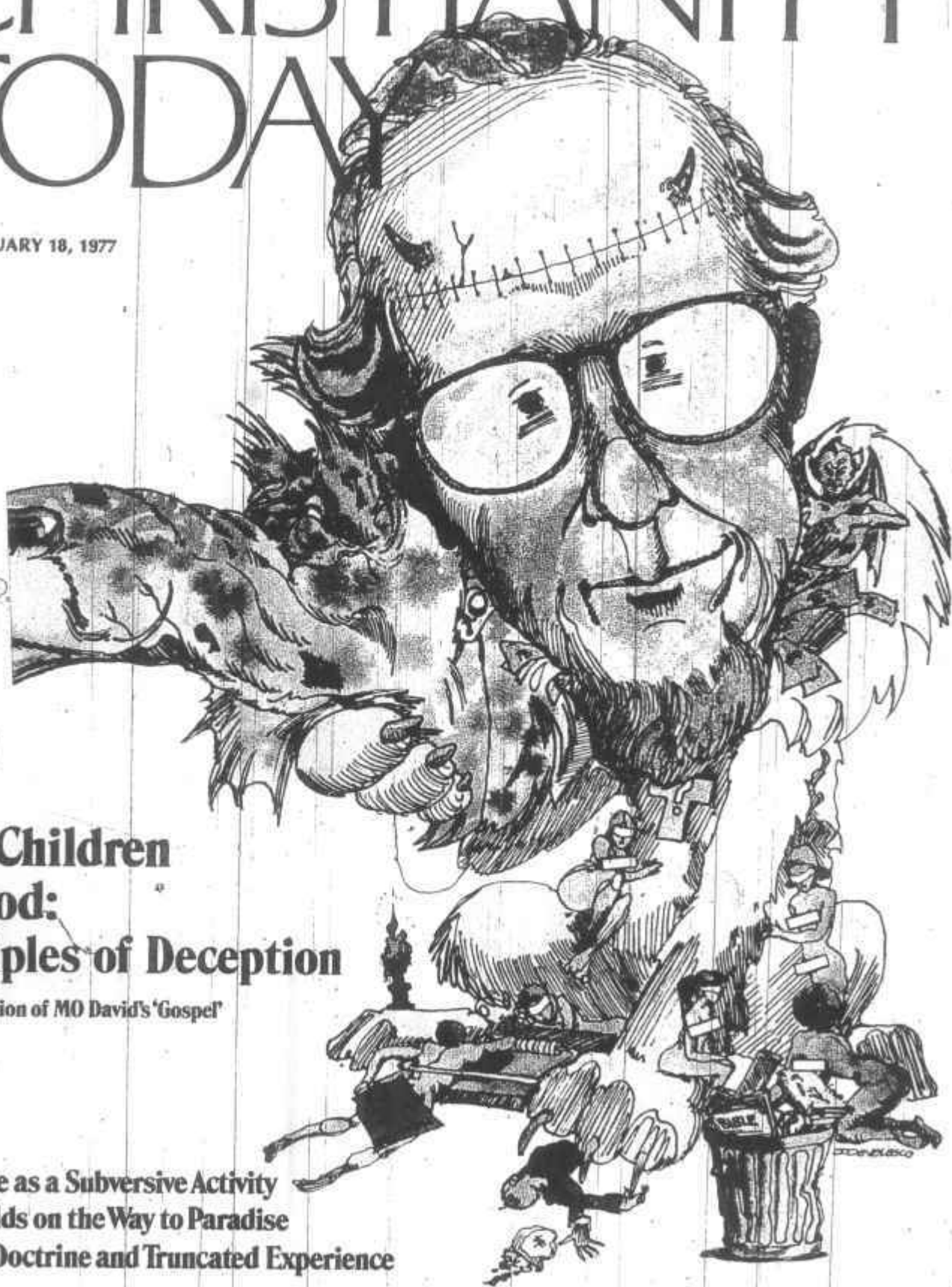


CHRISTIANITY TODAY

FEBRUARY 18, 1977

11 84 0280 TFC10 SAMPLE COPY
UNIV MICROFILM
A XEROX CO
ANN ARBOR MI 48106



The Children Of God: Disciples of Deception

The Evolution of MO David's 'Gospel'

Marriage as a Subversive Activity
Minefields on the Way to Paradise
Of Tidy Doctrine and Truncated Experience

The Children Of God: Disciples Of Deception



MORE David Berg claims to be the "original founder" of the Jesus revolution. He is a former Christian and Missionary Alliance minister who in 1968 began a ministry to hippies in Huntington Beach, California. It has grown into a globe-encircling network of 800 "colonies" (communes) in seventy countries. There are reportedly 5,000 full-time disciples, two-thirds of them male; fewer than 15 per cent are in the United States. Since his "retirement" in 1970, Berg, now fifty-seven, has maintained a low profile in Europe, but he carries on his role of latter-day prophet (Moses) and King of Israel (David) by writing a profusion of "MO" letters—more than 500 in five years. These he mails to his colonies to be printed and distributed on street corners in exchange for donations.

Throughout their tempestuous history, the Children of God have become notorious for using profane and vulgar language excessively, for demonstrating their hatred against "the system" (disrupting church services used to be standard procedure), and for requiring converts to "forsake all" (parents, education, jobs, churches) and to turn over all their possessions to the organization. Hundreds of young people have disappeared into the COG, and the controversial Ted Patrick, charging that

the COG used brainwashing methods, proceeded to kidnap (he prefers "rescue") and "deprogram" disciples at the behest of distraught and desperate parents.

In recent years the COG has undergone radical changes in both theology and methodology. The MO letters have become increasingly sex-oriented. Berg, who is said to have several concubines, insists that his letters are "God's Word for today" and have supplanted the biblical Scriptures (God's Word for yesterday). Yet the letters endorse some totally unbiblical practices.

Much of the truth about the COG is shrouded in secrecy. But in July, 1973, Jack and Connie Wasson (whose "Bible" names were Timothy and Gracie) broke with the COG. Connie had been one of the original four dozen members in Huntington Beach; Jack had been involved for just a year. Two years later, in July, 1975, David Jacks (Jonathan Archer in the COG) repudiated Berg as a false prophet and left the organization. Jacks, a member for over five years, had helped to pioneer South America for the COG. He was a COG archbishop and had access to top-level information denied to ordinary disciples and to leaders of lower rank. In the following interview these two young men—Jack Wasson, 28, and David Jacks, 24—hope to alert the public to

the evils being perpetrated by David Berg on his followers (many of whom, they believe, are sincerely motivated Christian young people). Their charges can be fully documented from Berg's own writings.

Contact was made with Eugene "Happy" Wotila shortly before this article went to press. Wotila's seven-plus years in the COG date back to the sect's beginnings in Huntington Beach. Known as Joab, he was a leading Bible teacher in the sect. In October, 1975, he was

excommunicated by Berg for raising questions about COG teachings, among other things. His statements confirm the basic information provided in the interview with Wasson and Jacks.

Joseph M. Hopkins, the interviewer, is the author of a book on the Children of God scheduled to be published this summer by Acton House. He is a professor in the Department of Religion and Philosophy at Westminster College, New Wilmington, Pennsylvania.

Hopkins. Very few people have seen a picture of David Berg. What is he like?

Jacks. He's in his mid-fifties. A frail man. He has a bad heart. He's got gray hair and sometimes wears a goatee. He has a large nose. And he has a strong face, strong features. He has piercing eyes, and when you meet him he seems like he's really checking you out—not in a friendly way but in a very probing way that puts you on the defensive. Sometimes he rants and raves like a madman. Everybody is afraid of him. One time, while we were in Texas, he came in with a large chain and started throwing it down on the table, screaming that he had come to set the captives free from the system.

Hopkins. David, you were in the COG throughout most of its history. Would you describe a few of the changes?

Jacks. The COG started out small and grew rapidly. When I joined there was just one traveling colony of a hundred members, with David Berg teaching the classes. Berg's immediate family were the key leaders. However, as the organization grew, people with business experience were recruited, and they soon rose to prominence in the group. The strategy is still evangelism, but the messages are 100 per cent different. It's not so much Jesus Christ any more; it is Moses David. And the methods are different. Before, it was street evangelism. Now it's peddling literature for money.

Hopkins. What about discipline?

Jacks. When I first joined the COG, it was very regimented. But as David Berg's goals changed, more liberties were granted to the lowly disciples. Now, with permission, they can date—even date people outside the organization. They can also go to movies. By relaxing the rules, I think Berg is trying to buy acceptance, to gain popularity and more followers. Drugs and tobacco are still taboo, but alcohol is permitted in moderation—usually only at parties.

Hopkins. You say when you first joined there was just one traveling colony. What is the set-up now?

Jacks. Now colonies range from six to twelve full-time followers. The colony leader is called a shepherd. When it gets more than twelve members, a colony has to divide and create a new one. Three (sometimes two) colonies form a district, presided over by a district shepherd.

Three districts form a region, headed by a regional shepherd. Three regions constitute a bishopric, presided over by a bishop, and three bishoprics constitute an archbishopric, headed by an archbishop. Three archbishoprics constitute a ministry, governed by a minister; and three ministries constitute a prime ministry, ruled over by a prime minister. At the time I left there were four prime ministers in the COG. They are members of the board of directors called "the King's Counselors." It's a pyramid type of government, rule from the top down.

Hopkins. How important are the MO letters?

Wasson. The COG disciples believe the MO letters are the inspired word of God for today—and the Bible was the inspired word of God for yesterday. For this reason the MO letters are called the "New Wine" and the Bible the "Old Wine." There are at this time more than 500 MO letters; and besides this, there are a number of tapes that have been sent out by MO to the colonies. The first MO letter was called *The Old Church and the New Church*. Berg had a wife but had been living with his secretary, Maria; and the word was beginning to get out. He was either going to have to repent or to sidestep the situation, which is what he chose to do. There was a meeting in Montreal, Canada, in 1969. David Berg had this prophecy about "the old church and the new church." "In it he said that Maria was the new church and Jane Berg, his wife, was the old church, and that God was putting away the old church, Jane, because she had been a hindrance to the work. In her place God was giving him a new wife, Maria. David Berg was doing what was explicitly forbidden by Scripture, and he knew it. To justify himself, he had to come up with something that was at least as authoritative as Scripture, if not more so. That was the very first MO letter.

Hopkins. Aren't there various categories of MO letters?

Jacks. Here they are. First there are the "G. P." (General Public) letters, the ones they sell on the street. After that come the "D. F. O." (Disciples and Friends Only) letters. Next "D. O." (Disciples Only). Then "L. T. O." (Leadership Training Only). And after that, "L. O." (Leaders Only). He even

has "R. F. O." (Royal Family Only) letters.

Hopkins. With David Berg out of the country, how are these letters processed?

Wasson. Copies are sent to area leaders, who print them up for the colonies. COG headquarters formerly got \$25 royalty per disciple on each letter as it was issued. But now at least 40 per cent of all the money the kids make on the street "witnessing" is sent to higher administrative levels. The remaining 60 per cent or less is used to finance the colonies. According to a recent issue of the *New Nation News* (the official COG news publication), 248,108,922 MO letters were distributed in a 4½-year period beginning October 1, 1971, which breaks down to approximately 4.3 million per month.

Jacks. In Peru and Bolivia, over a period of a year and a half, we passed out 1.5 million letters, which was one letter for every twelve people in those two countries.

Hopkins. What is the average donation?

Jacks. Down there it was maybe \$0.08 a letter. Here in the States, they get anywhere from \$0.05 to \$1.00 per letter. Berg gets 10 per cent of that. And of course he derives income from other sources, too—the kids who "forsake all," contributions from sympathetic parents and friends, and so on. Benefactors are called "kings" and "queens." Berg teaches that you should use them but don't let them use you. But witnessing is the basic means of income. Kids go out on the streets for six to ten hours a day. In the States they bring in from \$25 to \$100 a day each. On the basis of ten people, that would mean \$500 to \$1,000 a day per colony, or \$2,500 to \$5,000 per week. This income is almost pure profit. Some letters cost less than a penny to print. At some of their discotheques (Poor Boy clubs) they now charge entrance fees. They put their slogans on coffee cups and sell little gold woks and MO tee shirts with COG slogans such as "I am a toiler" on them. They're marketing tapes and albums.

Hopkins. Is the term "spying Egypt" still in vogue?

Jacks. Not in the old way, it's had public relations. But Berg still espouses this philosophy—of using the system but not letting it use you. They still practice "provisioning"—getting all the food and lodging

ing they can free, along with paper, clothes, glasses, dinnerware, haircuts, anything they can.

Hopkins. What do they say when they go up to someone to "provision" something?

Jacks. They will say, "We're a Christian group. We're trying to help get kids off drugs. If you can help us out, we'll really appreciate it and God will bless you."

Wasson. And what kind of drug program do they have?

Jacks. They have no drug program whatsoever.

Hopkins. Isn't it hypocrisy for them to rip off the system when they flatly condemn it in all its aspects—churches, government, education, jobs?

Jacks. David Berg takes the attitude, "I'll take anything the devil has and use it for God's glory."

Hopkins. A year ago I wrote the IRS to ask for their most recent financial report on the COG. They wrote back, "We have no record of the COG as being listed as an exempt organization." This suggests that an investigation of the financial operation of the COG in this country would be in order.

Jacks. It's long overdue.

Hopkins. To get back to the MO letters, is it true that Berg claims to have received messages from occult sources?

Wasson. He has a number of what he calls "spiritual counselors" (the Bible calls them "familiar spirits") that give him revelations, supposedly from God. His main counselor is Abraham, a supposed Gypsy king who has been dead for a thousand years, who enters into Moses David's body and speaks through his mouth in a broken-English dialect. The messages that come, as you will see, are blasphemies and heresies, filled with arrogance, pride, and lust. There are dozens of these counselors. Besides Abraham, there are Rasputin, the Pied Piper, Joan of Arc, Oliver Cromwell, Merlin the Magician, William Jennings Bryan, Martin Luther, and many more.

Hopkins. You mean he actually claims that he is in communication with these people?

Wasson. Oh, yes. That they enter into his body and speak to him. Many of these revelations come in the middle of the night after he's primed the pump with a little wine.

Hopkins. Do you have a MO letter in which he describes this method?

Wasson. Yes. In *Jesus and Sex* (March, 1974), Berg states, "When I get drunk, I yield to God's spirit. . . . If you get intoxicated, why, it just makes you even more free in the spirit—at least it does with me."

Hopkins. Did I read somewhere in a MO letter that he claims to have sexual relations with spirits?

Wasson. Definitely. He has mentioned

in a number of letters his sexual involvement with spirits whom he calls "goddesses." But these spirits have become so aggressive lately he admits to being afraid of them. In *MO LI! Jewels* (September, 1976), he says regarding the goddesses: "I BUMPED INTO ONE OF THOSE WOMEN the other night when the light was out in the hall. They were waiting for me and whispering to each other. . . . 'Everybody keep quiet. Be still so nothing will disturb the sleep of David.' (Maria explains: 'He was talking about the whispering and giggling of the goddesses outside the door where they wait their turn to make love to him.')

Jacks. He seeks the help of a palm reader in one letter. In *The Green Door* he visits hell.

Wasson. The letter *Madame M*, subtitled "from one psychic to another," was written at the time his son Paul (known as Aaron in the cult) either jumped or fell to his death in the Alps in 1973. He tells of visiting a Gypsy fortune-teller called Madame M. She told him some really wild things. Here's a sample: "I THINK YOU BELIEVE IN REINCARNATION, DON'T YOU?" (David: "In a sense," I answered. "It is as though Abraham my angelic helper comes in and blends with my body.") Madame M continues, "YOU HAVE SUCH POWER!—LIKE MERLIN THE MAGICIAN!" (In other words, I could have the power of the greatest of the magicians of the world to help me if I wanted it, even like Merlin the Magician, King Arthur's court magician!)"

Jacks. MO has a long history of astrology, palm reading, and that sort of thing. He's followed Jeane Dixon for years.

Hopkins. What status do the MO letters have in the colonies? Are they placed on the same level as Scripture?

Jacks. Let me answer in David Berg's own words. In August, 1973, he wrote in a letter called *Old Bottles*: "I want to frankly tell you, if there is a choice between reading your Bible, I want to tell you that you better read what God said today, in preference to what he said 2,000 or 4,000 years ago. Then when you've gotten done reading the latest MO letters, you can go back to reading the Bible."

Hopkins. I've been told that when a new MO letter hits the colony, the kids go wild.

Wasson. Oh, definitely! They believe David Berg gets the big "heavyies" from God. Really, their veneration of MO approaches idolatry. When I was in the colony at Houston, it was expected that after new MO letters were read there would be received confirming prophecies from the disciples, like, "Yea, this is my servant, David. Hear him and obey him. Thus saith the Lord." He definitely believes he is God's endtime prophet. He believes he is the fulfillment of those Old Testament messages which refer to King David, who was to come in the future; Ezekiel 34 and

37, Hosea 3, and the like. Of course, most theologians believe these passages refer to Jesus Christ. And he teaches that many of the Children of God will be among the 144,000 spoken about in Revelation 7 and 14. He believes they are Israel restored.

Obviously, comparing himself to King David and Moses serves very nicely for his pyramid type of leadership structure, with penalties for disobedience to God's endtime leader. If your leader is wrong, God will judge him; but you must obey your leader. There was a case in Los Angeles in the early days when Abraham (an early COG leader) was giving a class on obeying leadership, and this illustration was used: "If your leader had told you to stand on a corner and witness, and a truck came bearing down on you, in that case you *might* be able to move. Otherwise, it is your duty to *obey*, period." The result of this sort of indoctrination is a reign of terror. If you even question in your mind Moses' leadership, God will know it and you will be judged.

Hopkins. What about sex in the COG? There have been rumors of immorality and hanky-panky in the higher echelons. Are they true?

Jacks. Extramarital relationships, definitely. Berg cites Abraham, Solomon, David, and so on, as examples for his having concubines. The top leaders have sexual affairs with girls in the group. But the disciples themselves are practically eunuchs for a year or so until they get married in the COG.

Wasson. This fooling around with sex goes way back. Married couples were encouraged as a group to participate in "skinny-dipping"—swimming in the nude. It was considered unrevolutionary not to participate. And COG members will do almost anything to avoid being called unrevolutionary. It was also policy for all married couples to attend evening "leadership training" sessions at the TSC (Texas Soul Clinic) Ranch in west Texas in the early days of the COG. These sessions would be led by David Berg, and no matter what subject they started out about, they always ended up on the subject of sex; with David Berg quite frequently leading the couples into a mass love-making session while he looked on. Then this doctrine came up that was taught only among the top leadership: "all things common," based on Acts 2:44. They applied the "all things" even to wives and husbands. The wife-and-husband-swapping was not explicitly condemned in a MO letter, but it was allowed and participated in by the top leadership. But after the NBC "Chronologue" program, which exposed some of the inner workings of the COG, they panicked and forbade any more of this to go on for a brief period. Then it resumed.

Jacks. Listen to this quote from *Beauty and the Beast* (July, 1974): "There were a

lot of times . . . when I would pick up a girl, not necessarily because I needed to make love to her sexually, although I often did in the long run, but just for companionship. Sometimes I did it as much, if not more, for her sake than even for mine. Because after talking with her for some time, she felt so much love that she wanted to make love, and I wanted to make her happy. And those girls usually think that they haven't done their job or earned their salt till they've gone all the way." Berg actually encourages fornication for the purpose of winning disciples. He says, "To go as far as kissing them on the mouth or deep-kissing them so that they get their germs and everything on you, that's a pretty big sacrifice. . . . We have shown the world every other kind of love. . . . Now we're going to go as far as giving them other forms of physical love, even sexual love, to minister to one of their finest and greatest needs." In *Flirty Little Fishy* (March, 1974) there is a picture of a mermaid making love to a naked man with the caption, "Hooker for Jesus." The COG now considers the "Flirty Fish Ministry" one of its most important, and there are a number of recent MO letters on the subject. Basically it means religious prostitution, and they are really into it now. As a result, recent reports from inside the group state that venereal disease is not uncommon and that there are numbers of mothers without husbands (the COG calls them "widows").

Hopkins: It's reported that many of the COG marriages are really common-law liaisons, without benefit of clergy. Is this true?

Wasson: In the beginning, the COG taught that a marriage license was just a piece of paper and wasn't really necessary. The actual marriage was when you went to bed. They had what they called betrothals—a kind of unofficial ceremony in the colony. Then when the COG started dealing with Fred Jordan (a Los Angeles evangelist and early benefactor of the COG who later repudiated the movement), he wanted the kids to get legal marriages, so that many of them did get legally married after that time. I would say about half of the COG are legally married to someone, although only a small per cent are living with their own legal husband or wife. All marriages, incidentally, have to be approved by the leadership. To go on with the effect of the COG upon married life, I'm going to quote from a MO letter called *One Wife*: "God breaks up marriages in order that he might join each of the parties together to himself. He rips off wives, husbands, or children to make up his bride if the rest of the family refuses to follow. He is the worst 'ripper-offer' of all. God is the greatest destroyer of home and family of anybody! . . . If you have not forsaken your husband or wife for the Lord at some



"Moses' David Berg, September, 1970

time or another, you have not forsaken all."

Hopkins: God is in the business of breaking up families? I thought that was the devil's business!

Wasson: In the letter *Mountain Maid* David Berg promoted topless bathing and encouraged the girls not to wear undergarments, and since that day only a handful of girls in the COG have been wearing a bra.

Jacks: MO's greatest pride now is his new sex book. He says it is hotter than anything in the latest sex shops. It's called *Free Sex*. On the cover are a nude fellow and girl, and the whole thing is full of MO letters on sex. But the freakiest thing is his letter called *Revolutionary Love Making*. It is absolutely the grossest thing you've ever seen in your life. I don't know how to describe it.

Hopkins: There are pictures of people actually engaged in various forms of intercourse. Before we leave this sex thing, how can the colonies remain clean with this lascivious material being fed into the members' minds?

Jacks: The COG is degenerating. David Berg is getting more and more into pornography, spiritism, astrology, and other far-out things—substituting this garbage for the fundamental Christian faith.

Hopkins: The MO letters abound with four-letter words. Is this sort of language common in the colonies?

Jacks: Most of the Children of God, all the way down to the lowest disciple, swear like pirates. Even when they witness, they use four-letter words. They believe it helps them relate to people on the street.

Hopkins: The MO letters aside, how does COG theology compare with the doctrinal teachings of most mainline denominations?

Wasson: In the beginning the COG

taught pretty much straight Bible. The main Bible teachers were Joab and Joel Wordsworth. Just recently, however, these two men were denounced by Moses David and excommunicated. He wrote to the colonies, "Any disciple in possession of Joel's letters had better destroy them immediately or be in danger of excommunication if found with them in his possession." This is like kicking the Bible out of the COG. Because practically all of the Bible lessons in the COG were written by Joel Wordsworth. Now his writings are contraband. The point is that COG theology is now based entirely on the MO letters. Those letters are *totally* heresy and blasphemy. They encourage witchcraft, religious prostitution, immorality, cursing, rebellion, bitterness, hatred. Another thing David Berg teaches is lesbianism. In *Women in Love* (December, 1973) he writes, speaking of sexual relationships between two women: "When He's speaking of love, He [God] says if you do it in love, against such there is no law, right? If it's real love. So why not? It is NOT EXPLICITLY FORBIDDEN SUCH AS IT IS WITH MEN WITH MEN. Male homosexuality is expressly, definitely and specifically forbidden and cursed and called *sodomy*. In that case it is absolutely forbidden and a *sin*. But I don't see and I've never been able to find any place in the Bible where it is forbidden to *women*."

David Berg also believes in universalism. Here's what he says in this letter *Old Bottles* (April, 1973): "I'll never be satisfied until *everybody* on earth is saved, which will never happen of course. But I'm looking forward to the day when . . . everybody or at least almost everybody will be saved—at least there won't be many left in Hell if any." Also, on the subject of Jesus, David Berg says in *Revolutionary Sex*, "From personal revelations and Bible study, I am convinced that Jesus Himself could have enjoyed His Father's own creation of sexual activity, with some of the women He lived with, particularly Mary and Martha, and yet without sin. Why should it have been a sin for Christ to have enjoyed sex that He Himself had created?"

Hopkins: In view of all these nonbiblical teachings that have been imposed on Berg's disciples, what would you say about the spiritual state of the young people involved in the COG?

Jacks: I am convinced that in the early days most members were born again and really received Jesus as their personal Saviour when they entered the group. Salvation verses were really stressed—John 3:16, Romans 10:9, 10, Romans 3:23 and 6:23, John 1:12, Revelation 3:20, and so on. However, with emphasis on the Bible decreasing.

Wasson: Having a confrontation with Christ isn't the big thing anymore. The key to success in the COG is how effectively a person fits into the Moses David

witnessing machine, producing more income and more disciples for King David.

Hopkins. Let's move on to COG eschatology.

Jacks. David Berg is a very apocalyptic person, and he believes the whole world—America first of all—is under impending doom. He believes that we are living in the last generation, and that the United States is the "great prostitute that sits on many waters" and the "Babylon" of Revelation. Another interesting thing is David Berg's courtship of Mu'ammarr Gaddafi, the radical strong man of Libya. Berg believes the Children of God are actually going to rule the planet Earth before Jesus Christ returns. He says that they will evangelize the world and that Gaddafi will help them by making a peace pact with Israel.

Wasson. David Berg is into astrology, and he saw Kohoutek (the "Christmas comet" of 1973, which was to have been the brightest of the century but fizzled) as a sign of America's coming destruction on or before January 31, 1974. A lot of the COG wrote their parents and friends in the United States saying, "Get out, get out, while there's still a chance. America is going to fall." The COG wore placards and paraded up and down the streets of almost every major city in the free world saying, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed." And of course the comet just fizzled out.

Hopkins. If America is to be destroyed by God, then who is going to fight in the Battle of Armageddon?

Jacks. Israel is going to be invaded by Russia (Gog and Magog), according to Ezekiel 38 and 39. The United States will get involved, and Israel and America will go down the drain. A world Communist government will be set up. Armageddon will take place at Christ's return, at the end of the seven years. The seventh trumpet will be blown, and Jesus will come in the clouds with all of God's people rising to meet him. This, Berg believes, will take place in 1993.

Hopkins. Wouldn't you say that one of the appeals of the COG is to be part of an elite group through whom God's promises and purposes are to be fulfilled?

Jacks. Yes, indeed. It's a very secure feeling. You feel that you are super-important, that you alone know what's going on.

Wasson. David's oldest son, Aaron (the one who died), wrote a song, "We are the 144,000. Who else could it be but us?"

Hopkins. What about sacraments in the Children of God?

Jacks. They started out baptizing in water in the early days. They did it by immersion. But it became a cumbersome thing to do and they just stopped doing it.

Wasson. Once in a long while—maybe on Christmas or some special occasion—they'll get a bottle of wine and a loaf of

bread and have Communion. But they don't do it regularly.

Hopkins. Are the charismatic gifts practiced in the COG?

Wasson. All claim they are Spirit-baptized and pray in tongues. On healing, the Children of God believe that suffering often is the judgment of God. So when they pray for someone who is sick, they ask the Lord to show the person where he has sinned so he will confess and so be healed.

Hopkins. Do they believe in natural childbirth?

Jacks. Yes. For a long time the women gave birth to their babies in the colonies. But they have lost some children in the past two or three years, so more of them have been going to hospitals.

Hopkins. What is their policy on medicine and doctors?

Jacks. They're opposed to people who try to make money out of people's afflictions. If you have faith and get better, then you get brownie points; but if you don't, then there's no condemnation about going to a doctor.

Hopkins. What happens on Sunday in the COG? Is it a special day?

Jacks. No, not at all. If they have a rest day at all, it's usually on Sunday. But there's no set day of the Lord.

Hopkins. It's reported that the Bergs and their retinue live like kings while most of the lowly disciples languish in poverty. Is this an exaggeration?

Jacks. No, I think it's well founded. David Berg doesn't live lavishly, but he does live comfortably—very comfortably. I know for a fact that John Treadwell (Jethro) has always lived very nicely in the COG. He's always had a nice apartment, has taken fencing lessons, and jets around the world like an aristocrat—all on his expense account.

Hopkins. An ex-member told me that in the colony where he was in Texas they ate moldy bread and whatever cheap food they could scrounge.

Wasson. Although the diet of the regular disciples was very poor in earlier days, since the practice of selling the MO letters became big, more money is available and diets are much improved. In poorer parts of the world, however, they can still be very bad.

Hopkins. Is it fair to say that Berg tolerates parents only if they support the COG?

Jacks. That's right. This is what he says about parents in *Who Are the Rebels?* (March, 1970): "You, our parents, are the most God-defying, commandment-breaking, insanely rebellious rebels of all time, who are on the brink of destroying and polluting all of us and our world if we do not rise up against you in the name of God and try to stop you from your suicidal madness of total genocide. To Hell with your devilish system. May God damn your unbelieving hearts."

Hopkins. What about the charge of brainwashing?

Jacks. The Children of God do not brainwash. They do not withhold food or sleep or anything like that. Leaders are not trained in the art of mind control.

Hopkins. Yet there are kids who come out of the COG and insist they were brainwashed. And their parents say that when they were in they had the glassy stare and the programmed grin. Ted Patrick now claims to have deprogrammed more than 1,200 young people from the COG and similar cults.

Wasson. We have had correspondence with 250 to 300 ex-members who were in anywhere from two to seven years, including long-term members who were in leadership all the way up to the top. One thing they are all adamant about is that they were not brainwashed. None of them feel that their mind or their free will was ever taken from them.

Hopkins. Then you don't believe in the concept of mind-control—that people can be programmed into a cult and then need to be deprogrammed?

Wasson. Not at all. I do believe in the Bible. The Bible teaches that we are free moral agents. If people believe a lie, they choose to believe a lie. As a matter of fact, God will send them a lie if they refuse to accept the truth. He will send a "strong delusion" because they have rejected the truth (II Thess. 2:11).

Hopkins. Then what is your alternative to deprogramming?

Wasson. There are very few in the COG today who wouldn't think seriously about leaving if they had what they considered an acceptable alternative. Those of us who are working in "Recovery" believe that those who have been through the COG and similar groups and have made it out O.K. are the most capable of understanding the particular problems of guilt and bondage that former members complain of. Just knowing there are others who have "made it out" is a major help to those who would like to leave but doubt they could make it on the outside. We are planning for the near future a course for former cult members and other interested persons dealing with the special ministry and problems of the "New Age Cults." Also, we are preparing tapes and literature for former members and their families in an effort to help them through the difficult transitional time. We further expect to open at least one recovery center where former members can come and "get their heads together," where we will offer counsel and encouragement. All of these efforts will be conducted with the help of former cult members.

Hopkins. What in your judgment is the future of the COG?

Wasson. My opinion is that the organization cannot survive much longer. The thing that holds it together is David

Berg. If he goes, there's no one person who has the charisma to inspire the loyalty of the thousands of disciples. And the leadership is torn asunder by bitter rivalries and jockeying for power. There is a good chance the group would split into various factions led by rival leaders—Jane Berg ("Mother Eve"), John Treadwell ("Jethro"), Maria, Joshua, Rachel, and so forth. Maria is right up there next to MO. But she has no charisma at all.

Jacks. But if anyone wanted to grab the reins of the COG, he would have to go with her. She will have a strong bargaining position. Even though she lacks the charisma or the know-how to run the organization, whoever wants to take over will have to go with her. One reason for this is that MO has prophesied that Maria will be the oracle of God. There have been similar prophecies about Rachel (who married a wealthy Italian member of the COG).

Hopkins. Tell me, as you look back on your experience, do you feel that you learned something? Have there been any positive results?

Jacks. It's hard to look back on 5½ years of your life and not find something there that was good. I still feel very close to those whom I knew in the group. We have been through a lot together. Actually, David Berg is and always has been the corrupting factor in the COG. If it hadn't been for him, the COG could have been a force for good instead of for evil. I really believe that. One thing no one can deny is these are some of the most committed young people in the world. And as individuals in the COG are set free from the Berg influence, they turn out to be some of the most committed Christians in the world. "He that is forgiven much loveth much."

Wasson. For me I guess it was like Marine boot camp. I wouldn't do it again for anything, but I wouldn't trade the experience for anything. The fact is after graduating from a Bible college and being a denominational minister I was looking for something more. The original goals and vision of the COG were good. With this broad experience in the area of the "New Age Cults" I believe God has projected me into a ministry which has unlimited potential. I could never have understood it had I not been through it. Perhaps someone else could have, but I couldn't. I thank God I can offer reassurance to the victims and families of these cults, not as an outsider but as one who has been there. Not as one condemning but as one forgiven. □