.

**AUDREY, IN RETROSPECT,** realizes that at that point she had already slipped out of her conscious mind into a sort of trance under which she operated for the next several months.

Several days later, the two visited the Miami colony. While one of the colony leaders talked with Stankiewicz, another dealt with Audrey.

She was told she would have to condescend to cleaning toilets and might have to die for "the cause." But she was simultaneously assured that if she succeeded in the organization, she would be numbered among God's chosen few.

The black picture painted that night was in sharp contrast to Stankiewicz's rosy description of life in the organization. By then, however, Audrey was determined she would make it.

THE TAMPA TRIBUNE

Saturday, February 7, 1976

Section D

# Children Of God

**AUDREY WAS INSTRUCTED** to return the following morning with her possessions to the Miami residence. There her indoctrination began immediately.

During her waking hours the month she spent in the Miami colony and the two months spent in the Jacksonville colony, Audrey was never left alone for more than a few moments.

In the Miami colony, Audrey was accepted as a member of a family of 12 that included two married couples, a 14-year-old girl, and about six single young men. During her stay there several other members joined and dropped out, unable to take the pressures.

The border colony is considered one of the most important in the Southeast, due to its proximity to potential flight from the United States, said Audrey.

**DAYS THERE BEGAN** with "quiet time", two hours each morning devoted to study of selected scriptures, usually taken out of context and explained to the "babe" by "elders" of the group.

The Bible was used as the basis for the teaching that parents are of the Devil, and to follow God, one must commit all his possessions to COG.

Also an essential part of the daily study were "MO-letters," written by a self-proclaimed prophet and the founder and leader of COG.

Believed by COG members to be a continuation of the Bible for "God's chosen few," there are more than 350 letters in print, dealing with a vast expanse of topics, including sex, politics, famous individuals, the cult's methods of propaganda and manipulation of the press.

**MOSES DAVID**, an alias of David Brandt Berg, 57, the cult leader, accounts for the name of the obscenity-laced literature.

Says Audrey, only the top leaders of COG know the whereabouts of Berg. Formerly of the United States, he has reportedly lived in several foreign countries.

Questions about Berg are squelched within the colonies with the response that knowing where he is located would provoke worship of the leader, rather than God.

Following quiet time and brief chores around the house in which they stayed, the "sheep" received their daily assignments from their "shepherds," a married couple. Then they hitchhiked to their "litnessing" destination, frequently soliciting funds from those with whom they rode.

**LITNESSING**, THE distribution of COG literature in return for proceeds, constituted most of their life six days a week. Sundays they were allowed to pursue entertainment with a small allotment from their week's proceeds.

Wherever she went as a COG member, Audrey concentrated on exuding happiness. "Become all things to all men" was constantly drilled into her, and she had no qualms about confronting anyone on any level.

If a person was into drugs, Audrey would tell them she was on a high that could not be reached with drugs. Devoutly religious people might be approached with a pitch of how great "religion" could really be.

"I was always elated. I felt like I was walking on a cloud as long as I kept in touch with key stimuli — prayer and MO-letters." The way in which she pursued both kept her psyched into a subconscious state, she said.

**AUDREY FEELS** the fallacy of their entire lifestyle was the motivation. The love they were generating to the people on the streets had one purpose. Make money.

Now she believes the money she earned for the cult, went not to aid impoverished countries as she was led to believe, but into the hands of Moses David.

Considered a "shiner" in the two colonies, Audrey on an average day in Miami earned \$15 for 75 pieces of literature. Later in Jacksonville, proceeds from her efforts jumped to an average of \$50 for 200 pieces of literature per day.

Berg, in an MO-letter written last year, boasted of the distribution of more than one million pieces of literature per week by his followers.

**OFTEN PERSONS** fell for other tactics of Audrey and her fellow followers. Several days a week breakfasts and suppers were "provisioned."

The young adults would select a food establishment at a mealtime and relate to the management the lives of self-denial they had elected to lead, so that the starving masses overseas could have the proceeds from their work.

Key words in the provisioning efforts were "missionary," "youth" and "Christian," Audrey said. Most of the time the approach worked and COG members

ate their meals at the expense of others.

"What repulses me," said Audrey, "is that when I was saying those words, I believed them with my heart and soul."

**AT THE END** of the days — litnessing and provisioning complete — colony members returned home to fill out extensive reports. Nightly each member has to specify how much individual litnessing and study of MO-letters had been done, the number of persons and "Holy Ghosts" they had converted to their way of thinking and the money they had collected.

Nights were occupied with lengthy prayer meetings; during which members of the "flock" were in competition with each other to determine who was closest to God.

Members were allowed to share reports of the day's victories during testimonial time preceding the actual prayer. Unfortunate incidents were not discussed, due to a pervasive feeling that anything bad should be kept to oneself or taken to the Lord. Burdens were not to be shared.

**AT THE END** of the prayers that concentrated largely on requests to Jesus, Audrey opened her eyes to a world of which she felt she was not a part. "I always felt like I was outside myself and not really there," she explained.

The "sheep" were then allowed 30 minutes of free time before the 11 p.m. lights out. During that time, there were showers to be taken and letters to be written to "Kings and Queens," prospective financial supporters and wayward members of the outside world. And there were always extra MO-letters to be studied.

Some of the members were forced to go for days without baths due to the rigid scheduling. But to complain would have been considered a sign of impenitence.

Only the shepherd and shepherdess were allowed to remain up after the bedtime curfew. Their time was spent planning litnessing assignments for the next day and discussing the operation of the colony on the meager 16 per cent of the members' earnings they were allowed to retain within the colony.

**SATURDAY NIGHTS**, the colonies staged parties to attract new members and donors. Music, light refreshments and soft drinks were provided.

About an hour into the party, the "flock" began presenting light-hearted skits. Gradually the drama would turn to heavier subjects.

The final skit usually dealt with a teen-age boy unable to find hap-

piness through drugs, money, church or any other means except the Children of God. Interested persons would usually remain to talk to COG members, sometimes deciding they too, wanted to find happiness through the sect.

To Audrey's knowledge, drugs were not used in the two colonies.

Pre-marital sex was prohibited, a rule she feels was adhered to at the two colonies. A 1974 report by Louis J. Lefkowitz, attorney general of New York state, however, details instances of rape reported within the COG organization.

**DISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS** were rare in the Florida colonies, Audrey said. When they arose, they were handled discretely by the leaders.

Self expression was denied, unless it was intended to fortify the cult in some way.

Audrey was suddenly transferred to the Jacksonville colony soon after a visit by her brother, Bob, to the Miami colony.

Though her lifestyle in the second colony was much the same, she was afforded more privacy and accommodations bordering on luxury when the regional leader stationed there gave up his room for her use.

Tempe Tribune  
2/7/76 #5



Dr. William Winter

*Tribune photos by Mitch Kezar*



Audrey Winter



Mrs. Winter

#2

Temp. Tribune  
2/7/16

**THE JACKSONVILLE FLOCK** was comprised of several married couples, about six single men and Audrey. As in the Miami colony, she was struck with the high level of intelligence of most of the members.

Audrey was led to believe through innuendos that she was being groomed for marriage to the regional leader, "Obad." For the new convert who looked to a life as a COG member, the thought was appealing. Marrying a regional leader implied less litigating responsibilities and greater status.

Already the "babe" of the group was tiring in her strenuous round of daily activities. The regimentation, the patterned existence, dashing from car to car at busy intersections to sell literature was taking its toll.

Rejections by pedestrians and motorists of Audrey's efforts to change the world only served to reinforce the COG thinking that "the world is a pit."

**AUDREY COMPLAINED** little, though, and sincerely tried to sacrifice her doubts for the sake of COG. The apparent strength she had gained and her willingness to accept without question are ironically largely responsible for her freedom from the cult.

Coupled with indications from her parents — considered potential donors by the colony — that they might come around to COG values, the factors were the reason she was allowed to visit her parents last Christmas, unaccompanied by an elder.

Except for her return with a COG elder to Brooksville one November afternoon to finalize her divorce, it would be her first trip home.

Letters from her parents concealed the plot they were laying to assure her return to reality. Telephone conversations between the parents and daughter were kept light.

**ARMED WITH A** number of MO-letters and other COG literature, and fortified by the influence of other colony members, Audrey returned to Brooksville last Christmas afternoon.

The family celebrated a low-keyed Christmas.

The following day, Dr. and Mrs. Winter and Audrey traveled to nearby New Port Richey to shop. Unknown to the daughter, the trip was used as a decoy in an intricate plan that might have dictated her sudden departure to a northern city.

Encouraged by Dr. Winter, both mother and daughter curiously purchased heavy winter coats that warm Florida afternoon.

Returning from New Port Richey, the family arrived within minutes of Audrey's brother, Bob, who had just returned from the Tampa International Airport with a black, middle-aged man.

**AUDREY STEPPED** from the car, assuming the man must be a friend of her parents. He had only to give Audrey a revolutionary handshake used in the cult, and mention the COG yoke she was wearing as a necklace before she realized his identity.

There standing before her was Ted Patrick, the one she had been taught as a COG member to fear the most. Devil in the flesh . . . Black Satan . . . Black Lightning. The thoughts tore through her mind.

"I literally thought I was going to die. I could not believe my parents had done this to me," said Audrey.

She resisted the temptation to run, knowing that she would be restrained by her father, brother or Patrick.

Instead she fled to a bedroom in the residence and began to pray she would not be harmed, that her COG influence would not be destroyed. It was difficult to disre-

gard the tales about Patrick she had heard in the cult.

**CONFUSION WAS** the matter of the moment as her mother began crying hysterically, her father calmly told her he felt Patrick's visit was God's will, and her brother attempted to reason her out of her fear.

Audrey finally submitted to their pleas and was soon seated in the family den. There, surrounded by her family, she listened for four hours as Patrick unraveled some of the mysteries about the controversial cult.

She had no appropriate responses for his probing questions about their lifestyle. Scripture verses were seen in a completely different light when she was requested to read them in context.

Patrick played tape recordings about purpose in life and revealed significant information about Berg's life. Audrey listened.

**DAZED BY THE** entire situation, Audrey felt at one time her mind was incapable of formulating thoughts. Then slowly objects around her began to solidify.

"For the first time it was different than the stoned, high feeling I had for three months. I just remember things began to appear as they used to be.

"I realized I didn't have to live my life as I had been. I was disillusioned and struck by the absurdity of it all."

Some time that evening, Audrey signed a statement that she had been psychologically attracted by COG, that her free will was impaired and requesting that if at any future time she is "kidnapped" psychologically or physically by a sect or cult, she be physically removed from it.

**AUDREY SLEPT** between her parents, with Patrick stationed at the front door to prevent her escape that night. The precaution is standard procedure for the seasoned deprogrammer.

The next day, the Winters drove Patrick to the Tampa International Airport where he embarked again on his continuous cycle of "deprogramming."

Within several hours of his departure, 20-year-old Julie Kimes, a deprogrammed former COG member, flew in to stay with the family overnight. She and Audrey then left for the Kimes' Pittsburgh home, where under the influence of one who had been through a similar experience, Audrey simply learned to live again.

"We just did the normal things persons our age do. It was so nice to be able to choose which clothes to wear and how to spend my days," she said.

**ALSO A VITAL** part of her rehabilitation was socialization with her peer group. For one who had not been allowed to show emotion for three months, the experiences were as new.

Audrey has since given a great deal of thought and research to the subject of religious cults.

Based on her experience, she believes they are an extension of communistic reasoning. "I firmly believe I lived communism for three months," she said.

She is convinced the youth entrapped by the cults are caring individuals, concerned about society and the world. "I just wish I could do something about those kids that are still in it, and don't even realize what is going on," she said.

**BACK IN BROOKSVILLE** now and teaching part-time in her mother's dance studio, she is contemplating her future. She intends to return to college eventually, but first plans to assist Patrick in his rehabilitation efforts, perhaps dealing with someone like herself who has been gone for a while.

"I want to understand it. I want to fight it. That is the best cause I can think of," she said.

MAY 9, 1983

David Berg came out with new letters recently, documenting (in lengthy detail - of course) his "Confession of an Alcoholic", and his physical ailment of the last four years or so, of a growth on his esophagus which causes him to choke easily and not be able to swallow chunky food. He credits this affliction to "not swallowing God's heavy meat, by giving it out in the form of MO letters". In other words, he has not been giving these serious warnings and revelations from God, and God has been on his case with the affliction as a result. So once he decided to go ahead and give some of these "strong meat" revelations, of course, he started feeling better and has less trouble eating, choking, etc.

It's fairly simple to see his logic - he almost says it in so many words in the letter. The members wouldn't want him to choke and die, now would they?! So therefore, they are going to have to steel themselves for some pretty strong revelations. What a transparent set-up! And what follows next but RED TERROR, a letter which I have not seen yet, but have heard from other sources, is a warning that the U.S. and Russian are going to be destroyed soon by nuclear holocaust and all COG/FOL members (they now call themselves "independent missionaries", or "The Group", or "Music With Meaning", or nothing at all, but completely disavow any connection with the COG as a group) should vacate the U.S. within three months (I estimate before the end of July or earlier). It's easy to see this kind of panic hysteria psychology that he is using as he did with "The Great Escape" in the summer of '72 and with "Kohoutek" December-January, 1973-74 - now that we are out! Those particular proclamations brought back a lot of walk-out people who had never figured out they were under mind-control, and were easily keyed back in by resuming the reading of the MO letters.

There are several hundred members along the West Coast, about 200 in Vancouver area, lots in Miami, and of course, Texas has seen many come through the Mexican borders. Escort service work is now their main form of income, because it is so lucrative, and faster than selling MO letters which is getting more difficult, anyway. In fact, one COG/FOL woman was recently arrested in Miami for prostitution, but that hardly seems to daunt them anymore - she just moved on, to another city.

The court case in Vancouver-Victoria B.C. involving several children separated from their parents after they talked about the sexual activities they are involved in, has come to a compromise agreement. It has been determined that there is some risk to the children, and therefore, the parents have had to agree to a 6 month re-parenting course, after which there will be a re-assessment in court. Their passports have been rescinded until then, and it will be interesting to see how they react when they read "Red Terror", even though they claim not to be members anymore. If they really weren't members anymore, why are they practicing the MO letters including the explicit sexual practices?

#### INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION

July 1-4 (Friday-Monday) - Cleveland, Ohio. All former members invited to join us for a weekend get-together - very informal - in/around Cleveland. So far, people are planning to come from as far away as Minnesota, Michigan, Maryland, Montreal, Texas, etc. Bring your children. Camping out, but indoor facilities will be available. For more information, contact Judd and Marsha McKendry (ex-COG/FOL), P.O. Box 694, North Olmsted, OH 44070. (Don't put ex-COG on the envelope, please), or Katny Hansen, P.O. Box 8822, Minneapolis, MN 55408.

# Taxi! Hailing the drama of a lifetime

PHILLIP ADAMS

AS WELL AS Egyptian Mummy cases, hate mail and book matches, I collect taxi drivers. After a few minutes in the killing jar of memory, they are ready to be pinned for display with outstretched arms. The most extraordinary people drive cabs; among my rarer specimens, a university professor in Prague sacked by the Stalinists... a massive KGB goon filling in the front seats of a tourist taxi in Moscow... a kamikaze pilot hurtling through red lights and back alleys of Tokyo... an old guy in New York brandishing what he claimed to be a blood-stained spanner... and, last week, the tormented giant who drove me down the coast to Mascot.

In Australia, as elsewhere, the most exotic species come out at night. It is then you find yourself being driven by drug-crazed ratbags or by some sullen brute who refuses to turn down the Gregorian Chant of his radio despatcher... or an impassioned Palestinian with his story of dispossession in Jerusalem, raging against the Israelis on the Tullamarine freeway.

Given the local habit of sitting in the front seat with the driver (politicians do the same in their Commonwealth cars so as to advertise their commitment to democracy) a taxi trip imposes a strange intimacy, particularly at night, and most men want to tell their stories.

Last week an emergency had me driving down the coast of New South Wales to Sydney to catch a last flight to Melbourne. And the young man at the wheel, the whole 6 ft. 5 in. of him, never stopped talking. It was a remarkable performance from someone whose marriage had just broken up "because I couldn't communicate with my wife."

"I was about 20 when I arrived in Sydney from the bush. I remember wandering around feeling so bloody lonely. After a week or so I was getting desperate when a couple of people walked up to me in the street, all smiles. They were very nice and sympathetic, and they took me to a flat in Newtown where there were more of them. They put their arms around me, said they loved me and that I was welcome to stay.

"And I did, for a couple of years. They were the Children of God, followers of Moses David. Thirty of us living in a one-roomed flat at Newtown. Six people sleeping in the front hall, a few in the bathroom, a couple in the kitchen and about 20 on mattresses on the floor and bunks against the walls.

"Because I'd just joined, I was called a Babe (a 6 ft. 5 in. Babe!) and the couple who ran the place were called Shepherds. Occasionally we would be visited by a bishop for the region, or an archbishop would come down from South-East Asia. We lived in that pig sty and sent all our money back to Moses David in America. We thought the money was being used to spread the word of God.

"Moses David used to be called David Brand Berg. I think it comes from Brandenberg. Anyway, his parents were Jews and he became a Christian pastor. But he said he was too radical for the Christian church, so he started a church of his own. About that time there was a comet — he said it was a sign. Anyway, he became very anti-semitic and said that the Jews were not the chosen people at all. We were the chosen people, the Children of God.

"It was the Cogs, that's what we called ourselves, who would go into the wilderness when Moses told us to. Who would go up into Heaven. The Jews were the Antichrist who would destroy all the Bibles, so we had to memorise a lot of things. Not only things from the Bible but Moquotes. They're the various things he said.

"He started out with Jim Jones in San Francisco. The two of them were close friends. But they went their different ways, Moses David saying that he was the End-time prophet that's talked about in the Book of David and in Revelations. He believed that America was the Whore that had to be destroyed by nuclear weapons, and that Gadaffi was God's instrument. He was very thick with Gadaffi for a while. Although later on he prophesised that Gadaffi would also become the Antichrist. I never really understood all that.

"I was very innocent then. There was a lot of sex going on but I didn't realise it. Anyway, I was a

bit busy brainwashing myself. Because that's what you do, you brainwash yourself. I was memorising all my Moquotes and stuff. Even when you went down the dunny someone would be talking to you about Moses David under the door. It was relentless. And you weren't allowed to listen to the radio, television or read anything else. So all you knew was what the Cogs believed. And everyone was so sincere. They really believed they were doing God's work.

"It was strange though, how mixed up you became. On the one hand, you felt special because you belonged to the chosen people. On the other, you felt less than dirt, because they were always putting you down. If you wanted to question something or argue about a belief, you were told not to think for yourself and just to memorise things.

"And I never got promoted because I didn't have the gift of the gab. The people who could talk a lot and smile a lot became Shepherds, not me. That's why I left for the first time and went to Queensland.

"No, they didn't attempt to stop me. It wasn't like some of the cults where you are threatened. If you left you just became Satan, and were described as terrible and evil. Personally I couldn't understand — how someone you had loved became a monster as soon as they left the group. Anyway, I did leave for a while and look my ordi-

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA  
"AGE" JULY 10, 1982



nary name again. Didn't I tell you? We all had names from the Bible. Mine was Zacharia.

"But I couldn't make it out in the world so after a while I drifted back. And they took me back to the commune and I lay on the pillows with some of the girls and we screwed each other. I now began to realise how much sex was used by Cogs. Do you know about the Hookers for Christ? Moses had the girls organised in brothels and they'd screw wealthy businessmen, try to get them emotionally involved. They would play them songs on the guitar. No, they didn't want them to join. But they wanted them to be financial supporters. It was the major source of income for Cog.

"It was about then that I met my wife, Joan. She was from Los Angeles and had been thinking of joining the group but she wasn't quite sure. Anyway, she came to the commune one night and we lay on the floor together and screwed. We were married a few weeks later and then had the first of our kids. Yeah, there are a lot of kids around the commune who are growing up as Children of God — they have never known anything else.

"One of my closest friends had been a Cog since he was 14 and he has got no hope of escaping, of getting away. Where would he go? What could he possibly do? Well, you can imagine how it will be with kids who are born into the communes.

"Joan and I were happy for a while. But then we started hearing about Moses David's wealth. When I went back to the commune at night I felt like a dog returning to its vomit. And he was living in luxury while we lived like pigs. It didn't seem right. Jet planes and mansions.

"Then something terrible happened with a close friend of ours who was kicked out of the commune. He gassed himself in his car. Once again I decided to leave and talked Joan into coming with me. I got very sick with the tension and anxiety. Because I find it hard to express emotions I get all knotted up inside and get terrible pains in my guts. I've been in hospital a lot having operations. Joan got a job writing for a pornographic magazine. She had always wanted to be a journalist. She reckons that porn puts women down and she was writing porn that didn't. At least, that's what she believed.

"The marriage got into terrible trouble. I was sick a lot of the time and then she had to have some lumps taken from her breast. I was terribly worried about her but didn't know what to say. And because I didn't say anything, she thought that I didn't care. When she finally left me a year ago, she was full of bitterness. She said she didn't think I loved her at all. Well, I loved her very much, but didn't know what to say. I couldn't find the words.

"It was different with the kids. I could talk to them and do things for them. When they were babies I used to bath them and change their nappies and all that. I'm worried about the children because I only see them on Sundays. I've got to find \$60 a week for maintenance and there's very few jobs up here on the coast.

"So I scrounge a bit of work by mowing lawns and doing odd jobs and driving the cab three nights a week. But it costs me \$50 in petrol just to get down to see them. So I'm falling further and further into debt which makes my guts ache all the more. When the kids come up to see me, it's terrible. They are so desperate for affection that they won't let me go. If I climb into the shower they hang on to my legs.

"I'm completely out of Cog now. Play the Irish drums in a bush-band. That's about the only relaxation I get. When I was with Children of God I played in a band called The Wild Wind, named after the spirit that David Moses talks to. My music is the only thing that relaxes me. When I'm feeling tense and knotted up I'll go out and play the drums under the stars. And the band I play with are marvellous blokes, even if they don't believe in God. I think I still believe in God, but not the way Moses David wanted me to. If they don't believe in God, what's that matter? They're still good blokes.

"More than anything in the world I want to get back with Joan and the kids. I'd get a flat with separate bedrooms, just to be with them. But she still hates me so much. Do you think I could try and write to her about it? Tell her how I feel? I can never find the words when I am with her, but perhaps I could write everything down. It's a year ago next week that she left me.

"I'm not sure I could stand the tension of Sydney. Just thinking about it now is giving me pains in the guts. I'd be better off with a bit of land. I've got a couple of angora goats and if I could get a small block I'd plant a herb garden.

"Moses David? The last I heard he was kicked out of America. Living somewhere in the Mediterranean. And he changed the name of the organisation. It's not the Children of God anymore. It's The Family of Love."

COURTESY OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD COMMUNE

## Religion

### Tracking the Children of God

*Will the real Moses please come down from the mountain?*

Even in the contemporary profusion of exotic religious cults, the Children of God stand out as, well, exotic. Once the most zealous of America's Jesus People, they used to disrupt other church services and denounce public schools, capitalism and what they considered the System. About 3½ years ago, inspired by a belief that the Comet Kohoutek heralded the destruction of America and the onset of the End Times, they began closing most of their 100 "colonies" and drifted off to Europe.

Over the years they have evolved into a brigade of international nomads, embracing a new religion proclaimed in hundreds of rambling "Mo Letters" from their founder and prophet, "Moses David" (né David Brandt Berg), 58. These Mo Letters have, among other things, encouraged the female Children of God to become "Happy Hookers for Jesus."

Mo lives in secrecy, whereabouts unknown, seen only by a handful of his apostles. The mysteries of Mo have escalated with the distribution of a document purporting to be the latest Mo Letter and titled "God Bless You—And: Good-Bye!" In the letter, Mo confesses that he has been a "false prophet" who passed off his own thoughts as divinely inspired and "led you by your faith in Jesus into the darkness of my mind." The movement, he announces, "has come to an end now and forever." Far from disbanding, however, the Children are arguing that the letter is a fraud.

Since Moses David refuses to be interviewed, it is hard to know for sure what is going on within the organization. Last week, however, TIME was given a tape-recorded message from "the real Moses David" that called the resignation letter "nothing but a completely fraudulent and lying forgery, rather shabbily concocted by some crackpot who is apparently partially demented." It only shows, the real Moses David continued, "what slimy stinking depths our enemies do not hesitate to slither to try to stop us, including criminal acts of kidnaping, involuntary incarceration, mental and physical torture and even murder!"\* Despite resemblances to earlier letters, Moses David argues, rather convincingly, that details of the language and format in the resignation letter prove it to be a hoax.

\* Unhappy parents of some of the Children of God have formed organizations to combat the cult and have called in help from various professional "deprogrammers." The Children blame unspecified "enemies" for the death of at least one disciple, whose nude body, with several internal organs crushed, was found last year at a medieval fortress in Belgium. Opponents suspect the sect itself, and police have never solved the case. Moses David's son Paul died under similar circumstances in Switzerland in 1973.

The "real Mo" tape was released by Barbara Canevaro, 23, a.k.a. Queen Rachel, who says she is the prophet's "official representative" and "authorized to speak for him in all matters." She is also the No. 2 leader and Berg's designated successor. A tall and glamorous figure with waistlong chestnut hair, Queen Rachel has been with the Children since they began in 1968. At one point she



Queen Rachel

lived with a disciple named Samson and bore him a son when she was 16 years old, but denies claims by defectors that she cohabited with Moses David for a couple of years. In 1973 she married another Mo disciple named Emanuele Canevaro, 35, who also happened to be the Italian Duke of Zoagli and Castelvari. The duke has welcomed the Children to Poggiosecco, his family's idyllic farm and wine-producing estate near Florence. Police raided the farm headquarters two years ago but found no evidence of wrongdoing. Indeed, neighbors in the nearby village of Grassina described the Children to a TIME correspondent as unfailingly well behaved and polite.

According to the mass-circulation German magazine *Stern*, however, the estate has a school where the Children train good-looking disciples in the arts of se-

duction. Such allegations are amply corroborated by the Mo Letters, which advocate not only Mo's version of the *Playboy* philosophy but the ancient practice of religious prostitution. In a 1974 epistle called "God's Love Slave!" for example, Moses describes how he gave his wife "Maria" to numerous men and then questioned her afterward to enjoy a "detailed description" of the action.

*Stern* and Spain's *Interviú* also reported that Berg resided in the Canary Islands until recently and appeared every night at a bar in Puerto de la Cruz with a harem of girls looking for pickups. The *Stern* report said he fled to Libya earlier this year, when an investigating judge summoned him for questioning.

Asked about all this, the Duchess Canevaro denied the magazines' reports but said: "There is nothing wrong with a sexy conversion. We believe sex is a human necessity, and in certain cases we may go to bed with someone to show people God's love." But "this is the exception rather than the rule," she added. As to the question of whether the Children engage in sex to raise money, the Duchess stoutly denied it. "No one has ever charged one penny for this and never will," she declared. (The Children support themselves by begging in the streets and selling literature and records.)

So far Children of God leaders have had no serious trouble with the law. And if the elusive Mo's claims are to be believed, his sect is indeed prospering. He claims to have 8,000 missionaries at work in 80 countries and even to have made 2 million conversions. That is "the most explosive growth of a brand-new religious movement in history," says Mo.



Elusive Cult Leader Moses David and friends during Canary Islands sojourn. Be "Happy Hookers for Jesus," the prophet told female followers.

# STANDARD

SPECIAL  REPORT

by  
Tim Hamlett, Tsang Shuk-wa, Annie Lam, Kathy Chan

## Flings with cult that sour...

MISS L's escape from the Children of God unmasked its activities in the territory, leading to the sect's flight to Macau.

She first joined the sect in October last year after several encounters with a foreign couple whom she had met in the canteen of the university a few months before.

She was invited to a religious gathering hosted by the couple the first time they met, but she declined the invitation as she was too busy.

She met the couple again in a religious gathering shortly after she had graduated and this time she was impressed by their faith.

She then decided to join their meetings regularly in order to be helped spiritually by their dedication to religion.

She was later told that the gatherings were held in different family units spread over different parts of the territory. They called it the Local Area Fellowship.

The rituals carried out in the fellowship were similar to those in bona fide religious institutions, she said, and that made her believe in their faithfulness to the gospels. Yet she was never told the name of the church she was joining.

After some time, she was persuaded to live with the holy families and dedicate her time to the church's work, including giving out preaching pamphlets in the street and translating literature from English to Chinese, to help extend the church to China.

A couple of members of the church then started introducing her to the MO letters, the bible of the sect written by their Father David.

Life in the sect's families followed a fixed routine, she said, including breakfast at eight, prayers at nine, housework at noon, and various religious indoctrination activities in the evenings.

Her family objected to her joining the sect and moving out to live with the "holy family".

When the sect finally got her moved out from her home permanently, her family persisted in its efforts to rescue her.



CASSETTES and publications sold by the Children of the God sect.

Her sister had found receipts issued by escort agencies and some contraceptive devices in the handbag of a female church fellow of Miss L and so they became more suspicious of the sect.

However, Miss L would not consider the evidence shown by her sister, as her family members had already been labelled as devils by the members of her fellowship.

The family of Miss L followed her to her new home with the sect and reported the case to the police. But Miss L was released shortly after being arrested by the police. After the incident, Miss L was moved by the sect from the Mid-Levels flat to Shatin.

In December, she was taken to a police station by a member of the sect because her family had reported her missing to the police.

The case was taken over by a serious crime unit and after giving a statement in the police station, the girl was taken home by force by her parents.

The police later searched the sect's dwellings in the Mid-Levels, with the aid of information supplied by the victim. Startled sect members hastily disposed of MO letters and other documents.

Miss L's family invited Miss Christine Howorth of the Council On Mind Abuse from Canada to tell their daughter about the horrible side of the religion she believed in.

Miss Howorth, who was once a member of the sect, was able to point out the sect's heresy and finally succeeded in converting the victim.

Miss L was lucky in that she was too new to the sect to do flirty-fishing, and she said the job she was required to do for them was to sell the pamphlets.

Miss L later helped to rescue other members of the same sect. One of them was John, a matriculation student living in Cheungshawan.

Miss L rescued him indirectly by informing his family about his relationship with the sect. John's family then rang him up in the sect's Shatin haven and asked him back for an occasional dinner.

John was locked up by his family when he got home, and two "brothers" of the sect who escorted him home made a fuss trying to get him out. The row attracted the attention

of the police and the two sect members were questioned about the sect on the spot.

One of the sect members was a young local designer who eventually extricated himself from the sect, and the other was an Australian boy who had been with the sect for seven years.

As the secrets of the sect became known to the authorities, the group here, composed of several families, stopped its activities and prepared a massive retreat.

Most of the members were sent to countries in Southeast Asia. The designer was sent to the Macau base to take up a designing job there.

But he said one of the sect's families, living in Shatin, had not joined the general exodus and was still in Hongkong. He said the family was led by a woman called Morning Star and had been missed out by the police raids.

The designer arrived in Macau in January this year but he defected three months later when he found that the sect was not offering him the spiritual satisfaction he sought.

He joined the sect in October last year after several enthusiastic attempts by a girl to invite him to the sect's gatherings.

He was attracted to the sect at first because of its theory of not believing in the church but believing in God.

After he moved in to live with the sect's Shatin family, which was in fact composed of three original families, he experienced the routine daily chores of the family's life.

The strict discipline upheld by the family and the lack of privacy in the "home" were two other reasons that drove him away, he told *The Standard*.

They were not allowed to bolt the bathroom door when they were inside, he said.

The frequent running away from the surveillance of the local authorities, and another similar incident in Macau, made him suspicious of the cult's legitimacy.

He was living with a foreign couple in Macau, not with Jonathan Berg's family. The family was dissolved after a search by the Macau authorities and the members moved out to live in a hotel.

When he read a private note written by his roommate, also his instructor on MO letters, which stated "if you are not obedient to orders, you are no longer to stay in the family", he eventually decided to quit the sect secretly.

It was the sect's norm to take the suggestions made by the top leader as orders, he said.

After he left the cult, he found himself more enlightened about religion and more optimistic about life than before he joined.

He said he had not come across the idea of flirty-fishing while living with the family. The only occasion when he had talked about sex in the family was in a private discussion with a 12-year-old boy who took sex casually.

While he was with the family in Hongkong before the evacuation, he had followed a parent of a family on recruitment missions to the Chinese University of Hongkong.

The family head did not identify himself as a missionary to the students there but just introduced himself as someone working in a musical institute.

He sold music tapes to the students and took down their telephone numbers for further contact for religious gatherings.

# 'Banished' sect is making comeback

THE Children of God, a notorious sect mingling religion with prostitution, is infiltrating Hongkong again after a temporary retreat to nearby territories.

The evacuation was forced by the Hongkong authorities at the beginning of this year, after complaints about the sect's activities by the family of an escaped member — a female undergraduate.

The police, tipped off by the defected member, searched more than 10 apartments in Shatin and the Mid-Levels. Foreign sect members, except those with UK passports, were black-listed as undesirable.

They were ordered to leave the territory and moved to nearby countries, most going to Macau and some to Japan or Southeast Asia.

Macau, which has been the Far Eastern base of the sect since 1981, is the present refuge of most members.

The sect moved from Hongkong because of the exposure of its activities by a defected

couple in the widely-publicised *Don and Marie* case.

Its work in Hongkong has continued since then, but the tainted name of the sect is no longer used. They operate as a group of religious people without a specific name to continue their recruitment.

The family of the sect headed by Jonathan Berg, the son of the founder, lives at Hac Sa Beach in Coloane Island, Macau, sources in the Portuguese colony said.

The core family comprises 10 adults and 10 children. All the adults are foreigners, while the children are Eurasians.

The sect is keeping a low profile in Macau, according to one source.

It was known that about 100 to 150 Macau residents knew the Berg family but whether they were local recruits of the sect was not known, the source said.

The family supports itself mainly by rearing cattle and running a 15-minute-daily musical programme on the radio. Although the children's choir, the Ho Family Singers, which used to be a major breadwinner of the sect, still exists, its importance has been reduced with fewer public concerts held to raise money.

The child singers can nonetheless obtain donations by singing at private parties. Publication of the sect's booklets, which had been another way of making money, has

CHILDREN OF GOD: A SECT

ceased.

The only time the Berg family has showed up in public in the Portuguese colony was on the Festival of St John the Baptist, last June.

The Macau government and residents know of the existence of the sect from media reports. No action has been taken against them as the members have done nothing against the law.

However, the increasing distribution of suspicious posters and cassettes in Hongkong recently indicates that they have resumed efforts to find converts in the colony.

The local Concern Group for Religious Sects is aware of posters advertising guitar-playing lessons conducted by foreigners.

These posters, put up in busy areas of Wanchai and Causeway Bay, have also shown pictures of the instructors and members.

The foreign instructors will hang around the poster sites to sell cassettes labelled *It's the Music*.

The musical tapes the Children of God gave to their members had the same name and the same labels.

The only difference between the recently distributed tapes and the old ones is the omission of a correspondence address.

It was stated on the covers of the old cassettes that more information could be obtained by writing to Miss Li — Box 40326, Tsimshatsui P.O.

Meanwhile, a new breed of "missionaries" has been preaching outside the University of Hongkong and the Hongkong Polytechnic recently.

The Concern Group for Religious Sects has noticed the activities of the preachers

and warned students facing the ordeal of examinations to beware the sensational "gospels" preached by the sects.

Local membership of the Children of God has increased from 120 before evacuation to 200 now, a former member said, quoting data from a newsletter circulated among the sect's members.

The defector, who is a designer and has stayed with the family for seven months, joined the Berg family in moving to Macau during the mass evacuation. He came back to Hongkong two months ago when he became aware of the incredibility of the sect's beliefs.

Also in the newsletter, he said, was a picture of Jonathan Berg, the son of the founder of the sect, with members in Shanghai.

It indicated that the sect has infiltrated into the mainland with Shanghai as the main base. Membership there had increased from 70 last November to over 200 now, according to the newsletter.

Mrs Teresa Lam, the coordinator of Caritas Group and Community Work Services, said the rising figure indicated that the cult was actively entering the China market.

She said it was not difficult to get into China now under the mainland's open door policy.

The sect's foreign members could gain easy access to people in the mainland by using the pretext of cultural exchange. They could also preach to youths there through teaching them foreign languages.

The bibles and booklets of the sect were sent to its mainland disciples through Chinese businessmen.

In view of the increasing influence of the sect in the mainland, the local Concern Group for Religious Sects informally told visitors from China here on a visit in March about the sect's activities in Hongkong and Macau.

The visiting groups had not yet heard anything about

the Children of God in the mainland.

The sect did not always appear as the Children of God. It used different names, like the Family of Love or the International Missionary Fund, to mask its appeals for donations.

"It (the sect) is like a chameleon, changing its name and colour to avoid being identified, which might stop the flow of voluntary donations," said the Reverend Ferdinand Lok of the Hongkong Centre Council of Catholic Laity.

It appeals mostly to young people who are in the transition between adolescence and adulthood and have some sort of emotional or psychological problem.

The members will be asked to turn over all their possessions to the sect and sell publications of the sect to earn money.

Female members are encouraged to "flirty-fish", that is to use sex to recruit new members and raise cash for the movement.

This religious prostitution has made the sect notorious.

A Korean female, Mary d'Angina, who escaped from the sect with her husband Don four years ago, said women members of the sect had to go out with potential male recruits met through escort agencies or picked up in hotel bars.

The money made by sleeping with the recruits was sent to Zurich to Father David, the founder of the sect.

David Berg, known to the sect members as Moses David or MO, organised the sect in 1968 in California. It branched out to other states in the US, Europe, the Middle East, and in 1978 extended to Southeast Asia with 12 members in Hongkong.

Up to last year, the sect had been established in 70 countries with some 10,000 members. It had set up 12 homes in Hongkong.

The bible of the sect is letters written by Moses David — the MO letters.

## Christians fear sex sect seducing Chinese youth

By C.K. LAU

There are mounting fears that the Children of God sect is active in China at a time when Beijing is relaxing controls on religion.

There are fears too that the sect is staging a revival in Hongkong following the expulsion of many of its members earlier this year.

Foreign members of the sect are believed to have entered the mainland as English teachers and are recruiting young Chinese eager to mix with Westerners.

Local Christians claim the sect — which uses sex to gain converts — will present a distorted picture of Christianity to the Chinese.

Father Ferdinand Lok, of the Concerned Group for Religious Sects, said his organisation has information that the sect is active in some cities on the mainland.

A former Children of God adherent claimed the sect attracted about 500 Chinese youths to a meeting in Shanghai last year.

A picture published in an issue of the sect's internal publication purportedly showed the eldest son of David Moses, the sect's founder, holding the service.

Although it was difficult to say whether the picture was genuine, the size of the crowd at the Shanghai service warranted concern, he said.

Although there was no hard evidence to point the finger at anyone, he said it was possible some sect members were teaching at Chinese colleges or universities.

In March, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Hongkong, the Most Rev John Baptist Wu, visited China to forge closer ties with Chinese churches.

Fr Lok said as far as he knew Bishop Wu had not raised the question of the "love sect" with Chinese religious leaders during his visit.

The Concerned Group for Religious Sects was formed by the Hongkong Council of Catholic Laity, Hongkong Catholic Youth Council and the Caritas Group and Community Work Services and Family Services.

It seeks to gather information on the activities of brainwashing religious cults and to help victims escape their control.

Fr Lok said there was an indication that



Fr Lok — indication the Children of God was staging a revival in Hongkong.

Children of God was staging a revival in Hongkong.

Cassette tapes similar to those formerly sold by the cult are being sold again on the streets, he said.

Fr Lok said he suspected that a new group of foreign members of the sect had come to Hongkong to replace those expelled.

He warned the public that the sect's usual approach was to distribute pamphlets, sell cassettes and offer to teach the guitar or give English lessons.

The cult's women engage in what is known as "flirty-fishing" — using sex to recruit new members and working as prostitutes to support the sect.

The sect is known to use other names — the Family of Love and International Missionary Fund — to avoid detection, he said.

## F.A.I.R. (Family, Action, Information, Rescue) Information Sheet

### Leader:

David Berg, also known as Moses Berg, Moses David, Mo and recently Father David.

### History:

Berg's parents were travelling evangelists in America. He followed in their footsteps, and claims to have received special revelations from the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah. He became disillusioned with institutionalised religion and started work among Hippies. Impressed by the Jesus Movement, he founded the 'Children of God' in 1968, and a year later the group became a structured organisation with a pseudo-clerical hierarchy.

Giving the impression of a revivalist Evangelical youth group, they were welcomed by many on arrival in Britain (1971). Opinions soon changed and the group dispersed in 1973 but resurfaced 3 years later under the name 'Family of Love'. The present trend is to leave Europe and the USA in favour of South America where Berg expects shelter from a possible World War III.

### Teaching:

This includes occultist beliefs, such as astrology and spiritism. For example, Berg claims to have received inspiration from a Gipsy king 'Ibrahim' and other departed spirits. But the Bible (Authorised Version of King James (1611) only) is the basis of FOL teaching, with a special emphasis on the apocalyptic last days and the imminent return of Christ. Only the 'Children of God' (in contrast to the 'Children of Man') can escape the consequent destruction. 'Moses' Berg will lead them out of the wilderness. The doomed 'satanic system' including all Establishment institutions (governments, churches, schools, mainstream medicine) must be avoided. MO-letters, regular circulars written by Berg in biblical style, with numbered verses, are placed on the same level (if not higher) as Scripture of which they are said to offer true interpretation. MO-letters are graded for general public, leaders or 'members only'. Some of the latter contain instructions on the controversial practice of 'Flirty Fishing' (gaining converts by sexual seduction) and the role of group and child sex within the movement.

### Life Style:

In the early years members lived in 'colonies' of about 12 persons under very strict rules which governed every aspect of their lives. But the present trend is for small family units with much greater freedom.

On entering the movement, converts are given a new name, usually of biblical origin. They surrender all possessions including money, and a proportion of all 'earnings' goes to Headquarters. They progress from 'Babes' to fully committed members in a very short time. The frequent change of 'Mission fields' creates a nomadic life style and makes members hard to trace.

Though there are married couples in the movement, the emphasis is on 'shared sex'. Members are encouraged to satisfy anybody's sexual needs as an expression of love. Because contraception is discouraged, the number of children born into the movement is increased, and in view of the promiscuity their parentage is not always easy to establish. There is a high incidence of venereal disease.

### Main Activities:

Apart from caring for the homes and the entertainment of new contacts, much of a member's day is taken up by reading and memorising Scripture passages and MO-letters. But the main activity is 'litnessing' (derived from 'literature and witnessing'). This consists of selling FOL-leaflets, often in comic-strip form, and trying to attract potential converts. Singing groups, often including young children, are used to attract public sympathy, interest and donations.

### Attractions:

As in other cults: the welcoming warmth of the group, lack of responsibility and the security of life within a framework of strict rules. Also the elite feeling of belonging to the 'chosen few' with the particular task to perform of bringing about the 'Kingdom'. No restrictions in sexual activities.

### Dangers:

Estrangement from families, rejection of education and work training, exclusiveness, isolation and indoctrination which may lead to extreme narrow-mindedness and total

loss of critical thought process. Sexual promiscuity leads to the possibility of contracting V.D. which may also affect children. Disdain for orthodox medical treatment heightens this danger. The sexual freedom and the fact that children are considered to belong to the movement discourages the forming of true family units within the movement. There may be fear of leaving the movement, with traumatic consequences.

Membership:

Worldwide: estimated at around 8,000, in the U.K. perhaps 300? European strongholds until recently: Spain and Italy.

Main Addresses:

Publishers of MO-letters and other literature:

World Services, P.F.241, 8021 Zurich, Switzerland

Address in U.K.: BM Box 7191, London WC1N 3XX

In other countries mainly 'Poste restante' and the name of a town.

Addresses of flats and houses in Britain are not worth publishing as they may change at any time.

Main publications:

MO-letters

'True Komix' (religious tracts in comic-strip form)

'Love is News' (reports with photographs on the activities of FOL members. (various formats)

'Daily Might' (monthly readings from MO-letters)

'Free Sex' (explicit manual for members only)

M W.M. Tapes (Music with Meaning Show)

Recorded FOL singing groups, also spoken tapes

Further Information:

Children of God, Family of Love (John Moriconi 1980)

Booklet, 40pp price 30p, available from Christian bookshops.

Not for a Million Dollars (Una MacManus 1981)

Paperback, price £1.65, most Christian bookshops  
(Description of cult life from personal experience)

They followed the Piper (Lee Hultquist 1977)

Available from Christian Literature Crusade

(Account by the mother of a FOL member)

Some general books on cults contain chapters on COG/FOL e.g.

The Challenge of the Cults (Maurice C. Burrell 1981)

Intervarsity Press, Paperback £1.85, most Christian bookshops

The Cults are Coming (Lowell D. Streiker, 1978)

American publication by Abingdon, Nashville.

Available by order from general bookshops.

For more detailed information ask for FAIR book list or contact.

Deo Gloria Outreach

7, London Road

Bromley, Kent, BR1 1BY, Tel.: 01-464-9500

Or:

Christian Literature Crusade

2, Cathedral Place, London E.C.4., Tel. 01-248-5528

We have made every effort to ensure that this information is correct. But we welcome notification of change in any of the above in case of inaccuracies.

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