

# *The Children of God*

Children of God is highly controversial group grew out of a house meeting in Los Angeles organized by David Berg in 1967. Berg's group was one of the first to work with "the hippies and freaks" of that area and began as a legitimate protest against a dead orthodoxy.

During 1970 Berg assumed the name Moses David, or "Mo." In 1971 his fledgling community experienced a period of rapid growth. During that year they sent their first missionaries to Europe and began their worldwide expansion.

The group developed into a number of secret colonies. Berg communicated with them by means of his "Mo letters." During this period the organization of the group became increasingly complex and a series of schisms appeared. In mid-1976, the Children of God had approximately 20,000 full-time members plus about 800 children of the members organized into over 600 colonies in 70 countries.

Since then the movement has gone into rapid growth. However, because of the secretive nature of the group, it is difficult to obtain accurate information on its membership.

Originally the theology of the Children of God was a form of evangelical Christianity where the influence of the Holiness Movement, Pentecostalism, Brethren and premillennialism ideas are blended in a confusing doctrine.

One of the first indications of their departure from orthodoxy was the development of a prophetic tradition in their communities. In 1970 Berg visited and became disillusioned with the State of Israel discovering some truths that shattered his premillennial assumptions which resulted to an identity. He then tried to seek answers to his many questions from ancient religions, and claimed that he found the answers.

Berg now portrayed himself as a prophet and quickly developed his distinctive views. Christian sexual ethics were rejected, and a combination of beliefs, including reincarnation, astral projection, and astrology, were incorporated.

One of the most controversial developments appeared in his famous Mo letter of 1976, where he introduced the concept of "flirty fishes," by which he legitimated ritual prostitution as a form of evangelism where members freely give themselves for free sex. Today the group's theology is in constant flux and depends entirely on the "revelations" of Berg.

Reincarnation is the belief that an individual's human soul passes through a succession of lives. The idea of reincarnation had its origin in northern India (1000-800 B.C.). Western views of reincarnation popular today are modifications of the ancient theory of transmigration of souls (sometimes called metempsychosis), which holds that the soul may be incarnated not only in human bodies but also in animals and plants.

The Western version of transmigration has been redefined to limit cyclic rebirths taking place in human form only. The concept of reincarnation first appeared in the early Hindu scriptures (Upanishads).

It has always been an integral part of classical Buddhism. Reincarnation thinking characterized some Greek philosophers, including Pythagoras and Plato. Because of the influence of the first century Greek mystery religions, the Gnostics, and the Roman Stoics, the theory of transmigration, or reincarnation, became firmly established as a Western as well as Eastern doctrine.

The Eastern concept of Karma is closely associated with the notion of reincarnation. The law of karma asserts that the evil deeds of past lives relate to the present life, and that one's present actions have implications for future lives. Essentially karma is the law of cause and effect, of action followed by reaction. In the Orient the belief in karma has resulted in a basically pessimistic view of life.

Human existence is often a dreary, endless cycle of pain, suffering, and rebirth. Karmic reincarnation does not resolve the problem of evil. It requires self-salvation leading to ultimate liberation from the wheel of rebirth. The concepts of divine forgiveness and mercy are absent. The modern Western expression of reincarnation emerged during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and was revived by such nineteenth century occults movements as Theosophy, founded by the influential Madame H. P. Blavatsky.

This westernized version of reincarnation was later popularized by such psychics as Edgar Cayce, Helen Wambach, and Jeanne Dixon. Western reincarnation's advocates stress a more optimistic view of life, holding out the hope of more and better lives. The ultimate objective of all reincarnation is to fuse with "ultimate reality," to merge with God, to become God.

All reincarnation teachings are based on a monistic, mystical-occult world view that promotes the essential divinity of humanity, denies the notion of a sovereign personal God, and offers the promise of esoteric wisdom.

Biblical Christianity, in contrast to reincarnation teaching, emphasize grace, atonement, and forgiveness for fallen humanity through the once-for-all death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Christian's disavowal of reincarnation is anchored in the biblical assertion that "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

Astrology is the ancient art or science that claims to discover and interpret the influence of stars and planets on persons or events. Some conclude that the planets actually exert an influence, while others believe that a study of their movements and positions will provide an indication or prediction of how a person or event will fare.

Astrology is to be distinguished from astronomy in that the latter seeks information about the heavenly bodies and laws governing their movements, while the former deals with alleged meaning in the relationship of heavenly bodies to people and events on earth. Astrological principles seem to have been developed first in Mesopotamia, among the Assyrians and Babylonians of the seventh-sixth centuries B.C.

The interpretation of movements and positions of the heavenly bodies was one of the chief means at the disposal of priests for discovering the will and intentions of the gods. But horoscopes for individuals had not yet been developed; astrology was restricted to concerns of public welfare and the king as head of state.

During the Persian period, in the late sixth century B.C., cultivation of astrology began in Egypt. After the death of Alexander the Great and the breakup of his empire, astrology found its way from the Seleucid Empire into the western Greek world.

During the third century B.C. personal horoscopes became popular. In the first century B.C. astrological practices spread among the Romans. Augustus and Tiberius were first century A.D. emperors who subscribed to astrological practices.

In the credulous spirit of the Middle Ages both Jews and Christians were swept up in the practice of astrology. It was further developed by Muslim Arabs during the seventh to the thirteenth centuries. Enjoying considerable popularity even in political circles of the West during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, astrology lost its grip after the advent of the new astronomy of Copernicus and Newton during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the subsequent arrival of the age of reason.

The resurgence of astrology in recent years is due in part to the anxiety and uncertainty of the age and the decline of the influence of Christianity and biblical principles in Western civilization. The Bible is clear in condemning the worship of heavenly bodies (Deut. 4:19; 17:2-5), a practice that Manasseh introduced in the southern kingdom (2 Kings 21:5) and Josiah removed (2 Kings 23:5).

That was not the end of the matter, however; Jeremiah refers to Hebrew worship of the "queen of heaven" (Ishtar, the planet Venus; 7:18; 44:17-19) and more generally to worship of heavenly bodies (8:2; 19:13). But such worship is not the same as the practice of astrology. Isaiah referred specifically to stargazers, to "those who divide the heavens," those who distinguished the signs of the zodiac (47:13).

His condemnation of them was clear in his declaration that they could not even save themselves. Hebrews were to seek their God directly. The astrologers were also indirectly condemned in Daniel's day, when they could not meet the demands of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel through divine enablement stepped into the gap (2:27; 4:7; 5:7, 11).

In the NT there may be two references to astrology. Some think that "height" and "depth" (Rom. 8:39) are to be considered as astrological terms, but more likely they are to be treated as astronomical terms and merely refer to celestial spaces above and below the horizon in which the stars move and from which they rise.

The appearance of a star at the birth of Jesus has given rise to much astronomical and astrological discussion. Magi, perhaps Median priests, saw Jesus' star in the east (Matt. 2).

Whether it was a nova, a comet, a conjunction of planets or just some supernatural light in the sky, it signified to them the birth of a great ruler among the Jews. An isolated sign like this is no endorsement of astrology.

God has the right to meet seeking hearts through a medium they would understand. If there was a sign in the heavens at Jesus' death (sun was darkened) and if there will be signs in the heavens at his second coming (Luke 21:25), why should there not be a sign in the heavens at his first coming?

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