

Parents criticize tactics of fundamentalist Children of God

by Merrill Sheils
Newsweek Feature Service

A 22-year-old nurse named Kay Rambur was riding her bicycle on the University of California campus at Berkeley when she came upon a group of guitar-strumming Jesus People. She stopped, listened to the music, the sermons and, on the spur of the moment, decided to join them.

She rode off in their van, first to Los Angeles, then to a commune in Mingus, Tex. By the time her father, a retired Navy officer, caught up with her, she was quite beyond his reach.

"WE TRIED to get her to come home with us," he said, "but she told us, 'The Devil's in that car with you. I'm not getting into a car with the Devil.'"

Kay Rambur became one of the Children of God—a youthful, furiously fundamentalist sect which split off from the established Jesus People movement and has been appearing all around the Western U.S. as well as in sections of the South, the East and Canada.

The COG people, as the Children of God are sometimes called, believe the world is about to end—and for good reason, according to their lights. They reject practically everything in modern society from the profit system to the existing churches to the norms—and extremes—of ordinary human behavior.

IN PARTICULAR, they reject the family, pointing to such New Testament passages as that in which Luke quotes Jesus as saying: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother... he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26)

In rural communes and decrepit city buildings, some 3,000 COGs lead lives of strenuous asceticism. They disavow alcohol, tobacco, drugs and illicit sex. They spend most of their time in prayer, in memorizing huge chunks of Scripture and in proselytizing, in which they have been so successful as to provoke an organized backlash.

Parents of some COGs have set up several anti-COG groups, the most notable so far being the "Parents' Committee to Free Our Sons and Daughters from the Children of God." In a series of blasts at COG, the committee has charged the sect with being "anti-government, anti-religion and anti-schools."

The committee also accuses COG leaders of "brainwashing" their followers, and there have been allegations of hypnosis and the use of drugs to keep the members faithful to the sect.

COG HAS responded to the committee with a \$1.1 million libel suit. It has also announced that its rules against visits home have been temporarily set aside and that any COG member who wishes to may spend Christmas with his family.

This apparent liberalization of policy comes after many charges by parents that they have been allowed to see their sons and daughters only in the presence of other COG members. One parent, Ismael Barron of Seattle, says that several "guards" prevented him from taking his 18-year-old son from a COG camp near Burlington, Wash.

"My son was preaching the Bible to me every minute," says Barron. "He told me that we were no good, that we just

believed in money, that the whole system was rotten. I couldn't talk to him. He was never that way before."

THE COG people profess a total lack of surprise at the suspicion and animosity they have aroused in many quarters. "Jesus was hated and despised in his day, too," says Arnold Dietrich, 32, who is known in the sect as Bishop Joshua Levi. (All COG members adopt Biblical names upon joining the sect.)

"We believe that we're a whole new nation, a whole new society based on the Book of Acts," he says, adding the phrase with which all COG people end conversations: "Praise the Lord!"

The sect claims that its particular mission is to take young people with serious problems and make them functional again. Some of the parents of its members concede it has done that.

HOUSTON industrialist M.J. DuPoy says that his 16-year-old son was heavily involved with drugs, had dropped out of school and disappeared, until he came under the sect's sway.

"I have to admit that I am now convinced that if he had not joined the Children of God, He'd either be dead or a complete dopehead," says DuPoy.

Prayer group plans conference

The Prayer and Praise group will sponsor a conference on Bible Prophecy Friday and Saturday.

The film "Dry Bones" will be shown at St. Mark's Episcopal Chapel Friday at 7:30 p.m. Following the film John Ruthven will speak on "The Present Day Fulfillment of Bible Prophecy."

The Saturday session will be in the Nebraska Union Centennial Room, at 9:30 a.m. Harry Turkis, contributing author of *And God Spoke*

Again to Isreal will speak. Hal Lindsay video tapes will be shown in 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. sessions.

Singing and a message from Carl Stuart will end the conference at 7:30 p.m. Saturday.

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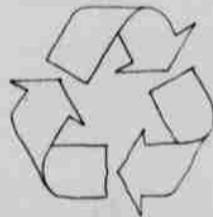
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