

subculture. She becomes a career apostate, establishes an organization for “former cult members,” and reinterprets her story with the help of opponents of The Family such as Canadian scholar Stephen Kent (no doubt the same person first referred to as “cult expert doctor Steve Dent” in the Introduction, page xiv). After this socialization, she ends up with a post-charismatic reinterpretation of all her experience through the lenses of the anti-cult movement. She also tolerates the sensationalizing of her story and its packaging by the publisher with a title such as “Heaven’s Harlots” and a titillating subtitle mentioning “sacred prostitutes.” This is somewhat unfortunate, since the book is otherwise useful for anybody interested in the paradoxical history of flirty-fishing. In this respect, Williams’ account confirms that in this most bizarre of the evangelization strategies, sheer manipulation of women by irresponsible leaders coexisted with spiritual experiences regarded at the time as genuine by many of those who were involved.

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Heaven’s Harlots: My Fifteen Years as a Sacred Prostitute in the Children of God Cult. By Miriam Williams. William Morrow and Company, 1998. 297 pages. \$23.00 cloth.

Former Children of God (COG) member Miriam Williams has gained considerable media and popular attention with her autobiographical account, *Heaven’s Harlots*, but I was surprised to receive an invitation to review the book for an academic journal. *Nova Religio’s* book editor extended that invitation after receiving an unsolicited, lengthy review of it by two prominent scholars who have the reputation of being favorably disposed toward the COG/The Family. Having the reputation as a critic of the group, I was a logical choice to be an additional reviewer in an attempt to provide a balanced appraisal to readers of this journal. Indeed, the portrayal that Williams provides about her life in the group renews debates about religious patriarchalism, sexual abuse, corporal punishment, child abuse, and personal versus organizational responsibility that continue to plague this group and its history.

This book is the first study by a former member since the advent of the Internet and has resulted in the creation of a website, <excognet.com>, that must be causing The Family no end of grief. (It certainly is providing readers with eye-opening information.)

Born in June 1953 to a fundamentalist Christian-German mother who passively facilitated her father’s abusive patriarchalism and alcoholism,

Williams participated in Vietnam War protests while in high school. Like so many others, she experimented with sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll. Growing interest, however, in Christianity and the Jesus People, along with the favorable first television documentary on the Children of God, made Williams receptive to the discussion that she had during a chance encounter with two COG members in Greenwich Village in December 1971. Within days of that meeting, she visited a COG camp in upstate New York and relinquished all of her belongings in order to become a revolutionary in an army for God.

Her leader (whom she never met) was David Berg, who also went by the names Moses David and Mo. Berg wrote what were called Mo Letters that “gave us the hope that we would change the world. However, the big difference was—our leader heard straight from God, and God was still speaking!” (p. 36). Among other assignments, Williams began working in the understaffed nursery and married another member in the summer of 1972. As expected from Berg’s prohibitions against birth control, she soon got pregnant and delivered her first child (four more were to be born in the years to come) in a COG home with the help of a COG-trained (not professionally trained) midwife who had to call for assistance when the birth became complicated. In typical COG style, the first midwife blamed Williams’ difficult delivery on some alleged shortcoming with the Lord.

In the fall of 1973, Williams’ young family flew to Europe, and after a brief period in Germany they transferred to Paris and worked with a special Family musical group formed around former Fleetwood Mac member Jeremy Spencer. She became a dancer with the group and continued her work in child care, sometimes working in “deplorable conditions.” While there, COG leadership introduced the “colony” to Berg’s teachings about sexual sharing among members and using sex as a means to recruit new members (“flirty-fishing”). Later, Berg would instruct the flirty-fishers to get paid for their sexual services. Her first extramarital partner was a leader; her next partner was a financial supporter of the group. As flirty-fishing expanded, her husband, functionally, became her pimp.

Some time after June 1975, the Williams family moved to Nice, and soon Williams became involved in the lucrative flirty-fishing operation in Monte Carlo where she and other COG women moved in social circles with a jet-set crowd that included painter Andy Warhol, actress Catherine Deneuve, musician Ringo Starr, and billionaire financiers like Adnan Kashoggi. At some point, her husband took a second wife, and when he moved away with her son she began a quest to be near her firstborn child that continued for over a decade.

By January 1980, Monaco police had ordered Williams out of the city, and she moved in with a man who would become her second

husband—a handsome but depressed Italian man living in a village. At the end of that year, they traveled back to the Williams' home country, the United States, where they lived in difficult, impoverished conditions before journeying to Puerto Rico. Around January 1982, however, she returned to Europe after her first husband (who by now had left the group) kidnapped their son from her and returned to France.

Her attachment to COG had waned over the years, but she renounced the group completely after she found sketches that a preadolescent daughter of a leader had done of a penis “at different stages of erection” (p. 233). This event precipitated Williams' realization that COG publications “about having sex with underage teens” had real consequences, and she “realized with a gasp how foolish and blinded I had been” about the issue of adult/child (and teen) sex (p. 234).

Williams and her second husband stayed for a while longer in Italy, but apparently returned to the U.S. in 1991 and eventually separated. Williams combined her family responsibilities with work and college classes and was completing her Master's degree in sociology as she finished this book. In 1993, she helped organize a reunion of former COG members in Atlanta.

As a COG biography goes, Williams' account is fluidly written but unremarkable in content (except for her flirty-fishing activities among the Monte Carlo elite). Her activities in Europe kept her away from COG's activities in Asia and Latin America, so she missed seeing the widespread adult-child sex that occurred in those areas. Nonetheless, she is insistent that this kind of inappropriate sex occurred and counts herself among many who left “when sexual abuse of children became an undeniable reality” (p. 273).

This claim—presented cogently and based upon her own deductions that she reached through knowledge of the group's internal documents and “hundreds of stories from adults and children who have left in the past ten years” (p.273)—makes her a formidable critic. Williams provides a remarkable description of an organization in which pedophiles (including those in highest leadership) could flourish. Let us review her evidence.

Williams describes a group whose members believed that their reclusive leader received God's word on all matters, including directives about undergoing sexual revolutions. The secrecy around his whereabouts placed him outside normal boundaries of social accountability, and the group participated in a blurring of conventional sexual boundaries between adults. Berg produced letters that “were explicit” about adults having sex with teens (p. 229), and Williams read the Davidito Series, which “explained how parents themselves, or nursery workers, should teach children about sex” (p. 220). Moreover, while still a member she also read the *Heaven's Girl* publication, which

leaders hailed as a COG model for female teen behavior in anticipation of the predicted rule of the Anti-Christ's forces prior to the return of Jesus at Armageddon. As Williams concluded,

In these illustrated letters the young teen has multiple sexual relationships with men of all ages. With each new letter that arrived, I became more worried. Heaven's Girl became a sex fanatic. Then a new series titled *Heaven's Girl* was sent out with an artist's depiction of [Berg] in bed with a teenager. I confronted our new leaders immediately on their opinions of these letters. They were conveniently vague. (p. 230)

These and other publications reveal that the written and pictorial material (which the organization's highest leaders either wrote or approved) eroticized and encouraged adults' sexual contact with children and teens.

More evidence about child abuse in the group appears in Williams' book. Berg's loyal daughter, for example, wrote a tract in which she said "daddy made me feel good all over . . . I don't think it perverted me . . . but it sure converted me to His call" (p. 278). Direct evidence of incestuous abuse appeared in a newsletter article that one of Berg's granddaughters wrote, in which she indicated "that she endured dozens of intrusive sexual encounters with her grandfather, the first before she was twelve years old" (p. 274).

Complementing these statements, the social structures in which COG members lived put children at unusual risk of becoming sexual targets. Berg's theology of sexual sharing and flirty-fishing sexualized the cultural environment of the COG organization, and many unregulated adults had contact with children as members moved among various COG homes and bedrooms. Moreover, few members knew the real names of others, and some members even changed their COG names from time to time. Finally, the adults and children frequently changed both countries and local houses within countries, making the investigation of child abuse and prosecution of perpetrators exceedingly difficult. Combining all of these factors, it is hard to imagine a more structurally facilitating or theologically encouraging environment in which child (and teen) sex abuse could abound.

As a consequence of having been sexual targets, many of the now young adults have entered the sex trade. Williams only mentions one former child who likely turned to stripping, but I have spoken to nearly a dozen young women and two young men who have traded sex for money at one time or another following their departure from the group.

Defenders of COG/The Family likely will attempt to marginalize Williams' lucid account as just another attack from an unreliable apostate. They also likely will dismiss her allusions to the accounts of abuse that other former members have told her simply as

unsubstantiated hearsay from equally unreliable disgruntled members. Thoughtful readers, however, will marvel at the social controls and personal blinders that hindered Williams so long from seeing the obvious. They also may wonder why a few academics continue to downplay the abusive aspects of COG's history.

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The Division of Consciousness: The Secret Afterlife of the Human Psyche. By Peter Novak. Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 1997. 258 pages. \$14.95 paper.

In *The Division of Consciousness*, Peter Novak undertakes the daunting task of explaining the truth about the post-mortem fate of the human soul. Novak begins by presenting a historical-comparative analysis that identifies two major interpretations of the afterlife: the Eastern reincarnation model and the Western heaven/hell model. Arguing that empirical evidence from near-death experiences supports the Western model while regression analysis research supports the reincarnationist position, Novak claims to have discovered the truth about the nature of the human psyche that reconciles these apparently contradictory positions.

Specifically, Novak presents his "Division Theory" of the human psyche. According to this model, the human psyche is composed of two parts: the conscious spirit and the unconscious soul. At death, the spirit and soul both survive the death of the physical body but separate from each other. The soul, detached from the consciousness of spirit, becomes entrapped in its own content of memories, in effect creating a self-made heaven or hell, depending on the nature of the memories. The spirit, detached from the memories lodged in the soul from which it has separated, forgets its earlier identity and somehow becomes attached to a new body, in effect reincarnated as a new being without memory of its former existence.

Novak explains the eventual reunion of soul and spirit through a rather peculiar Christology according to which the spirit of Jesus enters the realm of the Primordial Soul (a sort of repository of all of the individual personal souls that have ever existed), thereby freeing the personal souls to reunite with their spirits.

Novak makes some rather extravagant claims for Division Theory, suggesting that it provides the key to reconciling the different perspectives on the afterlife found in the world's many religious traditions. However, his interpretation of non-Western beliefs is



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