

Parents Join to Combat Radical Youth Sect

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SAN DIEGO, Feb. 20 — Twenty-year-old Barbara Quirk stood at a microphone yesterday with tears streaming down her cheeks and declared: "These kids are possessed of the devil. They need the Word of God. That's what you're going to have to show them."

Until last month, Miss Quirk was a member of the Children of God, a radical religious group whose members, mostly in their late teens and early twenties, forsake all worldly possessions to follow Jesus.

She has left the Children of God and enlisted in a growing movement among parents and former members to eliminate the group.

The parents' movement grows out of a series of incidents that have brought bitterness and dissension into scores of American families and led to several cloak-and-dagger efforts—some of them successful—by parents and others to "rescue" members of the sect by force.

This weekend 60 persons, mostly parents of members and of former members, met at a motel here to form a national Parents Committee to Free Our Children From the Children of God (FREECOG). They elected officers, established dues and took steps to hire lawyers to initiate legal action.

They charge that the leaders of the Children of God have "brainwashed" their offspring to keep them against their will. They have also said that the religious group is "subversive" and keeps their children in a "slave-like atmosphere."

While FREECOG met here, another group was organizing in Dallas to demonstrate parental support of what the religious group is doing. It calls itself Thankful Parents and Friends of the Children of God (THANK COG).

Mrs. Emery A. Good, whose 21-year-old daughter Judy joined the Children of God 16 months ago, said that the purpose of the new group was to "reassure parents that all of those accusations against the Children just aren't true."

"I don't know that the Children of God is what I dreamed of for my daughter," she said, "but I haven't seen her as happy as she is now for a long time. I'm grateful that she has found a purpose in her life."

Chapters of FREECOG or related groups have been established in at least 10 cities, and members estimate that about 600 persons are involved in projects such as exchanging information or planning trips to "rescue" members of the Children of God.

One of the steps taken this morning at the FREECOG national convention, the first, was to begin to raise funds to hire counsel for possible legal action against the sect.

Such an effort will be difficult, however, because most members of the Children of God are not minors, and government agencies are usually reluctant to tangle with religious organizations.

Detroit Office Set Up

Other steps taken today at the convention included a decision to set up a national office in Detroit and to assess each family \$10 a month in dues. Harmen Guenther of Detroit was elected president.

Elders of the Children of God said that they had already moved to meet some of the objections of parents, including writing a new brochure that will be sent to parents of all new recruits to explain the nature of the organization.

Members of the sect have offered assistance to THANK COG, which attracted about 30 parents to a meeting today.

Mrs. Good said THANK COG would write parents of new recruits expressing regard for the Children of God. She said that many members of FREECOG "just aren't willing to accept the fact that their children have grown up or that they want to give up material possessions."

The origins of the Children of God are somewhat obscure, but the group seems to have crystallized around David Berg, a Fundamentalist preacher in his mid-fifties, who in 1968 began training converts for "100 per cent discipleship."

He is now said to live in England and to direct activities through his four children and their spouses.

The group, which says it has 1,600 members, embraces a rigid Fundamentalist theology, including divine judgment on those who do not accept Jesus Christ as Saviour. It regards all social structures, including capitalism and communism, as corrupt.

Members of the Children of God show their radical rejection of society by surrendering all

worldly goods to the organization and living together in about 80 colonies, or communes, in this country and, recently, Europe.

They adopt names from the Bible, such as Hosea or Joshua; refuse to accept secular employment, and rely for support primarily on contributions from businessmen and other friends.

Members spend as much time as they can "witnessing" for Jesus. They work in pairs or in larger groups with one or two guitars, and they frequent beaches and other places where youth gather.

Like Jesus calling disciples from their fishing nets, they often persuade young people simply to drop what they are doing and go off with them on the spot.

John Treadwell, whose biblical name is Jethro, said that this missionary zeal distinguishes the Children from other "Jesus people."

"The Jesus people are mainly interested in having a commune," he said. "For us, such fellowship is just a means to conquer the world for Jesus."

New converts are subjected to intensive Bible study that consists primarily of memorizing verses. After three months they are put into a three-month leadership course.

Verses Often Quoted

This educational process pays off in a single-mindedness that is evident to any outsider. A visitor to a colony in Dallas last week, for instance, found the walls of the duplex house decorated with Bible verses. Members always carried their Bibles and answered most questions either by quoting a verse from memory or looking one up.

The Children of God greet each other with "God bless you" and punctuate their conversation with such phrases as "Praise the Lord."

They seem to have little time for small talk. When doing such tasks as scrubbing the kitchen floor, they often had a cassette recorder nearby playing tapes of readings from the Scriptures.

Interviews with leaders and critics of the Children of God suggested that most members were "vulnerable" at the time of their conversion, often because they were either seriously looking for an answer to religious questions or had had family or other problems. Many say they were using drugs heavily.

Almost all members seemed outwardly happy and at peace with their decision to join.

'Sharing Love'

"There's no satisfaction like sharing the love of Jesus," said Paul David Cooke, 22, whose Bible name is Lazarus.

The most frequent complaint of parents, and in some cases spouses, of young people who have gone off with the Children of God is that the outsiders are unable to reach the new members in person or by telephone. This seems to be a common problem during the first few days after conversion.

The restoration of contact, though, does not always guarantee full communication. Leaders, or elders, acknowledge that sometimes new members,

enthusiastic about their new way of life and caught up in memorizing Bible verses, write letters that consist of little more than strings of quotations from scripture.

This problem persists in personal contact.

"It isn't my son who comes home and visits me," said Mrs. Maxwell Gilberg of Manhattan. "It's a shell. He has the mind of a 5-year-old and refuses to think about anything except the Bible."

Parent-child relations are also complicated by the radical teachings of the group, which includes the life-style of most parents in its list of things that are under the judgment of God.

Critics charge that the Children of God consciously teach converts to hate their parents. Elders vigorously deny this and cite literature to the contrary.

"After all, we want the parents to accept Jesus, too," said Jethro. "And you can't do this by beating them over the head."

Conflict between parents and children has often taken extreme forms. Mr. and Mrs. John Moody of Manhasset L.I., for instance, have not been in contact with their 20-year-old daughter, Melissa, since last August.

Mr. Moody, who is a senior vice president of Mobil Oil Company, said that his daughter joined the Children of God last year while a student at the University of Texas in Austin and that his initial impression of the group was largely positive.

"I must admit that I was quite emotionally impressed," he said in an interview.

Escape From Parents

He added, though, that he and his wife had tried to persuade their daughter to remain in school. The efforts culminated in an attempt last August to take her away in a car from Los Angeles, but she escaped during a stopover at a motel in Phenix, Ariz.

The daughter, whose Bible name is Patience, was interviewed last week at an airport in a large Western city after arrangements were made through elders of the Children of God.

She said that at the time she went with the Children of God she was looking for a way to serve Jesus and that contact with members of the group seemed to be an answer to her prayers.

"I had a very great spiritual hunger," she said. "I was looking for something more than just what I found around me. My parents love me. They gave me everything I wanted and needed. But they didn't give me what I really needed because they never told me about salvation, about Jesus."

Patience said that she had originally thought that her parents would be pleased at her decision but had been disappointed to find that "they didn't want me to serve [God] 100 per cent."

"I intend to serve the Lord for the rest of my life," she said. "The Children of God are the only people serving God full time, living the way the Bible says you should live."

She said that the decision not to communicate with her family since August, even to tell them of her marriage in September to a member named David Paul Senek, was her own.

"I love my parents very much," she said, "but I don't want them to try to kidnap me again. It's that simple."

Another situation of extreme conflict involves Mr. and Mrs. William Rambur of San Diego, whose 22-year-old daughter Kay joined the Children of God in Berkeley and took the Bible name of Comfort.

'Drug Trip' Recalled

In an interview in Dallas last week, Comfort said that she had not found answers to her religious questions in what she studied at school and had "accepted Jesus into my heart" while on a "drug trip."

She said that she went off with the Children of God when she met a member on Telegraph Avenue.

"I'd never seen anyone who knew the Bible like that," she recalled. "I'd ask him a question, and he had an answer for it in the Bible."

Mr. Rambur, a retired Navy officer who teaches auto mechanics in the nearby high school, said that he had made two unsuccessful attempts to abduct his daughter, once at a colony in Thurber, Tex., and once in Seattle.

He also failed in efforts to place her in a hospital for observation and to have her hypnotized by a local therapist.

Organized parental opposition to the Children of God drew attention last October when Mr. Rambur, Mr. Moody and Lawrence Cooke of Houston demonstrated against the group in front of the Federal Building in Dallas.

They were joined by Ted Patrick, a consultant on community relations to Gov. Ronald Reagan of California. Mr. Patrick became interested in the Children of God when one of his sons came into contact with some members of the group on a San Diego beach.

As a result of the Dallas demonstration and statement to the press, the Children of God filed a \$1.1-million suit for libel and slander against FREECOG and the four individuals.

Both the Children of God and FREECOG describe their struggles in terms of a spiritual crusade.

"There is a spiritual war going on," said Jared, a spokesman for the sect. "It's God and His people versus the devil and his. We like to serve God, and the devil doesn't like it."

Miss Quirk, who was persuaded after a conversation with a Fundamentalist pastor during a visit home that the Children of God were of the wrong spirit, agreed.

"This is a spiritual thing," she said. "The Children of God are sincere. They really believe that what they are doing is for the Lord."

She told the parents here that the only way to combat an evil spirit was with a good one.

"If you don't know the Lord as Saviour," she declared, "then you'd better get down on your knees."