

# **Lustful Prophet: A Psychosexual Historical Study of the Children of God's Leader, David Berg<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

Religious figures have played a minor role in the psychohistorical tradition, despite Erik Erikson's studies of Luther and Gandhi and frequent psychological insights that are woven into religious biographies. This study, however, focuses specifically on a recently deceased religious leader, David Berg, who founded a worldwide religious organization in the late 1960s known as the Children of God (COG). Using both autobiographical material from Berg's letters to followers and interviews with former members who knew him personally, this essay argues that the group's controversial sexual practices are a direct reflection of early sexual trauma that Berg experienced within his sexually repressive and punitive family environment. After years of Berg's relative failure as a Christian minister, the death of his overbearing mother during the period in which he was successfully proselytizing California hippies allowed his repressed sexuality to appear in the form of innovative social mores for his group. In Berg's case, formerly repressed, then unbridled sexuality served as the basis for the group's ideology and deviant social behavior.

## **Editor's Preface**

Dr. Stephen Kent's article seeks to advance understanding of the founder of one of the most controversial religious groups of recent decades. In the tradition of other psychohistorical studies, most notably those of Erik Erikson, Dr. Kent's paper examines how the personality characteristics of a prominent individual affected the social behavior of the group he founded. This study, then, can be useful to scholars trying to understand the genesis of cultic groups, and to former group members trying to

analyze their relationship to a figure whom they may have venerated as a godly prophet.

This preface, however, is prompted not so much by a desire to explain the relevance of Dr. Kent's study to this journal—which should be obvious. Rather, it is prompted by a desire to alert readers to an important aspect of this study that has to do with the way in which the threat of litigation almost prevented this valuable paper from being published. What happened to Dr. Kent's paper is an example of how critical review of controversial groups can be stifled, even in staid scholarly journals.

In 1990, Dr. Kent first submitted a paper based on his study of David Berg to *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion* (RSSSR), an international book series. As is commonly done with submissions to scholarly publications, Dr. Kent revised the paper in response to reviewers' comments. A resubmission was accepted by RSSSR in February 1992. In early 1993, Dr. Kent received page proofs of his article. In March 1993, the RSSSR's editors and publisher received letters from representatives of The Family (formerly known as the Children of God), its legal counsel, and Dr. James Lewis, director of the Association of World Academics for Religious Education (AWARE). These letters requested that Dr. Kent's article be withdrawn from the volume. (Dr. Lewis later retracted his recommendation that the editors delay the appearance of Dr. Kent's article, although he stood by certain of his criticisms.)

On March 29, 1993, Dr. Monty Lynn, coeditor of RSSSR, told Dr. Kent that his article had been withdrawn from the volume because the publisher feared the possibility of litigation. In a follow-up letter, Dr. Lynn said that this action "has been my most difficult editorial task during the past eight years. It is unfortunate that you must pay the price for legal and scholarly intimidation when your two pieces of scholarship [Dr. Kent's other contribution to the volume was also withdrawn, but is currently being revised for another journal] appear to your colleagues and to six reviewers to be appropriate in topic, method, and analysis and conclusions." Dr. William Bridger, associate vice-president for research at the University of Alberta, wrote in a January 28, 1994, letter to the

publisher: "I have never seen such a flagrant abuse of the principles that normally guide scholarly publication.... To ensure that Dr. Kent's methodology was appropriate for the study and met rigorous ethical standards, the specific conduct of the research that was used for the "Lustful Prophet" article was carefully and critically reviewed by the University of Alberta Ethics Review Committee. Full approval was granted."

In a January 5, 1994, letter to Dr. James Lewis, RSSSR's coeditor Dr. David Moberg articulated the issue that most concerns this journal: "If only those materials that shed favorable light on new religious movements (NRMs) are published, then scholarly publications cannot be trusted to give honest reports and appraisals that include their [NRMs'] weaknesses and flaws alongside of their strengths and virtues. Ere long journalists, politicians, religious leaders, historians, and others would discover this bias, and then all of the pertinent journals, serials, and books with materials on NRMs would be suspected of seriously distorting everything they publish. *The integrity of the scientific study of religion is clearly at stake in these issues of censorship.* Are we scholars/scientists, or must we become mere propagandists?"

Fortunately, the situation among scholarly journals has not deteriorated to the state that Dr. Moberg decries. Much critical material concerning the Children of God and other groups has been published in various journals and books. The conservative business decision made by the publisher of RSSSR, however much within the publisher's rights and prerogatives, is not representative of the entire scholarly publishing industry.

Dr. Kent's article is serious scholarship that has gone through the proper channels at the University of Alberta and has been reviewed by nine scholars, including three associated with the *Cultic Studies Journal*. Individuals may disagree with Dr. Kent's methodology and/or conclusions, just as they may disagree with Erik Erikson, Sigmund Freud, B.F. Skinner, and a host of well-known and lesser known behavioral and social scientists. Unlike ideology, science does not coerce agreement. On the contrary, it invites disagreement, which is vital to the process by which scientific truth is pursued.

Therefore, CSJ welcomes those who disagree with Dr. Kent to submit comments to this journal. We will consider all responsible comments, as we do with all articles published in CSJ (see our manuscript guidelines). Scientific understanding can only be advanced through such respectful dialogue. Intimidation tactics serve only to polarize opinions, chill scholarly inquiry, demean the scientific enterprise, and offend those who genuinely cherish the First Amendment—which includes freedom of speech as well as freedom of religion.



### **Lustful Prophet: A Psychosexual Historical Study of the Children of God's Leader, David Berg**

Psychohistorians examine how the personality characteristics of prominent individuals translate into social behavior and cultural events. Male political figures have served as the primary subjects of these studies, despite the fact that among psychohistory's most familiar works are two that examined religious figures—Martin Luther and Mahatma Gandhi (Erikson, 1958, 1969).<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly, psychohistorians have paid little attention to religious figures, even though religion plays a dramatic role in most psychological (and especially psychoanalytic) theories of personality development. While Erikson (1968, p. 106), Fromm (1950), and other neo-Freudians have taken somewhat sympathetic approaches to the positive role that religion can play in personality integration, Freud asserted that God is merely the superego in the form of a heavenly father-figure, repressing sexuality as it fosters civilization (see Freud, 1927, pp. 7, 13–14).

Although most psychohistorians have ignored religion, religious biographers have not ignored psychohistory. Indeed, psychoanalytic and other psychological perspectives have become commonplace in biographies of religious figures. On occasion, these perspectives have provided the entire framework for analyses of prominent religious figures and the religious dogma that they espouse. Contemporary scholarship on Methodism illustrates these points dramatically. Moore's (1974) thoughtful and well-documented psychobiographical study of Methodism's founder argues that John Wesley's "compulsive, over-organized, perfectionistic [style] in his attempts to obey authorities which

he believed to be legitimate, just and consistent" (p. 36) stemmed from his "early experience of the conflict between the intrusive maternal authority and the ambivalent paternal authority" of his childhood years (p. 35).

Ironically, Moore (1974) notes that Methodism's appeal to the working classes of mid-eighteenth-century England may have been because:

Wesley's theology and preaching offered the masses an experience with parental authority (albeit divine rather than human) which they in fact had *never had*, and which, given the frightening experiences of their own childhoods, indeed seemed to be almost unbelievably good news. (p. 50)

Moore's psychoanalytic interpretation of Methodism and its founder is kinder in tone than the evaluation of the same group written a decade earlier by Thompson (1963), who found it "difficult not to see in Methodism in [its early] years a ritualized form of psychic masturbation" (p. 368) that revealed itself partly through "the perverted eroticism of Methodist imagery" (p. 370, see pp. 367–373).

Another excellent example of religious psychobiography is Sandeen's (1971) study of John Humphrey Noyes (1811–1886), remembered for his establishment of the Oneida community in mid-nineteenth-century America. Using primary (and usually neglected) sources, Sandeen discovered that as a young man Noyes

was deranged, besieged with sexual fantasies, and terrified of physical relationships with women; [was] a man unable to accept guidance from any source other than his own will, given to wildly neurotic denunciations of former friends and to a frightening intimidation of his own family, especially his mother. (p. 86)

In essence, there existed a "pathological side of his personality [that had] been neglected" by traditional academic studies of his life and work. Most notably, Noyes "was unable to approach a mature genital experience without severe trauma" (Sandeen, 1971, p. 87) until he fell in love with the wife of a fellow community member and gained sexual access to her through his initiation of "complex marriage" (a practice whereby each member was married to all community members of the

opposite sex). The object of his affection, Mary Cragin, probably became pregnant by him, and it seems likely that "the stability and peace of his little Putney [Vermont] community, combined with the love of Mary Cragin, provided the therapy which Noyes needed" to resolve his sexual problems (p. 90).

Of particular note for our own study is a controversial observation that Sandeen made while reflecting on Noyes's doctrine of perfectionism:

Seen from the perspective of psychology, movements championing antinomianism or millenarian social orders create an atmosphere in which previously repressed and subconscious wishes may be permitted public expression. As even historians know, this subconscious material is usually sexual. (p. 87)<sup>3</sup>

In this biographical study of David Brandt Berg (1919-94), I examine the effects of childhood psychosexual experiences on his implementation and practice of antinomian sexuality within the religious organization that he founded, the controversial Children of God (COG). COG emerged out of the hippie and antiwar counterculture of the late 1960s and the nascent Jesus Movement of the same period. It grew from a few members whom Berg's proselytizing children brought under his influence beginning in December 1967 to an organization with adherents around the world (see Davis with Davis, 1984; Melton, 1986; Pritchett, 1985, pp. ix-xxix; Wallis, 1981; Wangerin, 1982). Current accurate membership figures are difficult to obtain, but a 1978 internal publication indicated that there were 4,759 members (3,254 live-in adults and 1,505 live-in children) in 111 countries (*Family of Love News*, 1978a, pp. 1-3).

Berg is an ideal psychosexual historical subject for several reasons. He wrote extensively (and, it seems, candidly)<sup>4</sup> about his childhood, his attitudes towards his parents, and his own self-esteem, and he published these accounts throughout a corpus of printed letters (called *Mo Letters*, after his adopted name, Moses David) to his followers and supporters. While I do not have access to all of these publications (which may number at least 21 volumes, each comprising hundreds of pages), I have examined eight volumes of letters, some of which contain private, written comments from Berg's estranged daughter Deborah. In addition to these letters, I have interviewed 10 former members who were

involved with the group in its early days, 6 of whom had worked directly with Berg himself. I use these sources to develop a tentative psychosexual history of this reclusive leader,<sup>5</sup> which I hope to revise if and when additional biographical information comes to light.

The extensive material on Berg that currently is available allows me to portray a person whose legacy to the world likely will be very different from those left by the subjects of Erikson's two religious psychobiographies. Both Luther and Gandhi are remembered for the creative manner in which they channeled complex psychosexual tensions into social action, thereby having a profound (and arguably positive) influence upon important societal events. Berg's legacy, however, likely will not be respected. His group has attracted widespread condemnation from various authorities and the public because of allegations that some members engage in certain deviant practices, each of which is the direct translation of Berg's psychosexual drives into religious ideology. Among these controversial practices are "flirty fishing," incest (according to some close family members), and pedophilia.

My study shows how the death of Berg's mother unleashed his suppressed sexuality within the social context of the sexually permissive and antiauthoritarian era of the late 1960s. This social context facilitated Berg's construction of a religious theology and accompanying practices that directly reflected the desires of his newly unfettered id. Religious ideology sanctified his own sexual appetite, and the group context in which he expounded the ideology ensured that Berg's own complex sexual dilemmas influenced members' behavior around the world. COG's religious theology, and even its religious cosmology, reflected its founder's personal sexual drives.

The argument, therefore, provides a revealing glimpse into the relationship between Berg's sexuality and religion, a relationship that heretofore has been almost completely ignored by social scientists who have researched the group.<sup>6</sup> The study concludes with a brief comment on the extent to which the findings about Berg's psychohistory relate to general theoretical propositions made by prominent psychohistorians Sigmund Freud, Robert J. Lifton, and Erik Erikson.

### David Berg's Biographical History

Little in Berg's biography<sup>7</sup> up through his late forties suggests that he would become the leader of an international religious movement. He was born in Oakland, California, on February 18, 1919, to Virginia Brandt Berg and Hjalmer Emmanuel Berg, both Christian evangelists. Early in the marriage, Hjalmer had been converted by Virginia's wealthy father (who also was a preacher), and Berg later stated that

**THIS DRAMATIC AND CLIMACTIC CHANGE** from a cigar-smoking, beer-drinking, wild-dancing, party-going, good-looking, and loose-living young man of the world to a suddenly sober, serious-minded, zealous, young idealistic minister of the Church was almost too much for my Mother, for it was **not at all the man she had married**. (Berg, 1972a, p. 1412)\*

Berg's father received theological training at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa (Berg, 1972a, pp. 1412-1413), and his mother received some graduate training at Texas Christian University (Davis with Davis, 1984, p. 30).

David was the youngest of three children, with a brother born in 1911 and a sister in 1915. Berg's sister was born during a time later claimed by the mother to have been a period of complete invalidism for her, stating repeatedly that she had been totally crippled for five years before experiencing a miraculous healing. Although she based much of her ministry on that event, which later David proudly mentioned in his own work (Berg, 1972a, pp. 1413-1414), it now seems that Virginia Berg may have fabricated at least part of the story (Davis with Davis, 1984, 19-32).

By his own account, Berg described himself as

**A VERY LONESOME LITTLE BOY.** I had hardly any friends!... I didn't see my mother much either. My childhood was at the height of her busiest ministry when she was away a lot. (1971f, p. 754)

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\* Berg extensively used capital letters, underlining, and boldface text in his writings, all of which are reproduced in the extracts here.

Elsewhere he added:

I was frail, shy, and very reticent, a veritable bookworm and recluse who preferred to retreat to the world of study of other times and other places rather than participate in the foolishness and horrors of the hard, cruel world around me. (1972a, p. 1415)

After spending several years traveling throughout the United States and Canada (Berg, 1971a, p. 1148), Berg's family moved to Miami, Florida, where Virginia's ascending career thrust her into the religious limelight as she founded a church that associated itself with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (Davis with Davis, 1984, pp. 21-22; Berg, 1972a, p. 1416). She lost her church, however, during the Depression,<sup>8</sup> after which she became a full-time itinerant evangelist (Davis with Davis, 1984, p. 22).

Berg accompanied his parents, and apparently at some time traveled alone with his mother and functioned as "her chauffeur, secretary and singer" (Berg, 1973e, p. 2337). He graduated from Monterey (California) High School in 1935,<sup>9</sup> and in July and August of that same year attended Elliott School of Business Administration (city unknown [Bailey, 1991, p. 1]). He claims that as a young man he served a brief stint in the army (receiving a discharge in 1941 because of a serious heart problem [Berg, 1972a, p. 1417; Davis with Davis, 1984, p. 22]), but his records on file at the Christian and Missionary Alliance international headquarters make no mention of his brief military foray.<sup>10</sup> His records do indicate, however, that Berg was "ordained by [the] British-American Ministerial Federation [on] September 25, 1941" (No knowledge obtainable about it [Bailey, 1991, p. 1]).

Whatever his activities were in 1941, after they were completed, he seems to have returned to the evangelistic circuit with his parents.

While touring, Berg met Jane Miller and married her in 1944, and after their marriage they continued to travel with Berg's mother on the preaching circuit. Eventually they would have four children: Linda (born September 10, 1945, later known as Deborah in COG), Paul (born June 21, 1947, known as Aaron in COG, and who likely committed suicide in April 1973 while a COG member), Jonathan (born in January 1949,

known as Hosea in COG), and Faithy (born in February 1951)<sup>11</sup> [see Davis with Davis, 1984, p. xii]. While his family was growing, Berg attended Southern California Bible College in Pasadena, California, from June to September 1948 (Bailey, 1991, p. 1; Hill, 1981, p. 14).

As a traveling preacher with his own family, Berg led a modest life, spending much of his time sleeping in the family car, tent, or trailer as they moved from one location to another (Berg, 1971g, pp. 1152-1153). From 1949 to 1951, Berg served as a pastor to a Christian and Missionary Alliance church in Valley Falls, Arizona (Berg, 1972a, pp. 1417-1418), leaving that position either because (as he claims) of racism among white parishioners directed against his ministry to local impoverished Indians or because (as his elder daughter speculates) of charges involving sexual misconduct (Davis with Davis, 1984, pp. 23-24; see Kent & Mytrash, interview with Whitt, 1989, p. 5).<sup>12</sup> In any case, his dismissal embittered and quite possibly traumatized him (Hill, 1981, pp. 15, 51-52).

The next few years of Berg's life are unclear. Apparently he "attended Arizona State University for the Spring 1951 semester" (Denny, 1991), and then returned to Southern California Bible College for two summer sessions during that same year (Hill, 1981, p. 17). During this time he claims to have studied socialism and communism, presumably at Arizona State (Berg, 1972a, p. 1418). He also taught junior high school for three years in the early 1950s (see Davis with Davis, 1984, p. 2).<sup>13</sup>

Around 1954 Berg accepted a job in Texas with Fred Jordan, who trained missionaries for foreign travel and conducted a television ministry. Berg held the position for 13 years, until Jordan let him go in 1967 (for interesting details see Hill, 1981, pp. 21-25). Once again Berg moved around the United States and Canada on the preaching circuit. Meanwhile, his mother (widowed since February 1964 [Hill, 1981, p. 25]) had moved to Huntington Beach, California, where she began a small ministry to the local hippies and surfers. Apparently realizing the ministerial potential that existed with these young people, Virginia persuaded her son to try his hand at evangelizing to them. As Berg described these events, his mother

was writing us, begging us to come help the hippies of Southern California, saying that in her particular beach town there was a coffeehouse run by church people, but they just didn't know how to reach the youth! She wanted us to come out and teach them to win souls and minister to the youth! So we finally c[a]me just before Christmas in December [1967]. (Berg, 1971b, p. 746)

Berg and his family invigorated the coffeehouse by drawing in large numbers of hippies. With these successes, the seeds were being planted for the Children of God organization.

Thus far, nothing is remarkable about this story. Indeed, Berg's own evaluation of his life prior to his Huntington Beach ministry is one of frustration and failure. Reflecting upon the state of his life when he was in his forties, Berg remembered that

**BY THE [NINETEEN-]FIFTIES I HAD REACHED MIDDLE AGE,** I had a family, had worked in almost every kind of job from building construction to the District Attorney's Office, had been in the Army, been discharged as totally disabled due to heart trouble, been an evangelist, pastor, and was teaching school. I felt I was passing my prime and had not yet found God's perfect Will for my life—and I became desperate for greater power, more gifts, and greater usefulness to Him! (Berg, 1971c, p. 729)

Similarly, in 1966, when Berg realized that Fred Jordan was planning to fire him, Berg confessed that

this would have meant that I'd be out of a job, and almost broke at nearly fifty years of age. Seemingly frustrated and defeated, we were wondering what to do for the Lord, and we just decided to start out like we had in the beginning with our little family, now teenagers, and start preaching the Gospel on the road again. (Berg, 1976a, p. 4)

In essence, Berg felt himself to be unsuccessful until he began the Huntington Beach ministry to which his mother had led him.

### David Berg's Psychosexual History

The unsubstantiated set of charges that Berg's eldest daughter, Deborah, reported in her book—involving the stories of sexual philandering while Berg was a pastor in Arizona—hinted at a complex psychosexual life that had begun when he was very young.<sup>14</sup> So too does the fact that

sometime within the years of the late 1950s and early 60s, Berg had fallen in love with his young niece (who was not related by blood). He told his sister Virginia some time later that he wanted Jane as his wife and this niece as his concubine. (Hill, 1981, p. 26)

In a *Mo Letter* entitled, "Revolutionary Sex" that Berg approved for distribution to the general public, he spoke at some length about his early sexual experiences—experiences that the young Berg felt to be pleasurable but about which he quickly acquired guilt feelings. His early sexual experiences were of four types: genital manipulation by a female adult; oral copulation by that same adult; frequent masturbation; and sexual intercourse with a cousin. I will let Berg speak for himself about them.

After a revealing interpretation of biblical prohibitions and allowances regarding a wide array of sexual practices (including incest and polygamy, to which I will return), Berg launched into a discourse on masturbation:

**WHAT ABOUT MASTURBATION?** Isn't that one of the prohibited sexual offences? My mother certainly prohibited it, told me it was very naughty and dirty, slapped my hand for doing it when I was little, and even threatened to cut it off if I didn't stop! She even slapped our poor little Mexican maid out of the house in Oklahoma when I was only three years old when she caught her putting me to sleep in this pleasant fashion, a common practice amongst many other primitive cultures! So I soon learned that you not only weren't supposed to do it in front of other people or even members of your own family, but absolutely not at all, that it was strictly forbidden, naughty, nasty, dirty, wicked, bad, sinful and maybe even worse! I was told all those false old horror tales of all the people who got terrible diseases, wrecked their health and went insane by doing it!

**27. BUT NEVERTHELESS THERE IT WAS, WITH FREQUENT PHYSIOLOGICAL INSISTENCE** and an almost irresistible urge, as well as an extremely pleasant sensation, climaxing in an explosion of relief from the physical tension of the sexual necessity of our biological creation! **But along with it came those terrible inhibitions and almost disastrous guilt complexes inculcated by my poor mother's prohibitions and condemnations and denunciations, scoldings, threatening and dire warnings.**" (Berg, 1973a, p. 1339)<sup>15</sup>

In this passage Berg discloses the mixed messages that he got about sex as a child. A female adult manipulated his penis and may even have orally copulated him (as we are about to learn). He liked the physical sensation, but he seemed distressed at seeing the maid who had fondled him get violently expelled from the house by his mother, who in turn made Berg feel fearful and guilty over his sexual urges and sensations.

The trauma had been so great to the young Berg at seeing the maid beaten that the adult Berg discussed this event a second time in a tract called, revealingly, "Real Mothers!":

**40. EVEN THAT POOR LITTLE MEXICAN BABYSITTER MY MOTHER SLAPPED OUT OF THE HOUSE WHEN I WAS THREE FOR PUTTING ME TO SLEEP BY FONDLING MY PENIS.** I even felt that was unjust and unfair! I don't think I ever forgave my mother for that, really. I thought that was very very mean and unfair when the poor little girl was only trying to put me to sleep!—Besides, I liked it!

**41. I LIKED IT WHEN SHE PETTED AND SUCKED MY PENIS TO PUT ME TO SLEEP—AT THREE YEARS OF AGE!** Well, why shouldn't I?—I still like it! (Berg, 1975, p. 6)

In yet another tract when Berg recounted the Mexican maid story, he added:

**6. LOOK AT ME. I DON'T THINK IT DID ME ANY HARM!** Of course if you'd ask any of my enemies, they'd say, "Ahah, see! That's what made him such a sex maniac!" (Berg, 1978a, n.p.)

Indeed, one researcher subsequently was to suggest that interpretation (Hopkins, 1980, p. 44).

Among the reasons that Berg never forgave his mother for punishing him over his genital pleasure was that on one particular instance she humiliated him in front of the entire family about his masturbation habit. Again turning to Berg's own account:

34. MY DEAR MOTHER WAS REALLY NARROW-MINDED! I can remember when we first got to Miami & I was only six years old: It didn't seem to matter, after years & years of telling me not to, I was still doing it—In fact, I'm still doing it now! So she came in & caught me playing with it [i.e., his penis] again!

35. I SUPPOSE SHE THOUGHT SHE WAS GOING TO MAKE ME SO ASHAMED THAT I WOULDN'T DO IT ANYMORE. So she brought in the whole family, If you can imagine!—And my governess whom I didn't even like anyhow, & my brother & sister, scolding me before all!

36. SHE BROUGHT A WASHBASIN, A LITTLE BOWL & A KNIFE, & SHE TOLD ME SHE WAS GOING TO CUT IT OFF! Oh, I was terrified! I was absolutely petrified! I almost never forgave my mother for that, threatening to cut it off & embarrassing me in front of the family! But that didn't stop me. It felt too good to quit! I just kept it up in secret, my terrible secret sin! (Berg, 1978a, n.p.)

This castration threat obviously traumatized (as well as embarrassed) the young Berg, and his mother was the threatening castrator.

His mother had "superiority" over his father, Hjalmer, "in spiritual things," a condition that his father "humbly and rightfully acknowledged" (Berg, 1971h, p. 359). She was the dominant partner in the marriage, and when friends of theirs convinced them that Hjalmer

**SHOULD TAKE OVER AND TAKE THE LEAD, SPIRITUALLY AND EVERY OTHER WAY, AND MAKE [VIRGINIA] TAKE A BACK SEAT, SQUELCH HER GIFTS,**

**AND SILENCE HER WITNESS.... THIS NEARLY RUINED THEM BOTH!** (Berg, 1971h, p. 359)

When, as an adult, Berg experienced release from guilt and sexual repression, it occurred in a dream that came to him shortly after his mother's death.

One last story must be told before I have laid sufficient groundwork to leave Berg's childhood, and this story involves the sexual experimentation (including intercourse) that Berg and his cousin carried out, beginning when they were both seven years old. During the youths' first genital encounter on the family couch, Berg was horrified to discover that his uncle (i.e., his cousin's father), as well as the governess, the cook, and the maid, all were watching them. Terrified, Berg hid for several hours in a neighboring house, but apparently none of the adults ever told his parents. Reflecting back on the traumatic experience of being "caught in the act," Berg concluded that "it's really amazing the attitude parents usually have to children when it comes to sexual experimentation, like it was all evil!" (Berg, 1978a, n.p. [verse 55]).

As the adult leader of COG, Berg established policies that were completely opposite the sexual prohibitions that he endured as a child. This psychobiographical insight provides the interpretive framework for understanding the liberal yet exploitative attitudes that COG appears to have held toward childhood sex throughout much of the 1980s.

Obviously Berg had suffered psychological abuse because of his mother's punishments and castration threat, and had been sexually molested (regardless of the intentions of the Mexican maid who fondled him). Berg also was emotionally abused by his uncle, who watched him voyeuristically, along with the hired help.

It also appears likely that Berg was unduly physically punished by his father. When remembering for his followers how his father had spanked him as a child, Berg indicated that

**AT TIMES MY FATHER PICKED UP A BOARD AND HIT ME SO HARD ON THE FANNY** he lifted me right off the



ground, but I needed it, I'll tell you, and I respected him more for it. (Berg, 1977a, p. 6)

Knowing that Berg experienced such intense corporal punishment as a child, it is not surprising that he advocated similar beating of COG children, and boasted about using a fly swatter on his own kids (Berg, 1977a, p. 6). Unfortunately, his childhood experiences of violent corporal punishment are common among other conservative Christian religious leaders (Greven, 1991).

To summarize Berg's complex psychosexual history: he had early erotic experiences involving both oral and genital copulation, along with frequent experiences of masturbation. All of these sexual experiences involved adults either humiliating or shaming Berg, even to the point of threatening him with castration. Furthermore, he suffered severe beatings from his father. Each of these traumatic circumstances haunted Berg well into adulthood, but when he reached his fifties he suddenly found himself leading hundreds, then thousands, of hippies whose ideas of sex were very different from the ones with which he had been reared. In the COG social environment, Berg would "work out" his childhood sexual traumas through the deviant policies and practices that he initiated in the name of God.

### **Berg's Psychosexuality and the Children of God**

As a result of his evangelistic efforts among the counterculture youth of southern California, Berg's fortune changed. For the first time in his life, Berg began to have a successful ministry:

**IT HAD TAKEN ME 49 YEARS (GOD'S NUMBER SEVEN TIMES SEVEN!) TO FIND MY LIFE'S WORK!** And there we found it among the poorest of the poor—the poor hippies of Huntington Beach! (Berg, 1976a, p. 3263)

Obviously his mother had been right to encourage him to minister there, but Berg was resentful that he had to acquire his success under her initiation. As Berg himself remembered:

**IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THIS NEW MINISTRY**—my personal ministry nearly 20 years ago, when my Mother was still fighting the change and resisting my leaving the System [of

established churches], she used to ridicule my tactics, and accuse me of just being a carbon copy of Fred Jordan! (Berg, 1971i, p. 497)

Such ridicule was part of his mother's evaluation of him as a failure—an evaluation that his wife (whom he called Mother Eve in many of his tracts) also shared:

17. **I THINK IN MY LAST DAYS WITH MOTHER EVEL, BEFORE I MET MARIA** [Berg's young lover and "new wife"], **I'D ALMOST GIVEN UP ON MYSELF.** Mother [Eve] had practically won me over to where I agreed with her that I was no good, of no account and could never accomplish anything, would never get anywhere, and I wasn't a man of God. I wasn't spiritual, I didn't pray enough or read my Bible enough, and I didn't get down on my knees and moan and groan like she did. I have sometimes, especially over her.

18. **I THINK I'D REALLY GIVEN UP ON MYSELF.** I still believed God, I believed in Him, but I'd almost given up that he could ever do anything with me. I could see He was doing a lot with my kids, and I was trying to help them,

19. **BUT I FIGURED MY DAY WAS OVER,** and Mother [Eve] had given up on me, that was obvious. (Berg, 1977b, p. 2)

Berg felt defeated, and his self-esteem was badly damaged by both his mother's and his wife's harshly negative judgments of his meager ministerial successes.

Berg's lifelong resentfulness and anger burst forth shortly after his mother's death in the late spring of 1968, at a public meeting that he called and to which he invited many of his mother's friends (plus the press). His daughter Deborah recalls this August gathering in which "he came out with his big proclamation against the system":

*Davis:* Well, it was down at the Light Club [the group's coffeehouse]. He went down and spoke publicly, which he usually never did. Well, up to that time I don't think he ever had. He went down to the Light Club, and he got up, and the press was all

invited to come and everything to hear...; the press was there and all my grandmother's old friends.... And there he just blows them all away. He just damns the system and damns the church system..., damns the war [in Vietnam], damns the political system, damns parents for raising their kids wrong—I mean, oh, everything.... All of my grandmother's friends just..., you know, turned and didn't have anything to do with us after that. So it was kind of like all this vehemence [against] everything that he was disgusted with or mad about or—he just came out against it after she died. And [he] just began to practice what he really wanted to and how he really wanted to be.

*Kent:* So it sounded like he was not only damning the system, but also damning his own upbringing.

*Davis:* Yeah, his own—of course he was. He was damning his own upbringing, and it was too traditional, and it was oppressive. But he—like he never did it while my grandmother was alive. It was after...she was gone that he came out..., you know, when he came out with all of that. (Kent, interview with Davis, 1988, 46–47; see Berg, 1971e, p. 37)

Berg's own remembrance of this meeting supported his daughter's account:

**31. WHEN, AFTER THE DEATH OF MY MOTHER IN CALIFORNIA, THE SPIRIT OF GOD ROSE UP WITHIN ME ONE NIGHT IN PUBLIC DECLARATION OF WAR ON THE RELIGIOUS SYSTEM,** it was a decision that was made suddenly, in a split second, on the spur of the moment on my feet, unexpectedly and by surprise, with no time to counsel and confer with anyone but God! I openly declared war on the hypocritical old bottles of the religious system who were lined up on the back seat [i.e., his mother's friends], and I cast in my lot with outlaws, drug addicts, maniacs, and the younger generation, and [became] a traitor to my own.... I raved like a mad man; I cast myself upon the Mercy of God and the kids, and they both loved it—but the System walked out on me! (Berg, 1970b, p. 74)

Although Berg blasted various societal institutions (such as traditional churches) in this meeting, his attacks against the values of his recently deceased mother are particularly telling.

It was no coincidence, therefore, in 1971 when Berg wrote to his followers about the time when

Jesus even came to the point where He virtually insulted and publicly rejected His own Mother and family in preference to those that do the Will of God! (Berg, 1971d, p. 780)

More directly, in 1970 he wrote:

**THEY HAD TO GO AWAY.** As long as my father or my mother were around, I reflected their light.... And I never could have become what I am today, if they had lived on, because I had to go beyond them—and they would have gotten in my way. (Berg, 1970a, p. 242)

Berg's sexual repressions were about to dissolve.

With the death of Berg's mother, I see the conclusion of an important phase in his life. I call this concluding period Berg's sexually repressed phase, which began during his early childhood and continued until shortly after his mother's death. During this long period of his life (almost fifty years), Berg was "tormented" by guilt and anxiety over aspects of his sexuality, heightened by his sense of ministerial failure. He found relief from his guilt only after his mother, who was the source of much of it, passed away, and he entered into a new sexually released phase, with his explosion at the public meeting. Berg himself best described how he felt during this long, repressed phase in his admonition to followers about enjoying sex:

**93. ENJOY YOURSELF AND SEX AND WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN YOU TO ENJOY, WITHOUT FEAR OR CONDEMNATION!** For "perfect love casts out all fear," for "fear hath torment," particularly sexual fears [which] can be physical torture! I know, because I myself personally suffered for years the tortures of the demons of hell with their Goddamned churchy attitudes towards sex with which they had filled me!—And I don't want you to suffer, as I did, the horrors

of such sexual frustrations and condemnations! (Berg, 1973a, p. 1358)

With the death of his mother, Berg's sexual guilt died as well, just in the very period that his own ministry was growing. For the rest of his life he engaged in a wide range of sexual activities with little if any apparent shame.

A dream that Berg had soon after his mother's passing provides a clear sign that his repressed instincts were coming to the surface, marking entry into his sexually released phase. In the summer of 1968 Berg recalled:

**1. I DREAMED THAT IT WAS VERY DARK—A FRIGHTENING SORT OF DARKNESS**—and I was alone.

There was an awesome dreadfulness about the darkness, as though it was a time of great trouble or just before some impending doom.

**5. EVERYWHERE THERE IS A TERRIBLE SILENCE AND I'M IN THIS CITY AND THE STREETS ARE DARK.**

There is nobody on the streets and I'm so terrified I want to run down the streets to where I see a rather dim light, and it turns out to be a drugstore or chemist's shop. So I decide to go inside to buy a newspaper to see what has happened.

**6. THE DRUGSTORE IS RATHER DIMLY LIGHTED AND A FEW PEOPLE ARE STANDING AROUND INSIDE, BUT ARE EITHER ASLEEP OR HYPNOTISED,**

unconscious or dazed—totally unaware of what is going on outside. Suddenly my Mother appeared (this was not long after her death) and she said, "Son, come this way and you'll understand what's happening."

**7. SUDDENLY WE WERE UNDERNEATH IN A LABYRINTH OF BEAUTIFUL BRILLIANTLY LIGHTED UNDERGROUND CATACOMBS** crowded with young people—nearly all hippies with beards, long hair, and all stark naked!

**8. EVERYBODY WAS BUSY AND HAPPY AND STARK NAKED,** but didn't even seem to notice it or weren't conscious of being naked. So I asked Mother, "Why is this?" It seemed as though she communicated to me the meaning by mental telepathy, for immediately I could understand that they were mostly young and hippies because this was a part of the youthful underground church.—But why do they have to be naked? She said to me:

**9. "THIS IS A SIGN THAT THEY HAVE BEEN STRIPPED OF ALL HYPOCRISY AND ALL SHAM AND THE COVER-UPS AND FASHIONS OF THE WORLD."**—And I woke just like that!... and I knew it was from the Lord. (Berg, 1973b, pp. 1253–1254)

I extend Berg's own interpretation of the dream—that the drugstore represented establishment churches,<sup>16</sup> and the underground activity represented the "revolutionary church" of the Jesus Revolution (Berg, 1973b, p. 1254)—by pointing out the crucial role that his mother played in introducing him to an "underground culture" of nakedness and (probable) sexual freedom. In reality, Berg's mother, inadvertently, had done just that when she encouraged her son to bring his ministry to the hippies of Huntington Beach. Now, in a dream, she was repeating in Berg's psyche what she had done in life, but through her death was giving her son "permission" to involve himself with a youthful, sexually expressive generation. Given the counterculture values of the late 1960s, the hippies with whom Berg now was associating represented a sexual ethos of relative freedom and free expression—attitudes and behaviors that were exactly opposite to those in which he had been reared and under which he had felt yoked and burdened for half a century.

Through the serendipity of his ministry to countercultural youth, Berg found himself amid what for him was a completely new set of cultural symbols and social opportunities to explore and express his release from sexual repression.<sup>17</sup> As Berg himself proclaimed, "Thank God for the sexual liberation movement!... It is beginning to relieve us from [sic] some of our former taboos and inhibitions and abnormal guilt complexes and frustrations of the past" (Berg, 1973a, p. 1335).

Rather than utilizing these (for him) new symbols and opportunities in a manner that advanced his own mental health and provided a healthy model for his followers, Berg was overwhelmed by his newly released sexual drives. He translated his unbridled id into a series of destructive religious tenets. Berg synthesized the counterculture's sexual imagery with fundamentalist Christian doctrines of prophecy, revelation, and godly mission (see Pritchett, 1985, pp. xxi-xxii, xxiii). This synthesis allowed Berg to initiate within his organization an extensive series of behavioral and cognitive reorientations regarding sex that had the veneer of divine justification rather than psychological compulsion.

Berg's translation of his id into religious tenets took place in (what for my analytic purposes were) a series of steps that imposed his will onto increasingly larger numbers of people who came under his control. Moreover, he fueled these steps with alcohol, and eventually admitted to his members that he was an alcoholic (Hill, 1981, pp. 44-48, 90; Van Zandt, 1991, p. 169 n.13). The initial step affected Berg's interpretations of his own sexual urges. Subsequent steps affected members of Berg's immediate family, especially his wife, daughters, and granddaughters. Berg's tenets next affected the women with whom he closely worked, then the families of these women. Finally, Berg's religiously cloaked sexual tenets affected all members of his organization, and even extended out into the community through his insistence that COG members practice recruitment and resource acquisition through sexual activities.

#### **Step One: Reconciling Masturbation**

Among the most basic issues that Berg addressed after his mother's death was that of masturbation guilt. After, for example, recounting a long and detailed history of his own masturbation habit and accompanying guilt,<sup>18</sup> Berg compressed into one rambling sentence his new attitude toward it and the debility that his guilt had caused him:

**Masturbation in moderation (once or twice a week, as in married sex, depending on your strength), has absolutely no harmful effects whatsoever upon the human body, and in fact, is a perfectly normal God-given method of legally and lawfully satisfying these irresistible biological sexual urges of the human body amongst unmarried adults. The only damage it can possibly do is to cause psychological and spiritual frustrations**

**and their consequent emotional stresses because of the wrongful indoctrination of religious and cultural taboos, prohibitions and inhibitions by misinformed and improperly educated, ignorant and prejudiced parents or other adults who have inflicted these horrible misconceptions, beliefs, doubts and fears upon their poor, pitiful and unsuspecting children, resulting in terrifying guilt complexes and agonising introversions in these innocent victims of awesome adult ignorance and religious bigotry! May God deliver us and our children from the same! (Berg, 1973a, p. 1343)**

In Berg's case, God's deliverance came in the form of his mother's death.

#### **Step Two: Berg's Sexuality and His Daughters and Granddaughters**

Having concluded that masturbation is not abnormal or particularly unhealthy, Berg then addressed a series of issues involving his sexuality in relation to the women in his family. Interwoven within Berg's sexual guilt over masturbation and problems of self-esteem was the knowledge that he had a sexually intrusive relationship with one of his daughters, Faithy, and allegedly had sexually abused his other daughter, Deborah (*Shukan Bunshun*, 1992, pp. 3-6; Davis with Davis, 1984, pp. 9-10, 14, 58). Reportedly, he also made a sexual advance to his daughter-in-law, Sarah Berg (Charity Frauds Bureau, 1974, p. 52).

We cannot date when Berg's sexually intrusive relationship began with Faithy, but she alluded to it in a COG tract (see Davis with Davis, 1984, p. 204; Kent & Mytrash, interview with Whitt, 1989, p. 5).<sup>19</sup> Hints at it, however, appear in his groundbreaking "Revolutionary Sex" letter of March 27, 1973. In it Berg claimed:

**Incest, or certain forms of sex with certain specified close relatives was not made illegal until the Mosaic Law 2600 years after Creation. (Berg, 1973a, p. 1336)**

Two pages later he added:

**22. THERE ARE ALSO SO MANY BIBLICAL EXCEPTIONS TO SO-CALLED INCEST.... Such marriages of brothers and sisters, mothers and sons and even fathers and**

daughters were very common in ancient times and were not even considered incestuous, much less illegal, and were not even forbidden for the 2600 years from the creation of Adam until the law of Moses! (Berg, 1973a, p. 1338)

He also made a cloaked reference to Deborah's refusal to sleep with him in a self-serving tract on August 26, 1969, entitled, "The Old Church and the New Church." In the process of establishing the young Maria (Karen Zerby) as his new wife, Berg condemned unspecified relatives who **DO NOT THE THINGS THAT I ASK** and they know Me not, and they lie not with Me in the bed of love. (Berg, 1969, p. 2; see Davis and Davis, 1984, p. 58)

Elsewhere in it might be cloaked references to his sexual activities with Faithy, such as:

8. **BUT THIS LITTLE ONE, MY INFANT CHURCH**, My little one, My beloved, shall be raised upon My knees with fondling care and tender love and My protection.

11. **FOR I, THE LORD, HAVE DONE IT** that I may glorify My Name and preserve her whom I love—My Infant Church, My Little Ones..., who dwelleth by My side in nakedness and humility and adoration obeying My slightest bidding, attending to My least will and caring diligently for those little ones that come of her. (Berg, 1969, pp. 1-2)

Finally, in a chilling dream about Deborah in 1974 in which his eldest daughter's car wrecked and flattened her like a pancake, Berg revived her by putting his hands on her breasts (Berg, 1974, p. 2324).

Berg's inappropriate sexual activities apparently extended beyond his daughters to at least two granddaughters. During COG's legal battles over child custody with Argentine officials late in the summer of 1993, granddaughters Joyanne Treadwell and Merry Berg spoke on American television about their grandfather's inappropriate sexual activities. In an in-depth interview that I conducted with Merry in 1992, she stated that she had experienced dozens of intrusive sexual encounters with her grandfather, often involving mutual masturbation and vaginal insertions

with one of his fingers. She was not yet 12 years old when the first incident allegedly took place (Kent, interview with Merry Berg, 1992, pp. 32-35). She also discussed similar inappropriate sexual activity on the part of other high-status COG men (Kent, interview with Merry Berg, 1992, pp. 35-53), often with the complicity of COG women.

With hindsight, we realize that Berg shared many characteristics with incestuous fathers. His sexual guilt combined with occupational failures and harangues from his mother seem to have produced a man with a weak ego, which is a trait found among some perpetrating fathers (see Renvoize, 1982, p. 73). He had suffered forms of emotional deprivation as a child, growing up under an authoritarian father (at least when it came to punishment) and a frequently absent mother who was guilt-producing when she was around (see Mrazek, 1981, p. 100). His own accounts of childhood indicate that he felt very isolated (see Renvoize, 1982, p. 74). As we soon shall see, he and his wife suffered from sexual incompatibility (very dramatically at least early in their marriage) because of "their ignorance about sex" (Renvoize, 1982, p. 98), and for a long time the newlywed Berg had "little idea how to approach [his wife] in such a way that she [felt] sexually turned on" (Renvoize, 1982, p. 97). Berg seems to have repeated the often-reported pattern of fathers initiating sex with their oldest daughters (Mrazek, 1981, p. 100). As one author surmised about the incestuous father in general, but which aptly fits Berg himself:

It is difficult to sympathize with such a man until we begin to consider that in all probability he himself was abused, either physically, sexually, or emotionally as a child, and that he had no chance to develop feelings of well-being and self-confidence. (Renvoize, 1982, p. 80)

Of additional interpretive importance is the fact that Berg had his "first intercourse at the early age of seven" with his cousin of the same age (Berg, 1973a, p. 1340). About this first experience Berg wrote:

It was not entirely pleasant, being somewhat painful, as, of course, she was pretty dry and I couldn't get very far in with it! She had said she had seen her mommy and daddy doing it, and she thought we ought to try it, as it looked like fun!—And fun it was! And even educational, until my uncle caught us in the act!

**29. THE CONSEQUENT SPANKINGS, OF COURSE, ONLY SERVED TO CONFIRM OUR MISGUIDED CONVICTIONS THAT ALL SEX MUST BE EVIL** and those parts of our bodies were bad, although we could not understand why. So we diligently continued to examine each other for the answers by various forms of private exposure and pleasurable masturbations, mutual pettings, fondlings, huggings, kissings and other somewhat frustrating sexual attempts. (Berg, 1973a, p. 1340)<sup>20</sup>

Berg's older daughter, Deborah, also was seven when her father allegedly first approached her (see Davis and Davis, 1984, p. 9).

As with masturbation, the adult Berg (after his mother's death) sated himself with sexual practices over which he had experienced childhood guilt. Just as his family context provided the initial environment in which he felt guilt, so too was it in his family context later as an adult that he discharged that guilt. With Berg's subsequent extension of his family to include all of the Children of God, he extended the range of people onto whom he could impose, through claims of revelation, his own sexual wishes.<sup>21</sup>

Neither a sexual ideology influenced by the counterculture nor the fundamentalist Christian ideology of prophecy, revelation, and godly mission provided sufficient concepts or opportunities for him to integrate and assimilate his early pain into healthy, sharing, and moderated adult sexual expressions. Berg's inability to reconcile his early trauma at the same time that he was extending and tightening his control over his followers put him in a unique position of authority over thousands of people. On them and with them he unleashed his now-guiltless passions, and sanctified his deviance through scriptural interpretation and claims of divine revelation.

Complementing Berg's religious justifications of incest were his religious justifications for abandoning his wife for another (much younger) woman. Although the evidence is somewhat conflicting, Berg appears not to have been satisfied with his marital sex life. Perhaps his feelings about his marriage to Jane were best captured by a psychic whom Berg

apparently visited in April 1973, who told him, "You're not very happily married, but I don't think you are unhappy" (Berg, 1973c, p. 2110).

His weeklong honeymoon appears to have been disastrous, with the young couple having to visit the doctor after it was over in order to see if Jane had a medical problem that could explain her apparent sexual dysfunction. Nothing proved to be physically wrong with her, but about her emotional makeup Berg wrote: "It was just that she was so inhibited with all that holiness background that she was all tied up like an ox!" (Berg, 1970c, p. 2020).

Berg himself admitted to being "so bashful and so holy that **I was afraid to touch her to loosen her up**" (Berg, 1970c, p. 2020), and said that he could not touch his wife's breasts for perhaps a year (Berg, 1973c, p. 2025). For the first years of their marriage, David and Jane were too inhibited even to talk about sex (Berg, 1973c, p. 2024), although somehow they were able to work things out sufficiently well enough that she allegedly was able to have multiple orgasms at some point in their relationship (Berg, 1973c, p. 2025). He remained irritated, however, about his wife's persistent habit of getting hungry or having to go to the bathroom "**RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF IT** all" (Berg, 1973c, p. 2035).

Considered together, David and Jane's sexual life seems to have had deeply seated problems—problems that afflicted them individually and as a couple. Jane, too, must have felt dissatisfaction with aspects of the marriage, since apparently she ran off with another man in 1960, after which "David quickly went to retrieve her" (Hill, 1981, p. 23).

Berg's affair with Maria began in April 1969, while the group still was in Huntington Beach and after Berg had begun his practice of kissing female followers good night (see Davis with Davis, 1984, p. 47). In August 1969, some months after the affair had begun, Berg claimed to receive a revelation in which God required him to take a new wife who symbolized his establishment of a new church. In a fashion reminiscent of Joseph Smith's revelation allowing polygyny, supposedly sent to him by God after Smith already had secretly married several women (Muncy,

1973, p. 129), God's reputed revelation to Berg came long after he was sexually involved with Maria and had abandoned his wife.

Berg delivered the prophecy using language that cleverly combined family imagery with church metaphors in a narrative voice that overlaid God's will onto his own desires. He reported to his family and followers that God had revealed to him that

THEREFORE, SHALL THE OLD VESTURE BE REMOVED  
and she shall be clothed in a new garment and a new look and all  
things shall become new and old things shall pass away and I will  
have a new bride who will love Me and obey Me and do My will  
and bear Me children, no longer barren as she was. (Berg, 1969,  
p. 2)

With this revelation Berg gave himself divine sanction for his adulterous wife abandonment (and elsewhere in it for incest). And "God" was not finished.

### Step Three: Berg's Sexuality and His Female Followers

In the third step in Berg's period of release from sexual guilt, he granted himself access to all COG women, and effectively destroyed monogamous marriages among his followers. As was the case with the other steps, the processes were gradual, yet a few prominent events stand out.

After the group departed from California and traveled across the continent (ending up at Camp Laurentide in Quebec), Berg increasingly justified forms of nudity among his followers (Kent & Mytrash, interview with Whitt, 1989, p. 7). In the Texas Soul Clinic camp (from February 1970 to September 1971 [Davis with Davis, 1984, p. 97]), Berg required women to go braless, undoubtedly borrowing the idea from a trend within the women's movement (see Morrison & Holden, 1973). His December 27, 1970, poem, "Mountin' Maid!" (note the sexual allusion), however, gives no indication that Berg's bralessness policy was designed as a political statement against the body politic, as was the women's movement action.

His own sexual fantasies and preferences form the only basis for the poem:

*I am for the mini-blouse  
Or the see-through at my house!  
She is such a lovely thing!  
To her mounts I love to cling!  
I'm a mountin' man, my Honey!  
Give me mountains for my money!  
Though I oft explore her cave  
It's on her mountains that I rave!  
Let those mountains be more visible  
And their clothing more divisible!* (Berg, 1970e, p. 1363)

The poem continues in this vein for a total of 301 lines (see also Richardson & Davis, 1983, p. 412).

Berg himself enforced the prohibition by grabbing women's breasts, ostensibly to check for the banned undergarment. Sandy Brown, for example, recounted that Berg molested her in late 1969 in a COG camp near Pittsburgh. She was hanging up clothes with another woman, and Berg walked up to the other one

and gave her a hug and a kiss, and...I watched him fondle her breasts, and I couldn't even...believe my eyes. I told myself "No." And so directly after hugging and kissing [the other woman], he walks up to me. And [he] went to hug and kiss me, and said, "[Sandy], are you wearing a bra?" And the next thing I knew, I felt his hands on my breasts. And I just—I stiffened up like a corpse, and I—I threw his hands down, and I kind of cast it off like it was no big thing, but inside I was totally—I was totally devastated and violated... And he turned and kind of meandered off. And [the other woman] walked over and she asked me what was wrong, and I said, "He just felt me up." And I was very angry about it, and she said, "Well, he does that to me all the time." (Kent, interview with Brown, 1988, pp. 78-79)

If women nonetheless persisted in wearing bras, then Berg used the coercive threat of forcibly removing them in order to get his way. Another former member recounts:

Myself, I had made the statement that, if they were...telling me to take off my bra today, they'd be getting in my pants tomorrow, and it got back to Mo, so I got called on the carpet and got called up [to appear before the leadership]. It was about 2:30 in the morning...and for the next three hours he called me about every name in the book and a few that I haven't heard before. And in front of the leaders that [sic] he bawled me out [in front] of he asked me to take off my bra.... And I very discreetly, under my shirt, unclasped my bra, and pulled it out through my arms..., because I just, I just could not take off my shirt to take off my bra. And my husband bawled me out and said [that] if I really had been broken before the Lord and really repentant for my attitude, I would have taken off my shirt in front of everybody and taken off my bra. But that's the way that you [i.e., women who resisted the bralessness policy] were dealt with. (Kent & Mytrash, interview with Whitt, 1989, p. 14)

Women had little choice but to obey, and other members of the group (including both men and women) ensured obedience.

Berg's bralessness position received its definitive statement several years after it began in the 1973 tract, "Come On Ma!—Burn Your Bra!" Berg wrote this tract in response to a letter he had received from a Christian mother living near Red Deer, Alberta, who supported the group but who had sent a note to Berg raising questions about his "Revolutionary Sex" letter (Kent, interview with Jane and Luke Simon, 1989, p. 13; see Kent & Mytrash, interview with Whitt, 1989, p. 13). In the "Burn Your Bra" piece, Berg set the religiously antinomian bases for the braless requirement in imagery that combined religious justification, counterculture ideas, and Berg's own sexual impulses:

**32. 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'd better get out while you can still save your bra! Salvation sets us free from the curse of clothing and the shame of nakedness! We're as free as Adam and Eve in the Garden before they ever sinned! If you're not, you're not fully saved!

**33. MAY GOD DAMN EVERY SELF-RIGHTEOUS SEX-CONDEMNING, TRUTH-HIDING HYPOCRITE WHO WOULD HIDE THE TRUTHS AND BEAUTIES OF GOD'S CREATION FROM HIS HOLY PURE-MINDED CHILDREN!** To the pure all things are pure!

**34. COME ON MA! BURN YOUR BRA! BE LIBERATED TONIGHT!—Halleluia!** (Berg, 1973d, p. 1362)

Women in COG had little choice but to follow Berg's commands, since the combination of social pressure and religious threats (involving assertions that their disobedience indicated their refusal to accept the promise of complete salvation) left them with few options. In subsequent years, pictures of bare-breasted women adorned the covers and pages of *Family News*, an internal publication.<sup>22</sup> Berg also became actively involved with the contents of erotic videos made of COG women— both for circulation among members and for members' recruitment and solicitation efforts (Berg, 1981a).<sup>23</sup>

A crucial aspect of this third stage of Berg's sexually released phase was his establishment of a personal harem, into which he constantly rotated new women while remaining with Maria. By the summer of 1971, Berg had taken a teenaged girl named Rachel as an additional wife, even though he had overseen her marriage to a young man two years earlier (Davis with Davis, 1984, pp. 101–102). Berg continued to ignore marriage bonds when he wanted sexual access to particular women, and *Family News* carried letters from Berg's lovers who extolled the skills of Maria and Berg at lovemaking. As one ecstatic lover swooned to "Dearest precious Dad" in 1978:

To experience such an orgasm of Love while in your arms has been the desire of my heart for years! (*Family of Love News*, 1978b, p. 2)

Religious justification for the removal of marriage bonds appeared in a 1972 letter entitled, "One Wife." As he usually did with his sexually motivated organizational innovations, Berg framed the removal of marriage among members as an act of religious worship:



1. GOD WILL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE HIM, NOT EVEN THE SANCTITY OF THE MARRIAGE GOD!

2. THE FAMILY MARRIAGE, THE SPIRITUAL REALITY BEHIND SO-CALLED GROUP MARRIAGE, IS THAT OF PUTTING THE LARGER FAMILY, THE WHOLE FAMILY, FIRST, even above the last remaining vestige of private property, your husband or your wife! (Berg, 1972b, p. 1367)<sup>24</sup>

In a prescient passage, the implications of which no one could have foreseen at the time, Berg also added:

22. DON'T FORGET THIS MEANS YOUR CHILDREN, ALSO! Special favoritism and partiality—that is selfish property interest! If you love your flesh-and-blood children more than you love God's children of God's Family, then you haven't come to the realisation of what God's Family is all about! (Berg, 1972b, p. 1370)

Paralleling the sexual intrusions that Berg seemingly had perpetrated on his daughters and granddaughters, members soon were encouraged to break the incest taboo—and to do so in the name of God.

Having eliminated the strength of marriage bonds among COG couples, Berg extended his control over women's sexuality by establishing among his female (and eventually male) followers an elaborate system of "flirty-fishing." He justified the practice on religious grounds (see Berg, 1974b, p. 528), even though he also recognized at the time the practical financial gains for his organization (see Berg, 1978b; Wallis, 1981, p. 107). As Berg preached to his group:

"Hereby perceive we the love of God because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I Jn 3:16). "For inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these brethren, ye have done it unto Me!" (Mt. 25:40).

8. WOULD YOU DO IT FOR JESUS?—Then why not for others? "If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food (including sex?) and one of you say unto them, 'Depart in peace,

be ye warmed and filled!'—notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body (sex?), what doth it profit?" (Jas 2:15, 16). (Berg, 1977b, p. 1)

By claiming to his followers that they were to convert people (especially men) to Jesus by showing them sexual "love," Berg translated his own personal practices of antinomian sexual freedom into a recruitment and fund-raising enterprise for his organization. He also extended his own attitudes about sex outside of the confines of his group through his "hookers for Jesus."

#### Step Four: Berg's Sexuality and Children

In the fourth stage of Berg's sexual catharsis, Berg promoted sexuality between adults and children (see McFarland, 1994, pp. 498–499), using as models his apparently sexually intrusive relationship with Faithy and his youthful sexual experiences with the family maid.

In 1985, an example of sex between adults and youth occurred in a suggestive illustration (and accompanying text), showing Berg in bed with two women, one of whom apparently was in her midteens (Berg, 1985c, p. 392, see p. 390). More explicit and controversial was the widely circulated publication entitled *My Little Fish*, which contained photographs of an adult woman orally copulating and manually manipulating a boy who was just over three years old. Additional photos showed a naked female adult in bed with the young boy, plus other pictures in which the boy was in various sexual poses with an even younger girl (World Services, 1979). These pictures notwithstanding (in addition to related items in other publications), Berg stated in a December 1988 public denial of child abuse in COG:

"We do not approve of sex with minors & hereby renounce any writings in our Family which may seem to do so! We absolutely forbid it." (quoted in *Founders of the Children of God*, 1989, p. 1)

Critics, however, remained unconvinced, and with good reason.

A June 1991 letter sent by COG's World Services to group members suggests that the organization still believed in Berg's teachings regarding sex and children but was involved in an intense campaign to purge itself

of all documents that discussed the sensitive issue. The documents purge was not motivated by the organization's denunciation of the teachings. It was motivated by the realization that the group's opponents were using these documents to accuse it of practicing child abuse:

To our ungodly enemies and vengeful false accusers, some of our perfectly pure doctrines and views regarding God's Own natural & beautiful sinless creation are very "defiled" & "impure" in their soiled minds! (See Titus 1:15). In fact, they're so offended by some of our views (or their interpretations & misinterpretations of what they think are our views) & publications & pictures, that they seem bent on using (misusing) them to try to substantiate their very false & malicious accusations against us that we abuse our own dear children! So for this reason, we are now initiating an extensive "purge" of our publications. Thank the Lord, most of our publications will come through this purge with only a few pages missing. (World Services Family, 1991, p. 1)

The letter concluded with a list of publications that were to be "burned & gotten rid of entirely, as well as the specific pages that should be removed from within books & and lit[erature] of your Home's Library" (World Services Family, 1991, p. 2). Failure to comply with this purge "will result in your excommunication from our fellowship!" (World Services Family, 1991, p. 2). A biblical quote, however, from Titus 1:15 allowed World Services to place blame on opponents, rather than on the teachings or the sexual practices themselves, as the reason for the purge. "'Unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled & unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind & conscience is defiled!'" (quoted in World Services Family, 1991, p. 2).<sup>25</sup>

#### Step Five: Berg's Sexuality and Conceptions of Heaven

In the fifth and final stage of his sexual catharsis, Berg projected his own sexual fantasies into his belief in an afterlife. As Hill surmised over a decade ago, "[Berg] has convinced himself that the ultimate power of the universe can be obtained through sex" (Hill, 1981, p. 84). At least as early as 1970 Berg was writing about "Sex in Heaven," in which he described what he reputedly witnessed in a divine revelation:

**43. I'LL NEVER FORGET THAT I SAW ONE OF OUR GIRLS IN A HEAVENLY VISION.** That gown she had on was

like nothing earthly! It was gorgeous and it seemed to shimmer with light, as though it was made of light! But it concealed nothing of her beauty! It was chiffon or something—nice and flowing and airy and beautiful & sheer & see-thru! (Berg, 1970d, p. 6262)

In line with his behaviors on earth, by which he granted himself access to the women of his group, Berg envisioned (as I am about to show) that he would continue to have sex with women in heaven.

In what must be an unparalleled example of a religious leader formulating doctrines about an "afterlife" that actually reflect his (or her) own psychologically projected desires, Berg's conception of heaven constituted endless rounds of sexual activity. In a 1985 tract titled "Grandpa Goes to Heaven!," Berg expired and ascended into "the spirit world." There he met several COG members who had died over the years, one of whom was a beautiful member named Phoebe. Predictably, soon the two of them were together in bed. As Berg related:

**32. I HAD KNOWN THAT THERE WOULD BE SEX IN HEAVEN**, but I never dreamed that it was going to be as wonderful as this, as thrilling & exciting & rapturous & continuous!—No exhaustion, no tiring, no surfeiting, no impotence, no failures, no dissatisfactions! All was pure joy & love & endless fulfilment, hallelujah! Thank you, Jesus! (Berg, 1985a, p. 233)

He experienced repeated orgasms (Berg, 1985a, p. 235), and later the couple was joined by a second (as Berg called her) "pretty girl" (Berg, 1985b, p. 300). With a large number of women at his disposal during the twilight of his life, Berg fantasized the continuance of his earthly pleasures into the blissfulness of an orgiastic heaven.

#### Conclusion

Rarely do psychohistorians have such vivid material upon which to construct personality analyses as we have about David Berg. His childhood accounts were painfully troubling; his adult achievements were meager at least until nearly his fiftieth year; and his behaviors after that time demonstrate a degree of sexual appetite rarely recorded with comparable candor. With such demonstrable material I feel little need to

restrict interpretations to one psychohistorical school, but instead shall explore several scenarios that may offer insight.

To Freudian psychohistorians, Berg is the "primal father" ("Dad" to group members) who hoards the women of his "clan," often stealing them from his "sons." Unexpectedly, however, none of the younger "sons" kill him—a reality at odds with the classic primordial myth in which they commit patricide (Freud, 1913, pp. 125, 140–143; see Freud, 1939, pp. 102–106).

Here we see the first of several differences from Freudian themes that suggest the limited utility of classic psychoanalytic interpretations to this religious figure and his work. Berg survived, and seemingly thrived, in the open atmosphere of sexual noninhibition and antinomianism because of a practice that Freud had not considered possible: the primordial father gave his male underlings relatively equal access to a pool of women similar to his own. Under his edicts, these men acquired many more sexual opportunities with women than they ever could have had in regular society, since COG women were pressured against refusing the sexual advances of sexually desirous males. As former member Karen Meyer related about her years in the COG:

There's no recognition at all of a woman's rights. The last two years I was in the group, I don't think I ever had a night when I slept by myself. And I had no choice in the matter. (Kent, interview with Meyer, 1987, p. 28)

Berg, the sexually intrusive and insatiable primal father, had lived most of his life as David, the guilt-ridden and unsuccessful son, and the source of his guilt was the parent figure that Freud least would have predicted. Berg's mother, much more so than his father, drove the boy to feel intense shame, and it was his mother's (not father's) death that unleashed years of pent-up anger, hurt, and rage. His pious mother also was the potential castrator—the adult who made Berg's habit of masturbation into a godless sin of damning proportions. Even though his father was a preacher, his mother's light cast the darker shadow over him. Throughout his adolescent and adult years Berg's career remained dim compared to hers.

Berg was a deeply disturbed young man, but so, too, was Martin Luther, a religious figure whose ultimate religious achievements (at least according to Erikson) resolved many of his own psychological problems along with fundamental ones of his generation.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to Luther, Berg's resolution of his psychological problems only contributed to the confusion of a generation—a generation that eventually had thousands of teenagers and young adults looking to him for inspiration. Arguably, his escape as a late adult from Pentecostal Christianity's guilt-producing attitudes about sexuality could have led him to assist the hippies and counterculture generation in their struggles over questions about love for themselves, love for their peers, and love for the adults whom they held responsible for a seemingly loveless world. Indeed, "love," was among the cries of the counterculture—cries of hope, cries of fear, and cries of desperation as that generation watched hate steal away its political heroes and turn races against one other in American cities and Asian jungles.

The sexual revolution and the women's movement brought the counterculture generation unbounded opportunities for developing egalitarian and emotionally fulfilling patterns of sexual expression. A great religious figure would have seen these opportunities and then used the experience of his or her own suffering to alleviate such anguish in others. In a Christian context, the love of Jesus would have translated into forgiveness and the alleviation of sexual guilt, and from there would have nurtured couples in sensible, sensitive, and informed sexual practices. In Erikson's language, religion for the hippies would have eliminated guilt that they may have suffered from their sexually punitive parents during the third stage of their psychosexual development (of *initiative versus guilt* [Erikson, 1963, pp. 255–258]). Once freed from that guilt, the youthful generation would have been encouraged to emerge from the individual and collective period of *moratorium* (Erikson, 1963, pp. 262–263) and enter into a new phase where interpersonal intimacy became the example on personal levels of a much-needed candor among social and moral leaders.

Berg, alas, is not a great religious figure, and his solution to his own childhood-based guilt brought havoc unto those who relied upon him for guidance. He alienated the older generation of his mother's friends, destroyed his own marriage along with the marriages of others, probably

lost a son to suicide, eroticized the relationships with his daughters and granddaughters, and denounced his eldest daughter, all in the process of the pursuit of his own passions. Scores of young adults who once looked to him for guidance about the most personal aspects of their lives have departed from his organization with bitterness. Many of those who remained loyal to him are burdened with large numbers of children (often the result of religiously connected sexual activities, since Berg prevented birth control [Berg, 1978c]), have minimally marketable skills, and have sexually transmitted diseases (see Richardson & Davis, 1983, p. 417).<sup>27</sup>

In his twilight years, facing his own mortality, Berg committed a psychological fallacy based in religion analogous to a fallacy committed by Mao Tse-tung that was based in politics. As analyzed by Robert Lifton, the aging Chinese leader encouraged the Cultural Revolution in an attempt to ensure that his "revolutionary works" would transcend his individual death through "revolutionary immortality" (Lifton, 1974, p. 34). Within the Cultural Revolution was an attempt by Mao (and, by extension, the Chinese who followed him) to control the external technological environment through "an exaggerated reliance upon psychic [i.e., mental] power" (Lifton, 1974, p. 34). From this political example of revolutionary immortality and psychism, one easily could argue that Berg utilized a sexual "psychism"—a quest for sexual immortality that would legitimize his sexually based group policies and ensure their continuance after his death. The alleged power of faith and love would overcome the personal and social tragedies that resulted from the reckless sexual behavior that he fostered among his followers. A sex-filled (and problem-free) heaven would be the eternal reward for his followers' earthly obedience.

It is beyond the scope of this study to explore in depth the haunting question about why so many youth followed him into increasingly abusive sexual practices. While Berg did recruit persons from religious backgrounds who may have been reared in families where sex was a taboo subject, surely it cannot be true that all of his followers experienced a "collective sexual release" of some sort that paralleled Berg's own psychosexual catharsis. More plausibly, part of the answer about his loyal following lies in the religiously based justifications that he

used to legitimate his behaviors and beliefs. Berg established a social system in which followers equated resistance to him with hostility to God (see Kent, 1994), which meant that members controlled one another with the same fierce consciences that they used to regulate themselves. Although hundreds (if not thousands) of people have left COG over the years, many of the apostates had difficult times doing so, partly because they felt they would be ungodly by their disloyalty.

Such a compelling psychosexual historical account as Berg's, with its direct and adverse implications for thousands of people, points out dramatically the other side of religion to that studied by Erikson. When discussing individuals who are traumatized in the "initiative versus guilt" stage of psychosocial development, Erikson warned about the tragedy of a child's becoming "forever divided in himself" between "an infantile set [of instincts] which perpetuates the exuberance of growth potential, and a parental set which supports and increases self-observation, self-guidance, and self-punishment" (Erikson, 1963, p. 256).

For the traumatized child, "an inner powerhouse of rage" gets submerged at this stage into "the form of persistent moralistic surveillance, so that the prohibition rather than the guidance of initiative becomes the dominant endeavor" (Erikson, 1963, p. 257).

As an adult, this moral person's "initiative is apt to burst the boundaries of self-restriction, permitting him to do to others, in his or in other lands, what he would neither do nor tolerate being done in his own home" (Erikson, 1963, pp. 257-258).

Much of what Erikson described outlines the broad dimensions of Berg's own life, except for one chilling item: Berg tolerated in his own home, and required its perpetration in other "lands," the violations of incest and pedophilia, claiming that both practices were sanctified by God.

#### Notes

1. For the complex and unfortunate history about an earlier publisher's withdrawing this article from publication (at the page proof stage) after intimations of a possible lawsuit from the Children of God/The Family, see Mobilio (1994). Supporting the Children of God's demands for

publication withdrawal was Dr. James Lewis, Director of the Association of World Academics for Religious Education (AWARE), an organization that purports to provide objective information on "new" and alternative religions. Lewis eventually apologized for his request that the publication be delayed. At the time of their interference, neither the Children of God nor Lewis had read the version of the article to be published in the annual *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*. In fact, two months prior to Lewis's intervention against my publication, The Family arranged a meeting with him and an unnamed colleague because it was "seeking advice on how to combat the negative publicity and other attacks they felt certain would result from [its] bold new public stature" in the United States (Lewis, in Lewis & Melton, 1994, p. vi). Subsequent to Lewis's intervention against my study, he coedited a volume on The Family (Lewis & Melton, 1994), and published it through the publication company that he oversees. The Family now includes this book as part of its public relations pack.

2. In, for example, a review article by Tetlock, Crosby, & Crosby (1981), these 2 studies were the only ones listed (out of the 122 they reviewed) that focused on religious figures. All of the others studied male politicians.

3. Several other studies of religious biography that suggest psychosexual interpretations of data are worth mentioning. James Hopkins's (1982) study of the British prophet, Joanna Southcott (1750-1814), explained her "marriage" during her "divine pregnancy" and final months of life as the result of "her sexual longings turn[ing] back to her youth when her beauty had made her the heart's desire of the most striking young men of the neighborhood. The Spirit [i.e., the voices and visions that directed her], whose very existence was due to these unacknowledged and unexpressed desires, at last extended his benediction to a union which, except for the circumstances and the torments of Joanna's personality, should have taken place fifty years before" (Hopkins, 1982, pp. 207-208, see pp. 16-17). Another study worth examining is Tillet's (1982) biography of the Theosophical Society's Charles Leadbeater, who combined religious instruction with pederasty (pp. 279-284). Several studies discuss the relationship between male sexual confusion (especially over masturbation) and religious conversion (Delany, 1969, pp. 59, 61,

71; Thompson, 1963, p.366 n.2; Watts, 1978, pp. 418-419; see Kent, 1987a, p. 262 and n. 86; 1987b, p. 13 and n. 55). Also worth mentioning is Sil's (1991) biography of the nineteenth-century Indian mystic, Rāmakṛṣṇa, which includes important psychohistorical insights such as, "in more than one sense Rāmakṛṣṇa's entire spiritual discourse is a sermon about sex" (p. 49).

4. Some of Berg's comments about the family, however, may not be accurate or truthful. We have, for example, one autobiographical account in which his daughter, Deborah, has added critical, handwritten comments in the margins, disputing some of her father's statements (Berg, 1972a, pp. 1409-1416).

5. Berg's location at the time of his death remains a mystery.

6. One early study of COG (Davis & Richardson, 1976) examined the group's organizational structure. Another study by the same authors "discussed the use of sex by the COG as a recruitment tool" and argued "that the COG should probably be taken seriously about evangelism being the major reason for the rather unique embellishment of traditional fundamentalist orthodoxy" on recruitment and conversion (Richardson & Davis, 1983, p. 407). Although Van Zandt's (1991) recent study of COG contained a discussion of sex in the *Mo Letters* (pp. 25-26) and flirty fishing (1991, pp. 46-48), his primary intent was to describe what life was like from an insider's perspective. Roy Wallis gave a socio-organizational explanation of the recruitment logic behind flirty fishing, taking into account changing conditions both within the group itself and within the societies in which they operated. Wallis (1978b) realized, however, that "the origins of...developments within the Family [of Love—a later name for COG] such as the institution of plural wives, trial marriages, etc., can be accounted for partly in terms of Mo's own sexual appetites" (p. 72). In another publication, Wallis (1978a) outlines "structural and motivational factors that effectively free the women of the Children of God from the taboos and fears that form a part of marital relationships in most contemporary societies and render them available for 'flirty fishing'" (p. 16). Wallis's (1981) organizational history and analysis of the group is among the best available. His most recent publication on the group predicts that it likely will be "thrown into chaos

and uncertainty...on the death of Mo" (1987, p. 89). None of these publications analyzes the relationship between group doctrine and the psychosexual development of its leader. Ruth Elizabeth Wangerin (1984) provides a descriptive analysis of COG's impact upon its female adult members, indicating that "early on, they had to accept a middle-aged male prophet's fantasy-image of them" (p. 137). Her recent book said very little about Berg's sexual beliefs and activities (see Wangerin, 1993, p. 50), and she raised the possibility that his daughter Deborah's memories of incest might not be true (pp. 27, 178, 59 n. 13). Building on Van Zandt (1991) who cited a Reuters news account about Family members having used "pornographic videos" in a Canton, China, music club (p. 167 n.7), Wangerin (1993) suggested that these films were "probably nude dancing videos made by female disciples at Mo's request" (p. 167). One study, however, that should be read in conjunction with mine is Hill (1981). In his psychohistorical Master's thesis on Berg, Hill argues that the religious leader "has two main problems: an Oedipal regression and a paranoid psychosis with delusions of grandeur" (p. 87). Especially pertinent to my focus on Berg's psychosexual history is Hill's discussion and documentation of his alleged Oedipus complex (pp. 53-59).

7. Additional biographical information appears in Hill (1981) and Van Zandt (1991).

8. In 1924, Berg's parents built what Berg later claimed was "the largest Gospel Tabernacle in the Southeastern United States" (Berg, 1972a, p. 1416). Apparently the church fell on hard times in 1925, and a hurricane destroyed it in 1926. His parents then rebuilt the church and affiliated it with the Christian and Missionary Alliance. According to a note written by Deborah Davis in the margin of the text, "They personally rebuilt the Tabernacle. Then it was taken away from them by Mr. Weston" (marginal notes in Berg, 1972a, p. 1416). I do not know who Mr. Weston was, but it sounds as if he was the successful contender in a power struggle for the pastorate of the congregation. In later life, Berg used his parents' loss of this church as further proof of "the System's" corruption.

9. Hill (1981) claims that Berg "graduated with the highest scholastic record in the eighty-year history of Monterey High School" (p. 13). These and other comments about Berg's pre-COG history are very interesting because Hill had interviewed Berg's sister and obtained from her early letters that he had written to his family.

10. I attempted to verify Berg's military records through the National Personnel Records Center (Military Personnel Records) in St. Louis, Missouri, but was informed that the Privacy Act of 1974 required that I obtain the written consent of the individual before the information could be released (correspondence dated December 20, 1991). I have seen, however, a faded copy of an NBC television show on the Children of God from the early 1970s. In it a family picture is shown in which Berg appears to be in a military uniform. Hill states that Berg was drafted into the army a few days after Pearl Harbor, and "was stationed in the U.S. Army Engineers Headquarters Battalion at Fort Belvoir, Virginia until his complete disability discharge, due to his bad heart" (1981, pp. 13-14).

11. I thank Deborah Davis for providing me with these dates. She gave them from memory, so the possibility of slight errors exists.

12. Deborah Davis told me that the allegation of her father's sexual impropriety was a story that she heard over the years within the Berg family. I, however, was unable to find substantiating evidence about it. Records in the Christian and Missionary Alliance national office in Colorado Springs, Colorado, indicate that Berg "left Valley Farms Church [near the small town of Florence, southeast of Phoenix] and the denomination in February 1951. He dropped all association with the Christian and Missionary Alliance.... His given reason for departure was 'further education.'... The district superintendent at the time put in writing that Mr. Berg was not forced to resign. It was a voluntary, personal decision. No known immorality was involved" (Bailey, 1991, p. 1).

13. Hill (1981) states that Berg taught junior high school for O.L. Jagers, "a rather mystical and flamboyant Los Angeles TV preacher known today for his golden altar and white robe routine" (p. 18). Presumably Jagers had a school attached to his ministry, but I am not

able to confirm this conjecture. No mention, for example, of a junior high school appears in material about Jagers and his wife that I located (Harrell, 1975; Martin, 1967).

14. Deborah points out, however, that her father bragged in *Mo Letters* that he had affairs with women who had lived in the Berg home as various types of domestic workers (Davis with Davis, 1984, p. 29). I have not yet discovered such passages.

15. For crosscultural examples of adults masturbating children, often (ostensibly) to put children to sleep, see DeMause, 1994, pp. 142-143, 154.

16. Alternatively, the drugstore could have represented conventional society, while the underground "drug" culture of the hippies exemplified sexual freedom.

17. I must be careful, however, not to stereotype all members of this generation, especially since Berg indicated that many of his followers had written to him about their apprehension over masturbation (Berg, 1973a, p. 1342). Nonetheless, Berg generally viewed **"THE PRESENT HIPPIE GENERATION [AS] YOUNG PEOPLE [WHO] FINALLY RETURNED TO A MORE NORMAL ATTITUDE TOWARD SEX"**—an attitude that predated Christian repression (Berg, 1973a, p. 1344).

18. Worth noting is that the eight-year-old Berg first learned how to masturbate from instructions that a boy whispered in Berg's ear during one of his father's church sermons (Berg, 1973a, p. 1341).

19. In a 1988 internal publication titled *Good News*, the group published a section on **"FAITHY'S REACTION TO CHILDHOOD SEX!"** She stated:

I like it! It reminded me of how you [her father] used to put me to sleep when I was a little girl, 3 or 4. Wow! Daddy did it best! Back rubbin', that is, & front rubbin' too! The others, our various babysitters, just rubbed your back raw & it didn't even feel good, so I would pretend to fall asleep as fast as possible so they'd stop. It felt so good when they stopped! Ha!

BUT DADDY JUST MADE ME FEEL GOOD ALL OVER & I didn't know why, but it would really put me to sleep with a sigh! PTL [Praise the Lord]! I don't think it perverted me none at all, but it sure converted me to His Call! So I believe our parents should try it, & help our kids get the natural habit! WE PRAY IT'LL WORK, then Junior [who was a nephew] won't be a sex jerk! It worked for me as you can see, I just do what comes naturally! Oh I could write a book, but this is just a look, into my childhood sex! (*Family of Love*, 1988, p. 15)

Note that Faithy seems to be encouraging parents to masturbate their children.

20. The "consequent spankings" to which Berg referred may not have occurred in relation to the first sexual incident with his cousin on the couch, since he indicates elsewhere (as I quoted earlier) that his voyeuristic uncle never told his parents about it (Berg, 1978a). It sounds as if Berg and his cousin continued their sexual experimentations over a period of time, and perhaps at some point they got caught and punished.

21. This transformation of COG into Berg's extended family is indicated by the name changes that Berg underwent as its leader. In COG's early days, its members called him Uncle Dave. Later he was called Moses (or Mo), then David (after the Hebrew Bible King). Finally, he instructed his followers to call him Dad (Pritchett, 1985, pp. x, xxii, xxvi). Now members seem to call him Father David.

22. One former female member with whom I spoke reported that she was forced to remove her clothes so that males in her colony could photograph her, but she did not know what happened to the pictures. She indicated, however, that some women posed willingly (Kent, interview with Lowe, 1989, pp. 29-30).

23. According to a former member, the group called these films "headless houri" videos. Apparently the name related to the practice of deliberately filming the female dancers from the neck down in order to minimize the chances of their being identified if problems (with, for example, outside authorities) were to arise (see Kent, interview with Hiebert & Hiebert, 1989, p. 10). This same source told me that some

videos contained dances performed together by mothers and daughters (Kent, interview with Hiebert & Hiebert, 1989, p. 12). The videos that I have seen, however, show the faces of the women and girls, even though some of the girls seem to be about three years old and others appear to be preteens.

24. This passage resonates with Karl Marx, whom Berg probably studied during his near conversion to communism while he was a college student. In any case, he added sociological justification to his arguments about breaking down marriages, and, given the publication date of this tract (late October 1972), I wonder if he had heard about or read Rosabeth Kanter's well-known study of communes that was published in the same year (1972, pp. 86-93). Berg argued, for example, that "the history of communes shows that the most successful communes either abolished all private relationships entirely and required total celibacy, or abandoned the private marriage unit for group marriage!—Because they found that the private family group was always a threat to the Larger Family unit as a whole!" (Berg, 1972b, p. 1368). On the issue of destroying marriages, therefore, Berg was able to combine religious injunctions with sociological wisdom, all of which increased his access to "married" women.

25. The letter also revealed that some years earlier World Services had instructed COG homes to

dispose of any copies they may still have had of the "Dito" [*The Story of Davidito*] book, as well as the "Adults Only" TK [*True Komix*] volume. We explained then that because of society's increasing hyper-sensitivity to any publications for or about children that could even be remotely construed as having any sexual overtones to them, the modern-day inquisitors & witch-hunters who are bent on destroying our Family & our work for the Lord are declaring that many of our Family pub[lication]s appear "evil" to them (1 Thes. 5:22). (World Services Family, 199, p. 1)

Again, however, the problem concerning the publications was not their content or message but the manner in which critics interpreted them.

26. I am aware, of course, of the generally convincing criticisms of Erikson's study on Luther (for example, Dekker & Roodenburg, 1983), yet this particular statement about the religious leader's parallel resolutions of intrapsychic and cultural developmental problems seems defensible. Even if it were not defensible about Luther (about whom major problems of source availability exist), however, I would not alter my observations about Berg.

27. The problem of sexually transmitted diseases among women practicing flirty-fishing had become so great by late 1976 that Berg wrote a *Mo Letter* to his followers called "Afflictions" in which he indicated that "some of the girls have been starting to catch things" (Berg, 1976f, p. 3). As he did with other demands upon his followers, Berg explained the disease problem as a necessary sacrifice for the higher effort of saving souls. Indeed, flirty fishers were to receive inspiration from the life of Jesus:

108. AND THEREFORE IF WE SUFFER DISEASES OR AFFLICTIONS OR INFIRMITIES AS A RESULT [of women flirty-fishing], WE ARE SUFFERING FOR THEIR SINS, NOT OURS. We are suffering for their sins as Jesus did for ours in order that we and they might be saved. Hallelujah! Thank You Jesus! (Berg, 1976f, pp. 14-15 [4204-4205])

Along with prayer, Berg advised his female followers to go to a doctor "if you have anything at all that is at all questionable whatsoever" (Berg, 1976f, p. 19 [4210]).

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